

## The Maxwell collection

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The St John's College Library has recently acquired an extraordinarily rich collection of books, almost two thousand of them, which formed part of the personal library of Dr Kenneth R Maxwell (1960). At a stroke, St John's now boasts the single best repository of books pertaining to Brazilian and Portuguese history in Britain. The richness of the collection, which was fully catalogued by Dr Maxwell before he gave it to the College, cannot be exaggerated: rare eighteenth-century pamphlets mingle with limited-run exhibition catalogues and impossible-to-find monographs. St John's is poised to offer undergraduates, postgraduate researchers, and scholars alike, unparalleled access to books on an important, if often neglected, subject.

How Maxwell came to acquire such an impressive collection of books about Brazil and Portugal is a curious and captivating story. Born in Somerset, he had never ventured to Portugal or Brazil before graduation from Cambridge, where he read History. His tutors at St John's were Ronald Robinson and FH (Harry) Hinsley. He set off for Spain and Portugal upon completing his degree, learning the languages and supporting himself by becoming a stringer for the British press. It could have been a hackneyed *wanderjahr* before plunging into a less adventurous, more traditional career, but young Maxwell had fallen in love with the Portuguese language and was fascinated with the history of the Portuguese empire, which was crumbling in the mid-1960s, when Maxwell first travelled to Lisbon. He decided to pursue a doctorate. He went to Princeton and researched in the archives of Brazil and Portugal for his dissertation, supervised by the eminent Latin Americanist Stanley J Stein, which was later published as *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Portugal and Brazil, 1750–1808* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), a path-breaking book in English and, in its 1977 Portuguese translation, a best-seller in Brazil.

The success of Maxwell's first book in the Luso–Brazilian world must be explained in part by how his account of the late-eighteenth-century resistance to colonial rule resonated powerfully in the late 1960s and 1970s. Portugal was on the cusp of being shorn of its last remaining colonies – Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Guinea-Bissau – and embroiled in bloody conflicts that would coincide, if not cause, the fall of the Salazar regime. Brazil was toiling under the yoke of a military dictatorship (installed from 1964), a plight that seemed far from the future envisaged by the eighteenth-century republican conspirators chronicled by Maxwell.



Photo: Paul Everest

*Conflicts and Conspiracies* would have earned Maxwell easy passage to academic security at a leading university (and he would later teach at Princeton, Yale, Columbia and Harvard), but the excitement gripping the Luso–Brazilian world in the mid-1970s could not be resisted. After spending four years at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, he was drawn back to Portugal just as the Salazar regime was toppled by the Carnation Revolution of 1974 and the African colonies wrested their independence. Maxwell’s experience in Lisbon during this tumultuous time was transmitted to readers in his beautifully descriptive articles published by the *New York Review of Books* (and which provided the groundwork for his landmark *The Making of Portuguese Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)). Maxwell subsequently gave his collection of books, serials, and newspapers on the 1974 Portuguese Revolution to Princeton University Library’s rare books collection.

The rest of Maxwell’s career has been marked by this fruitful interaction between the world of scholarship and the world of public affairs. Besides teaching at several of the leading American universities, Maxwell directed programmes for a major foundation and, for almost fifteen years, held the David and Nelson Rockefeller Chair for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the Council on Foreign Relations, the leading international affairs think tank in the USA. He left the Council to found the Brazil Studies Program at Harvard, where he also was a professor of History. In 2011 Professor Maxwell retired from Harvard and returned



Photo: Paul Everest

to Devon. He continues to work on Atlantic history, and has recently completed a critical edition of the *Recueil des Loix Constitutives des États-Unis de l'Amérique*, published in Paris in 1778 and dedicated to Benjamin Franklin, who was then attempting to persuade the French government to aid the American colonies in their revolt against British rule. The *Recueil* was used by the Brazilian conspirators, who plotted in 1788–9 to declare a constitutional Republic in Brazil, modelled on the newly independent United States. Two copies of the 1778 *Recueil*, as well as a copy of Franklin's 1783 more complete French edition, are contained in the Maxwell collection at St John's.

The range of Maxwell's publications reflects the richly varied experience of his career: from volumes on Iberian defence policy to his masterful biography of the leading eighteenth-century Portuguese statesmen, the Marquis of Pombal (Cambridge UP, 1995), to his collected historical essays in *Naked Tropics* (Routledge, 2003). All of these scholarly and policy publications were in addition to his weekly column for the leading Brazilian daily, *Folha de São Paulo*, and his role as a regular commentator in the Portuguese and Brazilian media. Maxwell has witnessed the great transformations of Portugal and Brazil that have occurred in the past decades, from Portugal's integration into Europe to Brazil's transition to democracy (after 1985) and now geopolitical ascendancy. He has known intimately the major figures that brought about these changes, helping them, and both the Brazilian and Portuguese public, more generally to understand their own past. He has acted as a bridge between this Lusophone world and English-

speaking audiences. Whether as a guide, interpreter, analyst, translator or interlocutor, Maxwell is undoubtedly the world's leading authority on the subject.

From 1965 until the present, one of the unifying themes of Maxwell's indefatigable journeys through the Portuguese-speaking world has been his love of books and his passion for collecting them. There are few used bookstores in Lisbon or Rio de Janeiro with which he is unfamiliar and few, indeed, are the rare booksellers from whom he has not acquired a jewel or two to adorn his collection. These books now comprise the Maxwell Collection housed at St John's.

The Maxwell Collection has many strengths. There are excellent books on contemporary Brazilian politics and on Latin American history more broadly, for example. But the core of the collection is made up of books relating to Colonial Brazil and the Portuguese empire in the eighteenth century. This was a period, as Maxwell recounted in his trailblazing books, in which reform and revolution jostled for primacy as empires across the Atlantic world crumbled, dissolved, or were overthrown. In the course of his research and travels, Maxwell has carefully collected the best books on the subject, both rare texts and exemplary scholarship. Their presence at St John's surely will inspire future members of College to pick up where Maxwell left off and to begin their own Atlantic odysseys.



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