

## **EDITORS' NOTES**

### **Duke of Connaught, third son of Queen Victoria and first Cathedral Friends' patron**

On Sunday, January 16th, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, was commemorated in Winchester Cathedral with the laying of a wreath at his memorial. HRH the Duke of Connaught was the son of Queen Victoria and the first royal patron of The Friends of the Cathedral.

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Throughout history, the role of the younger sons of the monarch has been problematic for both the princes, unlikely to succeed to the throne, and for the royal family. In the case of Prince Arthur, the third son and seventh of nine children born to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, not only were there 50 years between his birth in 1850 and the death of his mother in 1901 but he was also in the shadow of his eldest brother Edward, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII, r. 1901-1910), his second brother, Alfred, Prince of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and his uncle, George, Duke of Cambridge, who was commander-in-chief of the army until 1895. Arthur was 91 when died on January 16, 1942.

Prince Arthur William Patrick Albert was a good-mannered, obedient child, who was said to be his mother's favourite. When he was eight years old, Queen Victoria wrote to her husband Prince Albert that Arthur "was dear, dearer than any of the others put together, thus after you he is the dearest and most precious object to me on Earth".<sup>1</sup> Among his godfathers was Arthur, Duke of Wellington, on whose birthday he entered the world and after whom he was named.

The "dear" boy, who throughout the Queen's long life rarely caused her any problems, had the special gift of getting on well with members of his extended family including his nephew Kaiser Wilhelm II, the last German emperor.<sup>2</sup> And so, in 1931 when his acceptance of the invitation to be inaugural patron of the Friends of Winchester Cathedral was announced, the diocesan conference spontaneously

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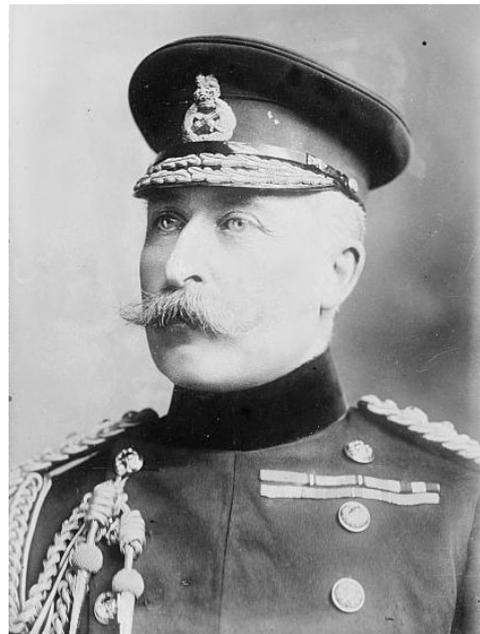
<sup>1</sup> John Van der Kiste, "Who were Queen Victoria's children? Everything you need to know about her sons and daughters". *History Extra*, (<https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/queen-victoria-prince-albert-children-who-names-sons-daughters-facts-motherhood-parents/>), April 14, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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applauded his appointment.<sup>3</sup> He was a very popular and well-regarded member of the royal family. However, the image of a well-behaved, courteous boy and man should not obscure that Prince Arthur was a highly trained soldier, a moderniser of the army and an advocate of social change in India. He was the last British prince to command a large army formation, the Brigade of Guards, at the battle of Tell al-Kebir in Egypt in 1882.

Prince Arthur joined the Army in 1867 and developed a lasting connection with the Rifle Brigade from 1870 onwards, eventually becoming major-general in charge by 1883. He remained as Colonel-in-Chief of the Rifles for the rest of his long life. His army career took him to Egypt and India where he sought to modernise the Indian Army and reduce the social gap between British and Indian officers and soldiers, although this was resisted by his uncle, the Duke of Cambridge and, as his biographer Noble Franklin wrote, “by almost anyone other than the queen”.<sup>4</sup> Prince Arthur, who had been appointed Duke of Connaught and Strathearn and Earl of Sussex in 1874, was also concerned for the status of women in India.



In 1902, the duke was promoted to field marshal and two years later was appointed to the new role of inspector-general of the forces. However, his robust critique of the so-called Esher army reforms as being “eyewash” brought him into conflict with Edward VII who moved him to Malta as commander-in-chief and high commissioner of the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup> The duke referred to this role as being “the fifth wheel on the coach”, an impediment to improving the army’s efficiency and a waste of his time.<sup>6</sup> To the annoyance of King Edward and the prime minister, R.B. Haldane, he resigned from the army in 1909, a clear statement of unhappiness at his treatment.

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<sup>3</sup> *Winchester Diocesan Record*, Vol XXXIX, No. 11, November 1931, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Noble Frankland, “Arthur, Prince, first duke of Connaught and Strathearn”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30462>, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

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In a roundabout way, this decision led to the peak of his career when Edward VII proposed his brother as governor-general of Canada in 1911. The duke's term in Canada included periods when he actively intervened in national military policy, notably opposing the use of a Canadian-made rifle which frequently jammed in battlefield conditions, and strongly supporting the recruitment of troops for the European war. Despite his controversial stance on military matters, there was widespread regret when he left Canada in 1916 as his term was regarded as highly successful.<sup>7</sup>

The duke's appointment as the first patron of the Friends of Winchester Cathedral in 1931 was one of many such engagements with groups as diverse as the Boy Scouts, Royal Society of Arts, United Lodge of Freemasons, and numerous army regiments. In accepting Dean Gordon Selwyn's invitation, the duke wrote that he "felt very glad to be associated with any undertaking in connection with Winchester and the Cathedral".<sup>8</sup> The duke was an Honorary Freeman of the City of Winchester and, wrote Dean Selwyn, "he has for many years taken a great interest in the Cathedral, to which he is a frequent visitor".<sup>9</sup>

The duke's role as patron of the Friends was valued highly by Dean Selwyn who referred to it in the first paragraph of his Letter to the Editor of *The Times* on November 14 which launched the Friends on to the national stage.<sup>10</sup> This was a level of royal patronage equivalent to those of other major cathedrals who had established Friends' organisations around that period and conferred regal legitimacy and status.<sup>11</sup>

The high point of the duke's active involvement with the Friends came in July 1934 when he attended its Festival of Music and Drama at the Cathedral, the main production of which was a pageant representing the marriage of Henry IV. A brief obituary in the *Winchester Cathedral Record* of 1942 referred to the duke's "lively care

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Winchester Diocesan Record*, *op. cit.*, p. 224

<sup>9</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, October 3, 1931, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> E.G. Selwyn, "TO THE FRIENDS OF WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL", *The Times*, November 14, 1931, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> By 1931, nine other cathedrals had formed Friends associations since 1927. Almost all had a member of the royal family as a Patron or First Member.

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for the Cathedral's welfare".<sup>12</sup> A large attendance at his memorial service on January 26 that year "was a fitting tribute to the esteem and affection in which he was held in Winchester".<sup>13</sup> His successor as patron of the Friends was his great-nephew, HM King George VI.

In 1949, a memorial tablet to the duke was installed in the north aisle of the nave by "Brother Riflemen" of the Rifle Brigade, of which he was Colonel-in-Chief from 1880 to 1942.

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<sup>12</sup> The Dean of Winchester (E. G. Selwyn), "THE CATHEDRAL, 1941-1942", *Winchester Cathedral Record*, Vol. 11 (1942), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*