

The Third Duke of Seville in Church Stretton

You may wonder what the Duke of Seville has to do Church Stretton's local history. The answer can be found in what is often a good starting point for such research: a wander around the old cemetery on Cunnery Road. There, four down from the Silvester Horne grave and memorial, is an unremarkable, modest, time-worn gravestone. Closer inspection reveals that it's the final resting place of Juan de Monclus, Duc de Seville.



The discovery suggests grand connections: perhaps relating to the town's previous attempt to become a spa town of renown: had word spread further than we'd imagined? Well, yes it had but it wasn't the spa that brought the Duke to our town.

To start at the first mention of his name in this country: Don Juan Lorenzo Francisco de Monclús y Cabanellas married Her Highness Maria Luisa de Borbón y Parade, Duchess of Seville, in London, on 25th July 1894. Juan was 31 and she was 26. The marriage took place within two weeks of her inheriting the title of Duchess, upon the death of her father. Unlike in England, the Spanish system was such that, if a Spanish Duchess should marry, her husband took the title of Duke. Juan, although a colonel in the Spanish cavalry, was of "no rank whatever" according to one indignant correspondent to "The Globe and Traveller" newspaper in London at the time.

"...the female in Spain invariably bringing her family title, if she has one, to swell the prodigiously long list usual among the Spanish aristocracy. If a Spanish duchess marry a commoner he takes her title. An instance of this took place recently in London, when the Infanta Doña Maria de Bourbon, daughter and heiress of the Infante Don Enrique, Duke of Seville, marries Don Juan de Monclus, a Spanish gentleman of no rank whatsoever. He is now known as the Duke of Seville, but not as "Royal Highness", that appellation belonging exclusively to his wife. – I remain, Sir, yours very truly.

Richard Davey

12, Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C. Jan 4.

THE SCARCITY OF WOODCOCKS

Sir,--I doubt whether it is correct to attribute the present scarcity of woodcocks to their destruction by sportsmen, since for many years these birds have been as eagerly sought for and shot as they are today. If there is any real scarcity I think it to be owing to the great frost of 1890 or 1891..... "

As you can see, letters to the editor haven't changed much in the intervening 100 years. Mr Richard Davey of 12 Buckingham Street, Strand, writing on the subject of nomenclature of the Spanish aristocracy has his letter published above another correspondent's musings on the scarcity of woodcocks. By the way, he denies that this has anything to do with their destruction by sportsmen but rather he puts it down to the Great Frost of 1890/91.

Back to the marriage: given the location, the apparent mis-match in terms of class and the timing, one could be forgiven for thinking that perhaps the marriage wasn't approved of by the aristocratic family in Spain. This doesn't appear to have been the case, however. The wedding took place in the catholic church of Our Lady of Victories, which at that time was the pro-Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Westminster (Westminster Cathedral not being built until 1903) and the foremost Catholic Church in England. One of the two sponsors was the Queen Regent of Spain. The wedding breakfast and reception were to have been held in the Spanish Embassy but were cancelled due to the recent death of the 2nd Duke (i.e. Maria's father). She hastily

adapted her white silk wedding dress by the addition of a black crepe sash and shoulder knots. Clearly, this was a wedding that had been planned for some time.



Her Highness
Maria Luisa de
Borbón y
Parade, Duchess
of Seville

Attribution:
National Portrait
Gallery, London

Sadly, we have
no image of her
husband, the
Duke.

Such an unhappy beginning was something of an omen and sadly, their union was not to be blessed: neither with children nor with lasting happiness. Although initially they lived the high society life with balls and good works in both London and in the country and were frequently in Barcelona (where Juan had a successful business), at the age of 40 Juan had the first of his attacks of mania and paranoia. He had already been in lunatic asylums in Barcelona and Southend before he was admitted to London's



Bethlem Lunatic Asylum, in 1913. He had been admitted under an “urgency certificate” (equivalent to being “sectioned” today) signed by Theophilus Bulkeley (T.B.) Hyslop (left, courtesy of [Wikipedia](#)), who had recently retired as Resident Physician and Medical Superintendant there.

The Duchess had requested the order because Juan had again become increasingly agitated and threatening; he squandered money and roamed the streets of London all day, convinced that everyone knew him and was his enemy. His period in Bethlem lasted from Jan until

October 1913 when he is discharged “relieved”, which we understand to mean he was relieved of his symptoms.

During his stay he often complained about the food and demanded Spanish meals but in the later months he became calmer and would participate in the dances and play billiards. Whether his illness was caused, or merely exacerbated, by events in Spain – and in Barcelona in particular – at the time is unknown but certainly they were not good times for the Catholic aristocracy and bourgeoisie. It was a time of anarchy, revolution and counter-revolution and it seemed that Juan lost a lot of his assets at this point. There seems to have been evidence of a spy network, with informers infiltrating all sections of the community. Perhaps Juan’s paranoia was not entirely without reason. We know little of their upbringing. Perhaps they had childhood memories of what must have been a disturbing period in Spain when, in 1873, the 1st Spanish Republic was formed and the king forced to abdicate. This was very short lived, less than two years. Then the monarchy was restored under Alfonso XII. The early years following the Restoration were marked by economic posterity. Nevertheless, times were often turbulent. There were numerous internal rebellions and Juan’s home province of Catalonia was usually involved.

How all this affected our two protagonists is unknown. However, later in life, Juan complained of his loss of position in Spain. Exactly what this entailed, we don’t know but we do know that his father committed suicide. Maria Luisa’s personal circumstances had been blighted from the outset, as she had been born two years before her parents married. Although she was later legitimised by decree of the Spanish king, there seems always to have been the taint of bastardy and this was at a time when this mattered a lot.

From his medical records at Bethlem we learn of his address in London: 26 Trebovir Road, Earl's Court, and this is what it looks like today, courtesy of Google street view:



After 1913, the next record we have of Juan, third Duke of Seville, is his death in 1918 at Stretton House, the private lunatic asylum that stood on the area now occupied by the housing development at Stretton Farm Road. T.B. Hyslop, who had signed the admission certificate for Bethlem, knew Stretton House well. When he was two years old, his father, William Hyslop, had bought it as a going concern and the family themselves lived there. Stretton House was a very nice establishment, with plenty of grounds and outdoor recreational facilities. The patients could enjoy cricket, gardening, billiards, and music, while the more active could ride or take 'carriage exercise'. The asylum was supplied from its own garden and model farm. In its brochure, T.B. is recorded as paying "periodical visits to the house in consultation with the Medical Staff". The assumption, therefore, is that Hyslop recommended Stretton House for the treatment of Juan's mania.

Juan's death was recorded as being caused by the "effects of [an] operation necessarily and properly performed" on December 13th, 1918 at the asylum. So it was noted on the coroner's report on the inquest, which took place on the day after his death.

The research revealed details of the remarkable - nay, shocking - members of the Duchess's family but also a little of the wider society of the time. The greatest surprise was still to find that the third Duke of Seville is actually buried here in our local cemetery. The gravestone is a sad witness to what must have been quite a tragic life for both him and his wife. Maria Luisa repatriated back to Spain after his death, sailing on the "Almanzora" in August 1920. She was 52 and had relinquished her title in favour of her youngest sister – with the permission of the King of Spain – in 1919. In fact, the present Duke of Seville is Maria and Juan's grand-nephew. By the way, in marked contrast to the grave of the Duke of Seville (below, left), as you stand in front of it, lift your eyes to the top of the cemetery boundary, just to the right of centre and you'll see an altogether different gravestone: the grand memorial to the Hyslop family (below, right).

