

The Royal Family and Freemasonry

The 2022 Prestonian Lecture

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AS THE YEAR 2022 APPROACHED, FREEMASONRY ANTICIPATED THE CELEBRATION of three important anniversaries. It would be the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of the United Kingdom of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Royal Patron of the principle Masonic charities; the 55th anniversary of the first election of HRH the Duke of Kent as Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England; and the 40th anniversary of the first election of HRH Prince Michael of Kent as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England. We had not, of course, anticipated the passing of the throne from Queen Elizabeth to His Majesty King Charles III. Nevertheless, this seemed and remains a fitting year for the Prestonian Lecture to

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take as its subject the connection between the Royal Family and Freemasonry, but it was not the first occasion on which this had been done.

Over the last two hundred years, dozens of articles on this royal connection have been published in respected books and journals, not to mention a few in less reputable publications. Synthesising this literature would provide sufficient material for a fair-sized book, let alone a lecture, so a more selective approach is here required. This lecture will not attempt simply to list the royal Freemasons with each of their lodge memberships and high offices. This is very adequately provided in the excellent 'Information Leaflet No. 1', issued by the Museum of Freemasonry. Nor will it discuss in any depth the connection between the Royal Family and Freemasonry beyond the English Craft, or of the important connection between the Royal Family and the principal Masonic charities. Each of these subjects is worthy of a lecture in its own right. What I will try to do is show you how members of the Royal Family pursued their interests in Freemasonry. This was often in the public gaze, with their activities recorded by artists in the pages of newspapers such as the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News* and later by press agency photographers.

Before doing so, a word of explanation is required. During the lecture I will be sharing with you a number of quotations. Unfortunately, the BBC were not prepared to release Charlotte Green for the day to read them for me, but as you will discover I have found a satisfactory substitute.

Literature on Royal Freemasonry

I should also issue one note of caution. Notwithstanding the abiding fascination to Masonic historians of the connection between the Royal Family and Freemasonry, this has not been the case with those general historians who have written biographies of members of the Royal Family. The score or so volumes of such biographies listed in the relevant section of the bibliography to the printed version of this lecture, contain over a million words in total, but fewer than 5,000 words relating to their Masonic activities. Sad to say, some of the Masonic facts as stated by these authors have been woefully inaccurate. To give only one example, the late Stanley Weintraub, in his biography of Edward VII, which, with an eye to sales, he entitled *Edward the Caresser*, tells us that for a fancy-dress ball hosted by the Duchess of Devonshire in 1897,

His Royal Highness donned the gaudy apron and insignia as Grand Master of the Freemasons.

In fact, the costume was based on that of the Great Prior of the Knights Hospitaller of Malta, which did not even include an apron, but should our present Grand Master choose to modify his form of dress based on this precedent, I am sure we would all be most supportive.



Fig. 1. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, as Great Prior of Malta, 02/07/1889

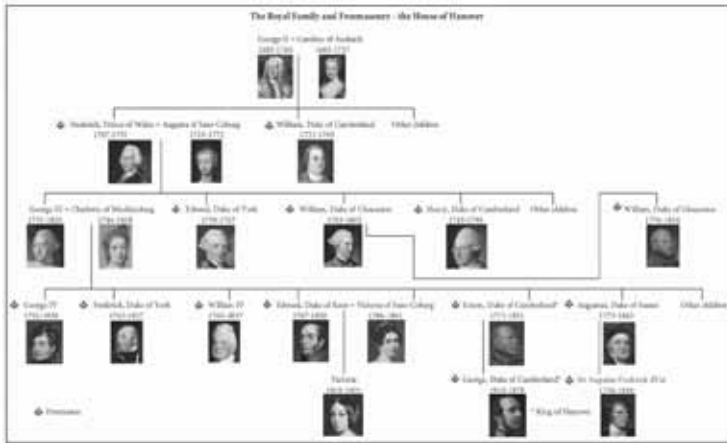


Fig. 2. The House of Hanover

The House of Hanover

The connection between the Royal Family and Freemasonry naturally divides itself into two periods. The first is that from the foundation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717 to the death of HRH the Duke of Sussex in 1843, thirty years after the Union of the Grand Lodges of the Antients and the Moderns. Over four generations, fourteen members of the House of Hanover were members of the Craft, although not all were active in its rulership.



Fig. 3. HRH Prince Frederick Lewis,
Prince of Wales



Fig. 4. HRH Henry Frederick,
Duke of Cumberland and Strathearn

So, who were the first Royal Freemasons? The very first was Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales, eldest son of George II, who died before he could inherit the throne. He was initiated in 1737, but never achieved high office in the Craft. His surviving younger brother, and three of his sons, were also Freemasons. The youngest of his sons, Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland and Strathearn, would become the first Royal Grand Master in 1782, serving until his death in 1790. It was during Cumberland's Grand Mastership, and with his support, that Chevalier Ruspini founded the Royal Cumberland Freemasons' School for Girls.



Fig. 5. George, Prince of Wales,
Grand Master c.1790
© Museum of Freemasonry



Fig. 6. Frederick Augustus,
Duke of York and Albany.
© Prince of Wales Lodge No. 259



Fig. 7. William Henry, Duke of
Clarence and St Andrews,
later King William IV.
© Prince of Wales Lodge.

Frederick Lewis's eldest son, who would become King George III, was not a Freemason, but six of George's children were. The oldest was George, Prince of Wales, later Prince Regent and King George IV, and the second Royal Prince to rule as Grand Master of Premier Grand Lodge, from 1790 to 1812. His younger brothers, the Dukes of York and Clarence, were appointed Past Grand Masters of Premier Grand Lodge in 1787.

The Prince of Wales was active in his role as Grand Master. He was among the first members of the Royal Family to engage in the laying of foundation stones with Masonic ceremonial. The appearance of Freemasons in their regalia was a common sight at the laying of foundation stones for even non-Masonic buildings until the early years of the twentieth century. As late as 1919, the relevant ritual continued to be printed in the Book of Constitutions.

On 3 December 1808, the Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone of the new Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, the previous building having burnt down a short time before. The watercolour by William Daniell (Fig. 8) is not generally considered to be one of



Fig. 8. The Prince of Wales at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 31/12/1808.
Painting by William Daniel. © Christies/Bridgeman

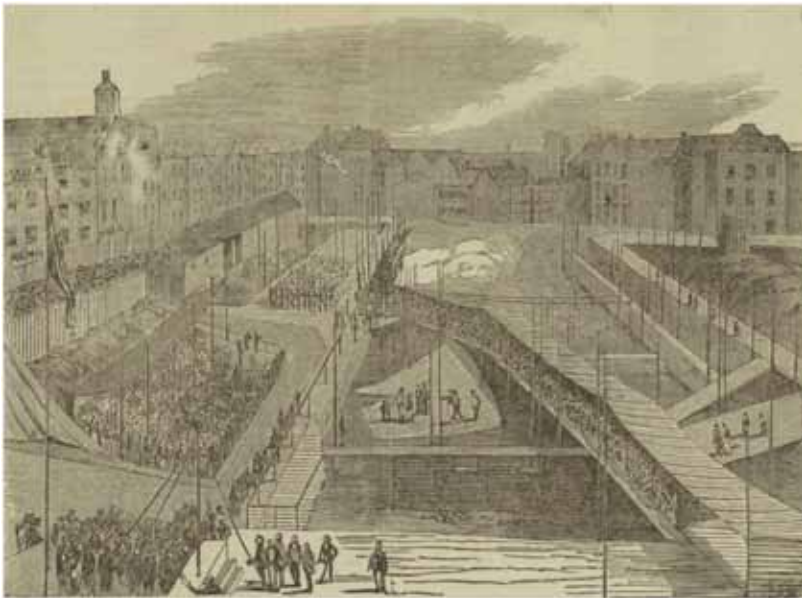


Fig. 9. George, Prince of Wales, laying the foundation stone of the Theatre Royal. ILN, 25/07/1857

the great works of British art and, in truth, it is difficult to see exactly what is going on. The situation is slightly clearer in a later woodcut, where the royal party and the foundation stone can be seen in the lower left corner. We are anyway assured, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for January 1809, that at the culmination of the ceremony, 'the illustrious Grand Master retired, leaving every spectator in admiration of the grace and dignity with which he had performed his part'.



Fig. 10. Chevalier Ruspini with pupils from the Royal Masonic Institute for Girls at Freemasons' Hall. Thomas Stothard, c.1790. © Masonic Charitable Foundation.

The Prince of Wales also supported the Girls' School. In a much-reproduced painting by Thomas Stothard, he is shown on the left among those receiving at Freemasons' Hall a deputation from the school, led by Chevalier Ruspini.

Although the Craft is famously apolitical, this has never prevented it from affirming its support for the Crown, as in an address to the Prince Regent on his stepping down as Grand Master:

We need not remind you, most royal Sir, that this is not the first time we have approached the throne, for you once most graciously condescended to present an address from us to your revered Royal Father, and to guarantee our Loyalty when, during a crisis of publick Danger, we considered it our bounden Duty to come forward with a solemn Declaration of our political Principles.



Fig. 11. HRH Edward Augustus,
Duke of Kent



Fig. 12. Augustus Frederick,
Duke of Sussex
Grand Master, c.1813
© Museum of Freemasonry



Fig. 13. HRH Ernest Augustus,
Duke of Cumberland & Teviotdale
King of Hanover

Returning to the sons of King George III, the least known today is probably the Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale, who was appointed a Past Grand Master of Premier Grand Lodge in 1796. Under strict salic law, he succeeded to the throne of Hanover on the death of his brother, King William IV, in 1837, having declared the Grand Lodge of Hanover a sovereign body in 1828.

The Prince of Wales, on his appointment as Prince Regent in 1812, was succeeded as Grand Master of Premier Grand Lodge by his brother, the Duke of Sussex. By then, negotiations for the merger of the Premier and Antients' Grand Lodges had been proceeding for some years. These were facilitated by the election of another brother, the Duke of Kent and Strathearn, as Grand Master of the Antients in the same year.

The Duke of Sussex ruled firmly over the now United Grand Lodge of England from 1813 until his death in 1843. In 1838, to mark twenty-five years of his rule over the Craft, he was presented with a magnificent silver candelabrum, now known as the 'Sussex plate'.

It was made by Garrard & Co, the royal jewellers, a total of 38 Masonic provinces and three military lodges contributing to its cost. The Duke's widow, the Duchess of Inverness, donated the piece to Grand Lodge in 1845, shortly after her husband's death, on the condition that she could borrow it when she hosted dinner parties. Almost a metre tall and weighing 2020 oz, or over 57 kg, one does not envy the footmen who would have had to transport it safely back and forth across London.

The death of the Duke of Sussex gave rise to two problems. One was the Masonic succession. Under Britain's version of semi-salic law, a legitimate daughter could inherit the throne of the United Kingdom in the absence of a legitimate male heir, hence Victoria's accession in 1837. Enlightened as we like to think of the Grand Lodge of that time having been, a Royal Princess as Grand Master would have been a step too far. The First



Fig. 14. The 'Sussex Plate' Candelabrum, 1838. © Museum of Freemasonry



Fig. 15. Funeral Procession of the Duke of Sussex at Kensal Green. *ILN*, 06/05/1843

Regal Intermagisterium thus commenced, the Grand Mastership passing into the hands of the Earl of Zetland. The other problem was more immediate.

The will of the Duke of Sussex had two unusual clauses. The first was that his body should be opened up to see if there was anything of interest to science. This was done and a description of the autopsy was, in fact, made public. The second was that he wished to be buried in the new public cemetery at Kensal Green, rather than at Windsor, and that his wife be laid alongside him on her death. (See Fig. 15) This was controversial, and Queen Victoria sought advice from the Duke of Wellington, who was concerned that Freemasons would react badly if the Duke's wishes were ignored. He advised that the request should be complied with, but warned:

It will be absolutely necessary to take effective measures for the preservation of the peace at his funeral at Kensal Green: and even that the magistrates should superintend the procession of the Freemasons.

Grand Lodge held a special meeting to commemorate his passing, but there was no Masonic participation in the funeral procession, which went off quietly and with due solemnity. His body was laid to rest initially in the catacombs and later in a massive, but plain, granite tomb.

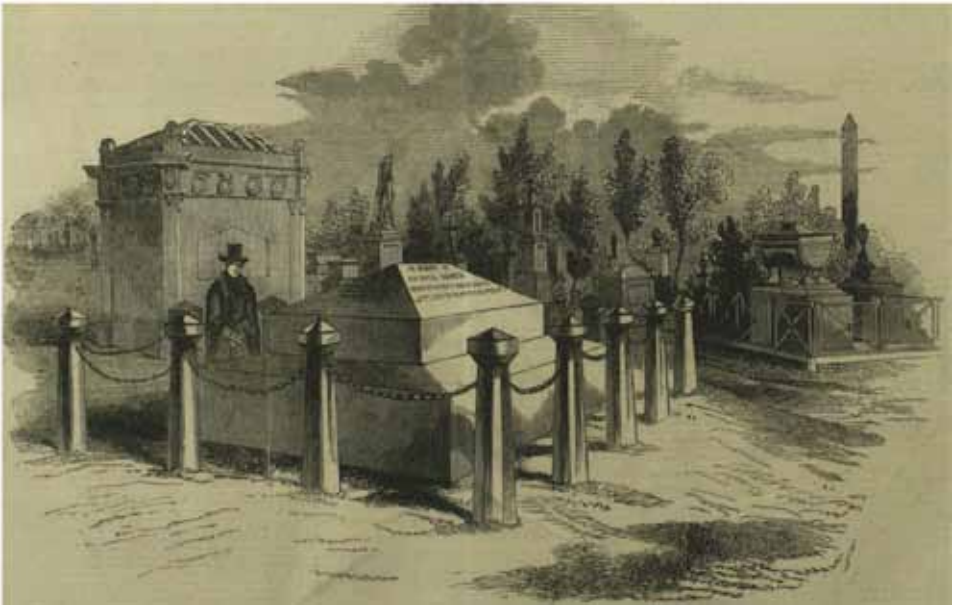


Fig. 16. Tomb of the Duke of Sussex at Kensal Green Cemetery. ILN, 26/04/1845



Fig. 17. The House of Saxe-Cobourg Gotha (later Windsor)

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

With the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837, and her marriage to Prince Albert in 1839, we move on the House of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, later Windsor. Ten of their number have been members of the Craft over four generations, plus four royal spouses, including His Late Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Before looking at them, we must also consider the attitudes of Victoria and Albert towards the Craft.

Unlike his older brother, Ernest, Prince Albert never became a Freemason, but he was perfectly happy to participate in Masonic stone-laying ceremonies, with many of those present wearing regalia and carrying lodge banners. In an exchange of letters with his eldest daughter, Victoria, he was also prepared to defend the action of her husband, Prince Frederick of Prussia, in not wishing to discuss with her the secrets of Freemasonry. Fritz, as he was known in the Royal Family, was already by then Grand Master of the Grand Landlodge in Berlin and visited lodges in London during his frequent trips to England.

Queen Victoria was also happy to participate in Masonic stone-laying ceremonies, most notably in 1867, at the laying of the foundation stone of the Royal Albert Hall. (See Fig. 18)

Notwithstanding the fact that over a period of many years she served as a patron of the principal Masonic charities, she never mentioned this subject in her daily journals. Slightly more common were references of visits to lodges by her sons and her son-in-law, Fritz, and two occasions on which she received Masonic delegations.

One such occasion was in 1887, after a meeting of the Freemasons of England had passed a loyal address, congratulating her on having achieved a reign of fifty years. It was customary to present such loyal addresses, which were usually engrossed on vellum and



Fig. 18. Queen Victoria at the foundation stone-laying at the Royal Albert Hall, 20/05/1867.
The Life and Times of Queen Victoria

richly illuminated, in elaborate caskets. The Golden Jubilee casket was made by George Kenning, the Masonic jeweller. Covered in royal blue velvet, it was ornamented with two large silver-gilt medallions, the Royal Cypher and other detailing.



Fig. 19. Queen Victoria Golden Jubilee Loyal Address Casket, 1887. Royal Collection Trust.
© His Majesty King Charles III 2021.

It may have been relevant that none of Queen Victoria's closest advisers were Freemasons, or particularly sympathetic towards the Craft. This was brought home when, in 1891, she was approached by Supreme Council 33°, in the hope that she might be prepared to become Grand Patron of the Ancient and Accepted Rite. The petition was submitted to her by her ever-pompous Private Secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby, who in a note on the subject wrote:

Sir Henry Ponsonby humbly begs leave to submit a petition from Lord Lathom and others asking Your Majesty to patronize the "33rd Degree in the Ancient and Accepted Rite". Sir Henry Ponsonby does not quite understand how Your Majesty can patronize any branch of masonry and Your Majesty does not patronize the Grand Lodge of either of the three Kingdoms. But as he knows nothing of the mysteries, he consulted Lord Salisbury, who replied that he knew less. It seemed to him that this was exclusively Protestant, but he did not suppose it mattered much.

Albert Edward, Prince of Wales

Even without a dispensation, Queen Victoria's oldest son, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, would have been eligible for initiation in 1862, but there is circumstantial evidence that Queen Victoria was not keen on his becoming a Freemason. He would certainly have been aware of the Apollo University Lodge while he was a student at Oxford. Shortly after his marriage in 1863, he attended an Apollo commemoration ball, accompanied by the new Princess of Wales. (See Fig. 21) As an aside, we should note that the Knights Templars retained their regalia and swords for the dancing. (See Fig. 22)

In fact, it was not until 1868 that Albert Edward was initiated, passed and raised, while on a visit to Stockholm. He pre-empted what he was sure would be an adverse reaction from his mother in a letter written on Christmas Eve, a few days after the event. Following several pages discussing the weather, the family and international affairs, he finally plucked up courage:

While I was there I took a step which I trust will not have met with your disapproval, as it is one I thought over for some time and did it of my own free will. I have become a Free Mason and was initiated by the King, who is Grand Master in Sweden. Before doing so, I had written to the Duke of St Albans, who is a Mason, and he consulted Lord De Grey, who is Deputy Grand Master in England, and both were of opinion that I could without fear become one.

Almost six years were to pass before two more of her sons, the princes Arthur and Leopold, were to be initiated within a few weeks of each other. On each occasion she wrote expressing her annoyance that they had taken such a step without consulting her first.



Fig. 20. HRH Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, Grand Master.
© Prince of Wales Lodge No. 259



Fig. 21. The Prince and Princess of Wales
being received at the Apollo Ball. *ILN*, 27/06/1863



Fig. 22. Knights Templars' Quadrille
at Isaac Newton University Lodge Ball, 1876.
The Graphic, 25/11/1876



Fig. 23. Investiture of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, as Past Grand Master.
Sigmund Rosenthal 01/09/1869. Museum of Freemasonry, London

It took a while for the Earl of Zetland, Grand Master, to satisfy himself that the initiation of the Prince in Stockholm had been regular. Having done so, Albert Edward was appointed Past Grand Master and invested at FMH, as depicted in a well-known painting by Sigismund Rosenthal. On Zetland standing down as Grand Master in 1870, his place was taken by the Earl (later Marquess) of Ripon, who himself resigned in 1874 on his conversion to Catholicism.

The Prince of Wales was then elected Grand Master and installed the following year at the Albert Hall. Among those present at the reception, not entirely properly dressed, was Mr Punch, who expressed the hope that the new Grand Master would turn his attention to 'our public architecture and, above all, the dwellings of the poor'.



Fig. 24. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, at the Golden Jubilee meeting. *ILN*, 13/06/1887



Fig 25. Mr Punch and the new Grand Master. *Punch*. 01/05/1875

Mr Punch would certainly have been impressed with the frequency, and enthusiasm, with which the Prince of Wales began to lay foundation stones, not only in the United Kingdom, but also abroad. In 1875, during his long tour of India, he laid the foundation stone of the new docks at Bombay. He failed to impress the local rulers, who had been invited, but who were given poor seats and took umbrage.

Also slightly controversial was the laying of *two* foundation stones at Truro Cathedral. (Fig. 26) The propriety of laying a foundation stone in a House of God with Masonic ceremony was called into question, which may have contributed to the decision to send 600 policemen from the Metropolitan force to bolster the local constabulary. In the event the ceremony went off quietly, and was later commemorated in a stained-glass window in the cathedral nave. (Fig. 27)

Albert Edward was an enthusiastic founder of lodges and often undertook the consecration of these himself. He also agreed to consecrate other lodges with which he was less directly connected. One such was Chancery Bar Lodge, of which the *primus* master was the Lord Chancellor, Baron Herschel.

Albert Edward's attendance at Grand Lodge, however, was poor, amounting to only a handful of occasions between his appointment in 1874, and the special meeting to celebrate his mother's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. In 1886, he had been invited to attend the

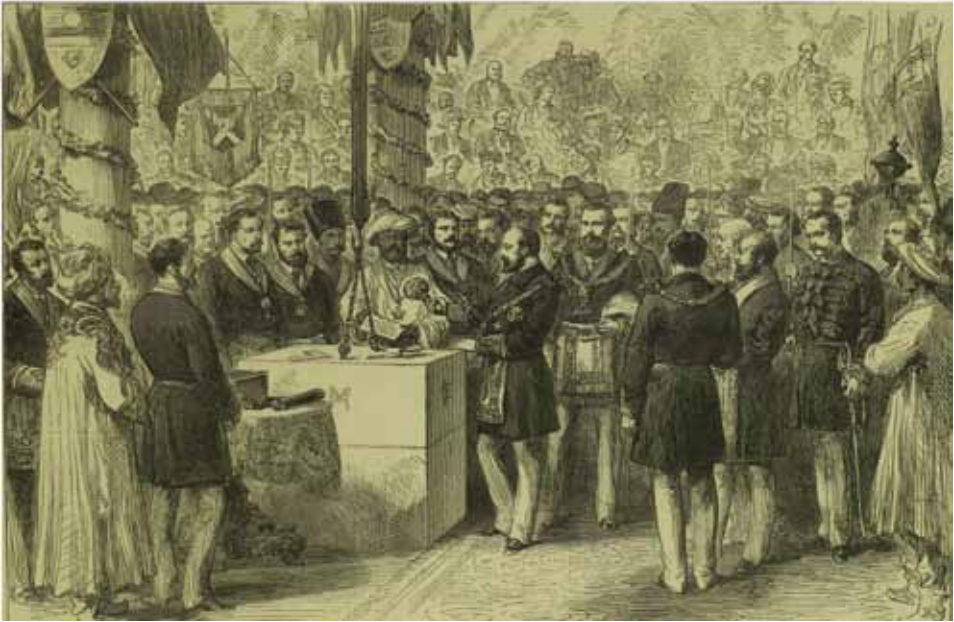


Fig. 26. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, foundation stone-laying at Truro Cathedral. *ILN*, 29/05/1880



Fig. 27. Window at Truro Cathedral showing laying of foundation stone by the Prince of Wales, 20/05/1880. Dr Mark Charter, Cornish Stained Glass



Fig. 28. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, at the Consecration of Chancery Bar Lodge No. 2456.
ILN, 09/12/1893

investiture of Baron Herschel as Senior Grand Warden, and to unveil a portrait of the Earl of Carnarvon. His Private Secretary was instructed to decline:

I have shown your letter to the Prince of Wales. His Royal Highness would have been very glad to have presided at the Lord Chancellor's Investiture, and to have unveiled Lord Carnarvon's portrait had it been on any other day but the 28th April, but the "2000 guineas" is run on the 28th and he has promised to be present at it. He cannot therefore, he much regrets, attend at Grand Lodge on the occasion in question.

The tradition of UGLE providing gifts to commemorate important events was continued in 1888, when the Princess of Wales was presented with a silver-wedding present, described as follows:

A magnificent, English-made, diamond butterfly brooch measuring $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2$ in, with *en-tremblant* wings and ruby eyes, *pavé*-set with 214 old mine-cut diamonds, totalling 46.78 carats, set in silver with gold detailing; the old European-cut stone forming the body being approximately 2.60 carats.

If this sounds spectacular, it was. It was later given by Alexandra as a present to her granddaughter, Princess Mary, the Princess Royal, on the occasion of her marriage in 1922 to the Earl of Harewood. (See Fig. 29) After her death in 1965 it remained in the Harewood family for some time, but was offered at auction by Sotheby's, Hong Kong in 2010, with a pre-sale estimate of \$120,000-150,000.

On his accession to the throne as King Edward VII in 1901, Albert Edward stepped down as Grand Master. His very public sponsorship of the Craft had led to an enormous



Fig. 29. Princess of Wales Silver Wedding Brooch, 1888. © Humphrey Butler Ltd.

growth in individual membership, and in the number of lodges. As one contemporary commentator opined:

I make bold to say that His Royal Highness never shows to more advantage than when among Freemasons. To-day, every man present was delighted with the Prince's geniality and kindness.



Fig. 30. Prince Leopold wearing Westminster & Keystone Lodge No. 10 Special Centenary Jewel, c.1876 Museum of Freemasonry, London.

The Dukes of Albany and Clarence

Before considering the Grand Mastership of the Duke of Connaught, it is appropriate to deal with the brief Masonic careers of the Dukes of Albany and Clarence.



Fig. 31. Installation of Prince Leopold as Provincial Grand Master of Oxfordshire. *The Graphic*, 04/03/1876

Prince Leopold, youngest son of Queen Victoria, and later Duke of Albany, was initiated in 1874, while studying at Oxford. Within two years, he had been installed into the chair of the Apollo University Lodge and, the following day, was installed as Provincial Grand Master of Oxfordshire in the Sheldonian Theatre. His competency as a ritualist was noted by the Masonic press and, in the absence abroad of Prince Arthur on military duties, his potential succession in due course as Grand Master was openly discussed. It



Fig. 32. HRH Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence

was not to be. Despite his haemophilia, he was active as Provincial Grand Master, but succumbed to the disease in 1882, at the age of 32.

Prince Albert Victor, elder son of King Edward VII, and later Duke of Clarence and Avondale, was initiated by his father in 1885. In 1889, the Grand Master's Council

proposed to the Prince of Wales that Albert Victor should be appointed to the recently vacated Provincial Grand Mastership of Surrey. Unfortunately, the press got wind of the news before the Prince of Wales had been told. He instructed his private secretary, Sir Francis Knollys, to withhold his consent:

To that recommendation His Royal Highness is afraid he cannot agree, for Prince Albert Victor has no connection whatever with Surrey, independent of which the fact alone of it having been announced everywhere in the Press that Prince Albert Victor would be nominated ... would in itself make the Prince of Wales reluctant to approve of the recommendation in question.

Despite respectful protests, the Prince of Wales was not to be moved. However, one of the arguments, that a 'Home' province would be suitable, and convenient, may have struck a chord. Within a year, the decision had been made to divide the combined Masonic province of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, with Albert Victor, by now Duke of Clarence,

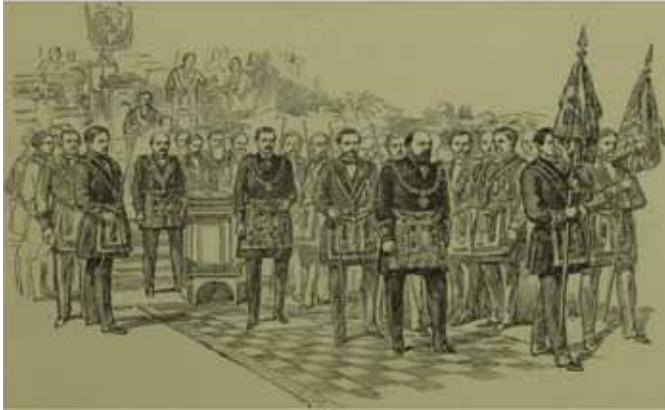


Fig. 33. Installation of the Duke of Clarence as Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire at Reading. ILN, 27/12/1890

as the first Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire. He was installed by his father at Reading in December 1890.

Although it would have been normal for a photograph to be taken showing Albert Victor in his new regalia as Provincial Grand Master, this did not happen. (See Fig. 34) A photograph had been taken of him with his father and uncle shortly after his initiation wearing his master mason's apron. Money, however, was obviously tight in the Royal Household at this time, and, instead of a new photograph being taken, the original one was altered. (See Fig. 35) This was considerably more difficult in the days before Photoshop.



Fig. 34. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, the Duke of Connaught, and Prince Albert Victor (Duke of Clarence), Sandringham, 1886 and '1890' Museum of Freemasonry, London

For the next two years, Albert Victor undertook his provincial Masonic duties with competence, but in 1892 he died of pneumonia at the age of 28. Although history has not always been kind to the Duke of Clarence, his Masonic reputation was spotless.



Fig. 35. HRH Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, Grand Master. Museum of Freemasonry, London

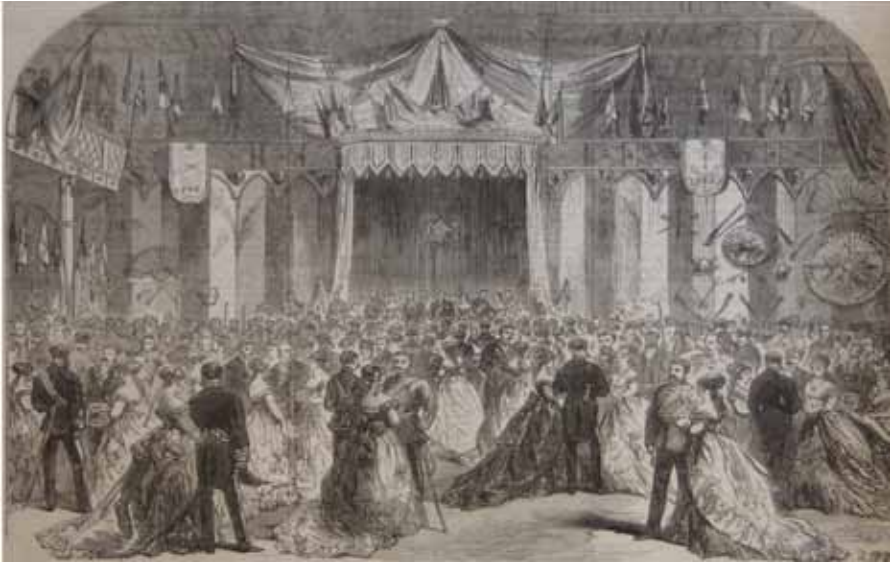


Fig. 36. Prince Arthur at a Masonic Ball, Exhibition Building, Dublin, 17/04/1869



Fig. 37. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, installing the Duke of Connaught as Provincial Grand Master of Sussex, the Graphic, 03/07/1886

The Duke of Connaught

Albert Edward's place as Grand Master was taken by his second brother, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught. During the course of his Masonic career he travelled widely and

held Masonic appointments in England, Ireland and India, once describing himself as representing the epitome of the Imperial Ideal in Freemasonry.

Arthur's first exposure to Freemasonry and Masonic regalia may well also have been at a Masonic Ball, in his case held in Dublin in 1869. This occasion was not without controversy. Shortly before the event, Paul Cullen, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, first Irish Cardinal, and proposer of the formula for the doctrine of papal infallibility, stated that he would excommunicate any Catholics who attended the Ball. Apparently, this did not put a damper on the evening.

In 1886 the Prince of Wales installed the Duke of Connaught, who was also Earl of Sussex, as Provincial Grand Master of Sussex at Brighton. On this occasion Mr Punch was absent, but his female equivalent at *Jack and Gill* magazine, the infamous Aunt Evins, turned up instead. Clutching a poker, her assurance to the Duke of Connaught that he had nothing to worry about in the forthcoming ceremony, was obviously not entirely convincing. The presence in the background of other instruments of torture, including the griddle, suggests that the artist may have had a passing acquaintanceship with the degree of St Lawrence the Martyr. Connaught also served as District Grand Master of Bombay during his tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army.

As Grand Master, he worked tirelessly for the Craft, founding the Masonic Million Memorial Fund after WWI. He also did his own share of foundation-stone laying in England and abroad, including for a new Presbyterian Church in Bulawayo, Southern



Fig. 38. The Duke of Connaught and the Prince of Wales at the Sussex installation.
Jack & Gill, 26/06/1886



Fig. 39. The Duke of Connaught, procession before foundation stone-laying for new Presbyterian Church at Bulawayo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) 1910. Museum of Freemasonry, London

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). One doubts that he was staying at the Masonic Hotel seen in the background.

No doubt with an eye to Masonic succession, in 1924 the Duke of Connaught made three Royal appointments as Provincial Grand Masters: Edward, Prince of Wales,

to Surrey; Albert, Duke of York, to Middlesex; and his own son, Prince Arthur of Connaught, to Berkshire.

Prince Arthur of Connaught

Of these the least well-known today is Prince Arthur of Connaught. Although a relatively junior member of the Royal Family, he was frequently called upon to undertake important royal duties, invariably doing so with great courtesy and professionalism. He served as Provincial Grand Master of Berkshire for fourteen years, presiding at all of the annual meetings except for the last, by which time he was seriously ill with cancer. He died at the age of 55 in 1938. His obituaries, Masonic and otherwise, recalled his unselfishness, geniality and the affection with which he was regarded by all with whom he came into contact.

Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII & Duke of Windsor
Known as David to his family, the Prince of Wales was initiated in 1919, not long after his war service was completed. This was despite an urgent telegram sent to the Prince of Wales at Buckingham Palace from Doctor Lloyd Owen, a GP of Criccieth in Gwynedd. It read:

Respectfully protest against my future Sovereign entering secret though august organisation STOP Seriously urge postponement STOP

Ignoring the telegram, he was initiated the next day. In his response to the toast to the initiate, he said how glad he was to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, King Edward VII, formerly Grand Master of the Order, and of his great uncle, the Duke of Connaught, the present Grand Master. He also stated that it was his earnest desire to do his utmost to promote the principles of duty, loyalty and benevolence on which Freemasonry rested. This reply may have been prepared for him, and contrasted somewhat with the letter he wrote later the same evening to his long-time mistress, Freda Dudley Ward (Fig. 39):

I've had a terribly sordid evening and am not thrilled one atom at having been made a freemason; [expletive deleted], what I think of it all, particularly heavy men's dinners when I have to get up and make a speech ...

Notwithstanding any misgivings, his Masonic progress was understandably rapid. He was master of Household Brigade Lodge by 1921 and joined several others. He was appointed Senior Grand Warden of UGLE in 1922 and, two years later, was installed as Provincial Grand Master of Surrey. By all accounts, he took that office seriously, and was a regular attender at the provincial meetings. He also took seriously the charitable aspects of Freemasonry. Ritual, however, was never one of his strong points. Lord Cornwallis, then Pro Grand Master, in a letter to Philip Colville Smith, Grand Secretary, stated that the Prince was of the view that:



Fig. 39. Mrs Freda Dudley Ward, *ILN*

... people who can memorise and attach undue importance to Ritual get too much advancement in Masonry, whereas a man who has not the time or the peculiar ability to memorise falls out.

There may be those today who agree.

As is well known, his reign was brief. Immediately following his abdication, he made a radio broadcast to the nation on the BBC, and then met his family in private before leaving England for France. The last person to whom he said goodbye was his brother, the former Duke of York and now King George VI. The latter's recollections of the parting are recalled in two documents. In the first he simply wrote 'When David and I said goodbye we kissed, parted as Freemasons and he bowed to me as his King'. In the second he stated that, despite protesting when his brother bowed to him, he insisted, saying: 'It's all right, old man. I must step off with the right foot from the first.'

Albert, Duke of York, later King George VI

Prince Albert, Duke of York, was initiated in 1919, the same year as his elder brother. His response to the toast to the initiate sounds more likely to have been self-penned:

I have always wished to become a Freemason, but owing to the war I have had no opportunity before this of joining the Craft. ... I have learned that Freemasons in this country have been a great help to the poor and friendless, and have been notable for their efforts on behalf of children. One can see, by the great Masonic Institutions and Schools, how successful their work has been in this cause, and I like to think that in the future I shall be associated in their great work.

His progress was as rapid as that of his brother, becoming master of Navy Lodge in 1921, Senior Grand Warden of UGLE in 1923, and PGM of Middlesex in 1924. The Duke of York's involvement with Middlesex was at least as zealous as that of his brother in Surrey. He attended the annual provincial meetings regularly, and personally consecrated three new Craft lodges, including one that bore his own name. Unlike his older brother, he was a proficient ritualist, attending regularly at the Lodge of Instruction of



Fig. 40. HRH Prince George, Duke of Kent, Grand Master, 1939. Museum of Freemasonry, London



Fig. 41. Five Royal Princes at the remote laying at Olympia of the commemoration stone for the Royal Masonic Hospital. Museum of Freemasonry, London.

the Navy Lodge. Although he followed precedent by standing down as PGM of Middlesex in 1936, accepting the office of Past Grand Master, he broke with precedent in several ways. First, he was formally inducted as Past Grand Master in person at the Albert Hall in 1937. Second, as we shall see, he personally installed three Grand Masters, and would have installed a fourth had not illness intervened.

George, Duke of Kent

HRH Prince George, Duke of Kent, was initiated in 1928, almost a decade after his two oldest brothers, and his Masonic advancement was typically rapid. Although Wiltshire was not a Masonic province previously associated with the Royal Family, he was appointed as its PGM in 1934, and attended several provincial meetings in the following years.

Masonic building projects

Meanwhile, in the 1930s, two great Masonic building projects were underway. In 1932, a unique event occurred in the annals of Freemasonry, when five royal princes were present

at a Masonic ceremony. (Fig. 41) The occasion was the remote laying at Olympia of the dedication stone of the new Masonic hospital at Ravenscourt Park, west London. Almost obscured by one of the stanchions to the gantry is the Duke of Connaught with, behind him, from left to right, his son, Prince Arthur of Connaught (PGM of Berkshire) and his grand-nephews the Duke of York (PGM of Middlesex), the Prince of Wales (PGM of Surrey), and the Duke of Kent (soon to be PGM of Wiltshire).

At this point, the Duke of Connaught must have been reasonably sanguine about the succession of royal Grand Masters in the Craft, and the other Orders. The premature



Fig. 42. King George V and Queen Mary visiting the Royal Masonic Hospital, 1933.
Museum of Freemasonry, London

deaths of the Dukes of Albany and Clarence had been a setback, and his nephew, King George V, had not joined the Craft. However, four other members of the Royal Family did still occupy high office. The Prince of Wales would traditionally relinquish any active Masonic office he might then hold on assuming the throne, but this still left three others to see the Craft through, until a new generation was available to take over.

The new hospital was opened the following year by Their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary. (Fig. 42) With the permission of the King, who was always supportive of Freemasonry, it was named the Royal Masonic Hospital.

The Masonic Peace Memorial, today better known as Freemasons' Hall, was completed in 1933, a lasting legacy to the vision of the Duke of Connaught whose idea it had been. Three of the royal princes arrived together for the dedication of the Grand Temple. In



Fig. 43. Edward, Prince of Wales, Albert, Duke of York, and George, Duke of Kent arriving at Freemasons' Hall for the Grand Temple dedication, 19/07/1933. Museum of Freemasonry, London



Fig. 44. King George V and Queen Mary visiting the Masonic Peace Memorial, 1934. Museum of Freemasonry, London

the following year, the Duke of Connaught gave a guided tour of the building to the King and Queen.

Shortly thereafter, the Duke of Connaught's plans for the Masonic succession began to go awry. King George V died in January 1936, the Prince of Wales succeeding to the throne as King Edward VIII. Before the year had turned he had abdicated, and the throne had passed to the Duke of York as King George VI. In theory, this still left two potential royal successors as Grand Master. In practice, by 1936, Prince Arthur of Connaught was already suffering from the cancer that would kill him in 1938.



Fig. 45. HRH the Duke of Connaught, 1939
Museum of Freemasonry, London



Fig. 46. HRH the Duke of Kent, 1939
Museum of Freemasonry, London

The New Grand Master

The Duke of Connaught did stand down in 1939, at the age of 89, after 38 years as Grand Master. The installation of Prince George, Duke of Kent, as his successor, was greeted by the Craft with great relief, the installation ceremony being conducted by his brother, King George VI. 12,000 Freemasons attended the ceremony, which was again held at Olympia. With the outbreak of war later in the year, the Duke of Kent's Masonic activity was necessarily curtailed. He did, nevertheless, visit a few private lodges, especially

where servicemen were present. In May 1942, at a meeting of the New Zealand Lodge, he remarked that the spirit of Freemasonry helped every brother to keep his sense of proportion in the turmoil around him. These were almost the last words he spoke at a Masonic gathering. He died in an air accident while on active service in 1942. Commenting on this loss, King George VI said of him:

The world conflict in which we are engaged has taken its toll, and has brought sorrow and loss to us all. ... Though the years of his Grand Mastership were few in number, they were momentous ones in the history of the Craft ...

The Second Regal Interregnum

There now began the Second Regal Interregnum, with a succession of three Grand Masters who were not members of the Royal Family. King George VI, however, remained fully engaged with the Craft. In 1943, he installed his brother-in-law, the Earl of Harewood as Grand Master, but he lived only until 1947. His place as Grand Master was taken by



Fig. 47. King George VI visiting Freemasons' Hall, 1940. Museum of Freemasonry, London

the Duke of Devonshire, the installation ceremony again being undertaken by the King. The period of his Grand Mastership was also brief, and he died in 1951. It had been the firm intention of the King also to install his successor, the Earl of Scarbrough, but illness prevented him from doing so. He sent a personal note of apology, concluding with his view that the world required spiritual and moral regeneration, and that he believed Freemasonry could play an important part in supplying this vital need.

The King was, in fact, recovering from a serious operation that had been carried out in an operating theatre constructed for the purpose at Buckingham Palace. It had first been suggested that the procedure might be carried out at a hospital, concerning which the King was open minded:

I suppose I have a good right to go to a Masonic Hospital, but I've never heard of a King going to a hospital before.

He died early the following year, his passing much lamented by the Craft.

It was to be a further fifteen years, in 1967, before the Craft again had a member of the Royal Family at its head, in the person of our present Grand Master, HRH Prince Edward, Duke of Kent. In 1982, the Grand Master installed his younger brother, Prince Michael of Kent, as Provincial Grand Master of Middlesex, who remains in that office today, as well as occupying the high office of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons. But the stories of our present Grand Master and Prince Michael are for another lecturer on another day.

Conclusion

Since the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, there have been only two brief periods when the Craft has not been ruled by a member of the Royal Family. Freemasonry has demonstrated that it can survive such periods, but the lustre of royal leadership is highly prized and rightly treasured among Freemasons. May the prayers of the Craft and the other Orders be heard that it be long continued.

