

Latin America's home in London

By **ROB CAPURRO**

CEO, CANNING HOUSE

The Canning Lecture has been and will remain the UK platform of choice for Latin American leaders seeking to engage with an informed and influential audience

George Canning (1770-1827) was British Foreign Secretary, from 1807-1822, and briefly Prime Minister in 1827.

On 12 December 1826, in the House of Commons, Canning was given an opportunity to defend the policies he had adopted towards France, Spain and Spanish America, and declared: "I resolved that if France had Spain it should not be Spain with the Indies. I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old". During his early period in the Foreign Office (1807-09), Canning had become deeply involved in the affairs of Spain, Portugal and Latin America and had been responsible for a number of decisions that greatly affected the future course of Latin American history. George Canning was the first British Foreign Secretary to devote a large proportion of his time and energies to the affairs of Latin America (as well as to those of Spain and Portugal) and to foresee the important political and economic role the Latin American states would one day play in the world.

It is not a surprise, then, that the name Canning House was adopted when the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils established their original offices in Upper Berkeley Street in January 1947. Canning was, after all, widely respected and admired in most of the countries of Latin America as their friend and supporter in the days of their struggle for independence, and as the man who led the governments of Europe to recognise the newly emerging republics established by San Martín and Simón Bolívar.

The germination of the idea of a British centre for Latin American affairs began at least as early as the mid-1930s when the need became apparent to enhance Britain's commercial and cultural relations with Latin America. Lord Davidson, co-founder of Canning House, noted the financial weakness and political vulnerability of some of the most important investments in Latin America, such as the British-owned railways in Argentina. He realised that the demand for an improvement in contacts with the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world extended beyond the traditional Anglo-Argentine connection.

Canning House now consists of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Council and Canning House Limited. The former was registered in 1973 as a company limited by guarantee and having no share capital. It is a non-political, non-profit organisation registered as a charity.

Fully supported by the British Government from the start, Canning House staged its first economic Seminar on Latin America at Lancaster House in May 1972 with the then Prime Minister, Mr Edward Heath, who inaugurated the format of it. The inaugural Canning Lecture entitled "The Argentine-British Relationship on the Threshold of the 21st Century" was given by HE The President of the Argentine Republic, Dr Carlos Menem. In April 2000, HE The President of Colombia, Dr Andrés Pastrana, delivered the second lecture entitled "Colombia: A Nation with a Great Future" and in October 2001, HE The President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, gave the third Canning Lecture entitled "A New Vision for Venezuela". A major annual occasion, Canning House has held this Lecture with most Latin American Heads of State ever since, with one notable exception, in 2010, when Mr William Hague, then Foreign Secretary, used the Lecture as a platform to launch the Government's policy on Latin America which is now known as "The Canning Agenda". The most recent Canning lecture was delivered in 2013 by HE Pedro Passos Coelho, Prime Minister of Portugal.

Aside from hosting the Canning Lecture every year, Canning House has become the natural 'home' and place of meeting for distinguished guests and visitors from Mrs Evita Perón in 1947, to the likes of The Earl of Mountbatten, Senhor Heitor Villa-Lobos, Salvador Allende, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, Dr Jorge Luis Borges, Arthur Schlessinger, Maestro Alberto Ginastera, HRH the Princess Royal, the Rt Hon John Major, Carlos Fuentes and José Saramago, to name but a few.

Building on this tradition, the current mission of Canning House is to be the UK's leading forum for informed comment, contacts and debate on Latin American politics, economy and business.

The Canning Lecture has been and will remain the UK platform of choice for Latin American leaders seeking to engage with an informed and influential audience on matters of state pertaining to their countries in general and their relationship with the UK in particular.

In this tradition, we are delighted to welcome His Excellency President Enrique Peña Nieto to deliver the 2015 Canning Lecture, following in the footsteps of four of his predecessors, namely Presidents Miguel de la Madrid, Ernesto Zedillo, Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Vicente Fox.