

Don Miguel, Sometime King of Portugal

There is a local air of mystery about Miguel, the ex-king of Portugal who died in Germany in 1866. One would not immediately associate a deposed foreign sovereign of extreme reactionary views with small-town nineteenth-century Battle, but the Cresy report of 1850¹ refers to 'a house now occupied by the ex-sovereign of Portugal, Don Miguel'. There is no more, because Cresy was enquiring into the sanitary arrangements of the town, such as they were, and did not see his task as recording the distant exploits of its inhabitants, however famous or curious they might have been. It appears to be the first of only three references anywhere to Miguel's residence in the town, and Cresy notes that the ex-king's house was the only one in the town that had the benefit of running water, piped from a distant spring, rather than relying on a well or roof run-off. The second mention of the former king is in Pike's Directory for 1851, which shows him as a resident of Rose Green. The third is in the Plomley diaries,² which on 21 November 1850 refer to *seeing the vessel 'Madeira Pet' named by Don Miguel, claimant to the Portuguese throne, who lived in exile at Battle.*

The disturbances of early nineteenth century Portugal are now little known outside the country in which they took place, but at the time they made headlines. Curiously, they shared several characteristics with the contemporaneous disturbances in neighbouring Spain, which have remained in the public consciousness for rather longer. Both concerned the attempt by reactionary and clerical elements to place on the throne a man who had a good if insufficient claim to it and who ended in exile. The Spanish Carlists survived as an organisation and even took part in the civil war of 1936-39, a century later, and they still exist. Their civil war motto, appropriate for such reactionaries, was *¡Viva la muerte!* Don Carlos of Spain and Don Miguel of Portugal were close relations.

The Portuguese royal family (the Braganza) had left home for their Brazilian colony after Napoleon's troops invaded the Iberian peninsula in 1807. Wellington finally stopped the French at the hastily-constructed Lines of Torres Vedras north of Lisbon in 1810, and slowly forced them back into France in what became known as the Peninsular War. The Portuguese king returned with the coming of peace. This king was João VI (1767-1826) whose two sons were Pedro and Miguel. In 1822 Pedro was to proclaim himself emperor of Brazil, which in common with almost all of Latin America was establishing independence from its European colonisers. Now back home, João provided Portugal with an early constitution. The ambitious Miguel attempted three coups against his father while he was in still in his early twenties. After the first two he was pardoned but after the third in 1824 he was banished from Portugal for life.

That is where the argument began. On João's death in 1826 it was claimed by some that Pedro could not succeed as he was the monarch of another country, with his son (also Pedro) also committed to Brazil; and at the same time that Pedro's only other child Maria, then aged seven, was ineligible to succeed because of her sex. If those claims had succeeded then Miguel would have taken the throne despite his permanent banishment. But having broken with Miguel, João had changed the rules to allow Maria to succeed, though her opponents asserted that this move had been made irregularly and was therefore invalid. As to Brazil, Pedro soon solved the question by taking himself there and abdicating the Portuguese throne in favour of Maria, for himself and for his other descendants. (The abbreviated genealogy following this account will explain the relationships rather more clearly.)

Just as in Spain, this family feud might have mattered little had there not been a major political dispute between those who wanted a written constitution (albeit one with considerable powers reserved to the king) and those like Miguel who wanted a return to full autocracy. By an agreement between those concerned Miguel came back to Portugal from abroad in 1828, as regent to his niece, with promises to marry her and to observe the constitution. (That a marriage to a niece would have been wholly contrary to the laws of the Catholic Church seems not to have caused any concern at the time, but presumably a papal dispensation would have been sought.) At once, however, he prevented her from landing from Brazil, had himself proclaimed king and persuaded the Portuguese Cortes – parliament – to annul the charter by which Maria had been allowed to succeed. Civil disturbances followed. Miguel practised autocracy with true belief, executing opponents without trial and allowing not even the most gentle opposition. There was therefore considerable disaffection, and the Powers were sufficiently disturbed by it to allow the French navy to defeat Miguel's ships in the Tagus in 1831.

In very broad terms this conflict pitched the merchant class against the diehards of the Church and the feudal landowners whose powers had been sharply curtailed by the new constitution. Because of international economic interests in Portugal it brought Britain as well as France into the argument. It was the turn of British naval expertise to crush the Miguelist fleet at the battle of Cape St Vincent in 1833; because of British concern about the diplomatic and therefore commercial consequences of its

men getting involved overseas without formal consent under the Foreign Enlistment Act, Captain Charles Napier had had to take command of the Portuguese navy under the name Carlos de Ponza, which he chose from his ambitious exploit in occupying the strategic island of Ponza near Naples during the Napoleonic wars. Napier was indeed to be crossed off the Navy List for his actions in Portugal (which included commanding an army to take back northern Portugal for Maria), though he was later restored and resumed an imaginative and successful naval career. The Miguelist army was finally defeated in 1834 and Miguel signed the capitulation of Evora. Under it he was to leave Portugal, never to return to Portugal or Spain, and to cease all activity that would disturb the country's peace. In return he would have an annual pension of £2000.^a Needless to say, he did not keep his promises.³ He denounced the convention that he had signed, whereupon his pension ceased.

Maria was reinstated, though serious disturbances continued for another few years, at least once amounting to civil war. The reactionary forces were believed to be coordinated by exiles in London. Miguel's main activist seems to have been the London-based poet and lawyer Antonio Ribeiro Saraiva (1800-90), whom the correspondent of *The Times* thought mad. Saraiva, who had been Miguel's Minister (today he would have been Ambassador) to the UK from 1828 to 1834, issued a manifesto on the ex-king's behalf in June 1843 that was published in the British press in 1846,⁴ just in time for a further major conflict that began at the turn of the next year, and thereafter he continued his support for Miguel and his descendants.

His last insurrection having failed, in September 1851 Miguel came to Britain but later married in Bavaria and took up residence there. He and his descendants continued to claim that they were the legitimate royal line of Portugal. Portugal became a republic in 1910 and the last king, Manoel, died childless at Fulwell in Middlesex in 1932. The Miguelists were now undoubtedly the senior branch of the Braganza family but there was no longer a throne to inherit and the present claimant now lives in Portugal.

What Miguel was doing at Battle is unclear. It is possible that he was pressed to go there to keep him out of London and out of the various conspiracies that continued to take place. Maybe, without his pension, he simply sought somewhere cheaper in terms of property prices and in a location that did not expose him to endless parties and the need to be hospitable. The 1851 census does reveal one Portuguese man in Battle – Joseph Oliveira, a valet at Rose Green. There are four servants in the house but no master or head of household resident at the time that the census was taken. But where was Rose Green? Cresy notes that it had, or had had, a supply of water from Telham Hill shared with the Abbey, so it was inevitably ground originally owned by the Abbey between Telham and the centre of town. Examination of tithe maps does not provide a certain answer, but the documents for its sale in 1835 show that it is now buried under the Glengorse estate.

A painting of the house shows it to have been in early Georgian style, perhaps with a touch of the seventeenth century. It was of two storeys, containing 16 rooms and six cellars (each devoted to its particular purpose) and it had been built in or shortly after 1761 on land acquired as freehold by George Worge, part of a family owning extensive lands in eastern Sussex.⁵ While perhaps not of regal standing, it would certainly have been a comfortable and extensive property. (The conveyance is dated 6 June 1761.⁶) Worge was a solicitor at Battle and steward to the Battle Abbey estate, which is presumably how he persuaded the then baronet to part with the freehold. But he did not live long to enjoy his new house. Parish records list his burial at St Mary's on 19 July 1765. There he is described as an attorney at law. He was 'buried in linen under the pew on the left hand going into the great chancel'. On 17 October his widow Elizabeth (Collier) followed him into the same grave. His property descended to a nephew, Thomas Jenner, who promptly changed his name to Worge.

Rose Green was clearly a desirable property. For some years after 1787 it was leased back by the fourth Webster baronet as a house for himself and his new, fifteen-year-old, wife while his aunt, widow of the second baronet, kept them out of the Abbey itself.⁷ (From 1791 the pair spent much time abroad, during which she committed the adultery that led to their divorce. Webster shot himself in London in 1800.)

Thomas Worge, formerly Jenner, died at Battle in 1801, leaving his property to a nephew George Worge, who lived at Turnham Green in Middlesex. Then or later it was subject to various conditions, notably but not only the payment of annuities to George's wife from whom he was separated before

^a Estimating the 2015 value of £2000 in 1834 is problematic. One authoritative source puts it at the lowest at about £167 000 but on other criteria it climbs to about £2 000 000.

his death in 1816. By then, in 1813 the fifth Webster baronet had bought it back, only to renege on the conditions and to be faced with a Chancery action resulting in his surrender of the property to the Worge family trustees.⁸ In the meantime tenancies continued: a Miss Jenner was there at the beginning of the century, presumably one of the Worge family; and from some point in or after 1807 General Robert Prescott (1725-1815). Prescott had joined the army in 1745 and served throughout the seven years' war (1756-63), including the capture of Montreal, and the American rebellion of 1775-83. He was later governor of Martinique when a British possession (the revolutionary French spared his life when they took the island back), then of Canada. He retired to Battle and is buried at Winchelsea.⁹ He was a friend and collaborator of William Markwick the naturalist. In 1816 his son Lt Col Serjeantson Prescott (1784-1816), commander of the fifth Dragoon Guards since 1813, was killed at Rose Green by a cricket ball.¹⁰

By at least 1826 Rose Green was occupied by Wastel Briscoe, Esq.,¹¹ who went to live at Summerfields, Bohemia, by 1833. He sold it, along with much land, to Thomas Flood of Fairlight in 1835: though it is unclear whether this was the freehold or the lease. The property was described in an advertisement of 1835 for letting as a

Respectable FAMILY HOUSE, called Rose Green, a Mansion, with good Stabling, Coach-houses, and a large enclosed Walled Garden, most eligibly situated...¹²

The sale particulars¹³ describe it as 'very desirable and improveable ...fit for any Family of the First Respectability'.

The estate went back to the Websters before Miguel appeared on the scene.

In 1841 the census has Rose Green occupied by agricultural labourers, though they may have just occupied cottages while the main house stood empty. (One occupation, for George Hoad, is illegible.) By Miguel's time later in the decade the Websters were very short of money, and one wonders whether the government offered them a sum they could not refuse in exchange for taking Miguel away from London to a place where he might do less harm. The house was finally demolished in 1858. The land later formed part of the Telham Court estate.

On census day in 1851 the ex-king was not at Rose Green but at what may have been a lodging house at 21 Nottingham Street (now Nottingham Place) very close to St Marylebone parish church in Middlesex. One authority¹⁴ suggests that the Portuguese were living in the basement of the house, and whatever the conditions were they would have been a far cry from the palaces of his home country. Miguel was described as *de jure King of Portugal* and was accompanied by a Portuguese viscount and by Saraiva. In 1871, five years after Miguel's death, Saraiva was recorded as living at 31 Nottingham Street with a butler and a small number of Portuguese. In 1881 he was a lodger, but again at 21 Nottingham Street. He refused to return to Portugal for so long as it was ruled by a family that he saw as impostors. He died at home, Paddock House at Ramsgate, on 15 December 1890 and is buried in that town.¹⁵

Miguel does not appear in the 1841 census. He was certainly in the UK in 1847, because there is a report of him visiting a London theatre,¹⁶ and a report of December that year states that he had arrived in Britain on 2 February, brought from Rome by the Captain Bennett mentioned below.¹⁷ Saraiva, as a fervent supporter not therefore necessarily a reliable witness, wrote in May of that year to say that Miguel had not left the country for the past four months.¹⁸ This would have been after the failure of his renewed attempt on the throne at that new year. But there had been such a report, that the yacht (or brig) *Julia* had landed him secretly at Oporto but had then reloaded him and left. There is some support for this belief in that the master of the *Julia* was one John Thomas Bennett, who at his bankruptcy hearing in 1851 admitted that he had been in Miguel's service – but engaged, he said, to start fisheries in Ireland,¹⁹ although this seems an interest unlikely to be close to the heart of the ex-king. It had been Bennett with whom Miguel had briefly lodged at Canonbury Cottage, Islington after his arrival in Britain in February 1847.

There are virtually no other newspaper references to Miguel's time in England. He went hunting with Lord Ranelagh at Horsford near Norwich in November 1847,²⁰ and he suffered an attack of influenza in London in December of that year, this last report stating that his residence was in Welbeck Street.²¹

The one work that treats of Miguel's time in England²² does not mention Battle. However, it does refer to Miguel being at Bexhill early in 1850, where the 'squire of Bexhill', the wealthy farmer Arthur Sawyer Brook (1811-90), kept a hunt so good that the Prince of Wales was to visit in 1864. (Brook ran the

Bexhill Harriers and the Cooden race track.²³) The evidence is that Miguel wrote two letters to Portugal while he was there. It is more than likely that he was resident at Battle at this point.

One would have expected that when Miguel died in Germany in 1866 there would be some mention in the press of his time in England. There was no obituary in *The Times*, but there was a leader;²⁴ it did not mention any such residence. Neither did a summary by a foreign correspondent, on 19 November. The Webster records do not seem at present to bear any information on Miguel's residence, and they would probably not do so if he were to be regarded as a guest or as a mere temporary resident. At present, therefore, the trail is cold and may remain so. Given the necessarily conspiratorial nature of the Portuguese exiles the full story may never be unravelled.

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