



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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MOST WORSHIPFUL BROTHER HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE VI

Forty years¹ ago on a cold January day King George VI stood at London Airport to farewell his daughter Her Royal Highness Princess Elizabeth and her husband Brother His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh as they commenced a tour of Commonwealth countries on his behalf. Everyone has seen famous newsreels showing the King bidding his daughter farewell. As we all know a week later he was dead and his daughter ascended to the Throne. It is incredible to reflect upon the social changes which have occurred since that day. Nothing brings this home more than the realization that the vast majority of people alive today were not even born during his reign.

This raises the question as to why forty years after the death of the King we should remember him. To my mind there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly his life covered a period of enormous social change. He was born during the reign of his great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, lived through two World Wars and reigned at a time when the British Empire became the British Commonwealth. More importantly in an age where the concept of public service and public duty is all too often lost or forgotten he provides an inspiring example of someone who put his duty above his own personal self interest. This he did notwithstanding that this was at great personal cost to himself in terms of his health. As the present Queen said on 21 October 1955 when she unveiled a statue of her father:

"Much was asked of my father in personal sacrifice and endeavour, often in the face of illness; his courage in overcoming it endeared him to everybody. He shirked no task, however difficult, and to the end he never faltered in his duty to his peoples. Throughout all the strains of his public life he remained a man of warm and friendly sympathies - a man who by the simple qualities of loyalty, resolution and service won for himself such a place in the affection of all of us that when he died millions mourned for him as for a true and trusted friend."

It is therefore appropriate to re-evaluate the King's life and to examine the

influence of Freemasonry upon him with a view to seeing what we might draw from his example.

King George VI was born at Sandringham, the same place as he was ultimately to die, on 14 December 1895. His life began on an inauspicious note because that day was the anniversary of the death of his great grandfather Prince Albert the Prince Consort. He was the second child of the Duke and Duchess of York who were later to become King George V and Queen Mary. The Duke of York was obviously somewhat concerned at the inconvenient arrival of his second son because he was motivated to write to Queen Victoria in the following terms:

"I am afraid, Dear Grandmama, you were rather distressed that he was born on the 14th, that doubly sad day to you & all our family, but we hope that his having been born on that day may be the means of making it a little less sad to you. Dear Grandmama. we propose with your permission to call him Albert after dear Grandpapa & we also hope that you will be his Godmother."

Notwithstanding the apprehension felt by the Duke of York the young Prince was warmly welcomed by his Great Grandmother who was present at his christening on 17 February 1896. The young Prince was called Albert after his Great Grandfather, Frederick after the second German Emperor, Arthur after his great uncle the Duke of Connaught and George after his father. Frederick the Great and the Duke of Connaught were both Freemasons. It is incredible to reflect that when he was born income tax was eight pence in the pound, an agricultural labourer earned fifteen shillings a week, a pint of beer and an ounce of tobacco was tuppence halfpenny. This was the Victorian Age. Clipper ships sailed the globe, horses were a common form of transport and oil lamps were the normal form of lighting. The electric light and motor car and the gramophone were barely heard of. There were twenty reigning monarchs in Europe and the British Empire covered a quarter of the globe.

The young Prince grew up in the somewhat cold atmosphere of his parent's household. Whilst he was a good athlete and later shone at tennis he suffered from a severe speech impediment. At the age of thirteen he became a naval cadet at the Royal Naval College at Osborne on the Isle of Wight. His progress there was dismal. In his final examination at Osborne in December 1910 he came last in his year. In 1911 he went to Dartmouth. In 1913 he joined the cruiser Cumberland where he undertook a six months course of training. On 15 September 1913 he received his commission as midshipman and joined H.M.S. Collingwood.

Prince Albert was to be on board this ship on 4 August 1914 when the First World War broke out. Despite ill health he was still on board her on 30 May 1916 when she was involved in the Battle of Jutland. He was thus one of the few monarchs in modern history who was actively exposed to warfare. When the Second World War was to break out on 3 September 1939 he was to be the King. After a brief spell aboard H.M.S. Malaysia ill health forced him to leave the Navy. He then transferred to the Royal Naval Air Service where he was at the end of the First World War.

On 2 December 1919 Prince Albert was initiated into Freemasonry and he joined the Navy Lodge No. 2612 English Constitution. The ceremony was carried out by Lord Ampthill who was then the Pro Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England and the Pro First Grand Principal of the English Royal Arch. On the night of his initiation the Prince said:

"I have always wished to become a Freemason, but owing to the war I have had no opportunity before this of joining the Craft. All my life I have heard of Freemasonry, and though there has always been a certain mystery attached to it, 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."

Many of the Prince's friends and relations had been Freemasons. Captain Louis Greig with whom he had served in the Navy and with whom he would later play in the doubles at Wimbledon was a Freemason. His elder brother the Prince of Wales had been initiated into the Household Brigade Lodge in May 1919. His uncle the Duke of Connaught was Grand Master. His Grandfather King Edward VII had been Grand Master and the Royal family had been involved in the affairs of Freemasonry on an almost unbroken basis since the Duke of Cumberland had been Grand Master in 1782. In addition to this Freemasonry was enjoying an enormous surge in membership in the years immediately after the First World War. It was therefore natural with these ties of tradition and his own interest in the affairs of his country Freemasonry should appeal to the young Prince Albert.

The Prince became a very enthusiastic Freemason and was at no time a nominal member of the craft. In 1921 by which time he had become the Duke of York he became Master of his lodge. He subsequently became a member of The Bard of Avon Lodge No. 778, being the Worshipful Master in 1925; The Prince of

Wales Lodge No. 259; Royal Alpha Lodge No. 16; Middlesex Masters Lodge No. 3420, being the Worshipful Master in 1934 and the Household Brigade Lodge No. 2614. On 11 February 1921 he joined The Ancient and Accepted Rite (Rose Croix) together with the Prince of Wales, Louis Greig and Rear Admiral Halsey who was Comptroller of the Prince of Wales' household. Four days later on 15 February 1921 the four of them were exalted into the Royal Arch when they joined the United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1629, now the United Studholme Chapter No. 1591. He was First Principal of the Chapter in 1928. In 1922 he became a Senior Grand Warden of the United Grand Lodge of England and in 1924 he became Provincial Grand Master of the Masonic Province of Middlesex. He continued to hold this office until he became King as a result of the abdication of his brother King Edward VIII in December 1936.

Meanwhile on 26 April 1923 the Duke of York had married Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon in Westminster Abbey. They had, as all the world knows, two daughters, namely the present Queen who was born on 21 April 1926 and Princess Margaret who was born on 21 August 1930. During the 1920's the Duke and Duchess of York rapidly developed what would now-a-days be described as a "high profile" public image. The Duke of York developed a keen interest in promoting social harmony and in 1921 established the Duke of York's Camp. These camps were designed to improve relationships between young boys of different social backgrounds. The camps were held at Romney Marsh and the Duke took part at all the camps and mixed with the boys. They were a great success and continued until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

Another aspect of the Duke's life was his interest in Industry. During the 1920's and 1930's the Duke was President of the Industrial Welfare Society. In this capacity he visited factories, went down coal mines, clambered up scaffolding and even drove trams through Glasgow. He came to have an intimate knowledge of industry and trade unions. Indeed his brothers called him "the foreman". He came to possess a wide knowledge of social conditions which ultimately served him well when he became King.

In 1927 the Duke and Duchess of York toured Australia and New Zealand. The main purpose of the tour was for the Duke to open the new Federal Parliament House at Canberra. It was to be his only tour of Australia. He had intended to undertake another tour in 1949 and then in 1951 but unfortunately both of these tours were cancelled due to his ill health.

The Duke's involvement in Freemasonry continued unabated through the 1920's and 1930's. He was advanced in Mark Masonry in The Grand Masters Lodge and

in 1929 he became Festival Chairman of the Mark Benevolent Fund and in the same year he became Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England and Wales and the Dominions and Dependencies of the British Crown. In September 1931 he became Provincial Grand Master of Middlesex of the Mark Grand Lodge thus being both Provincial Grand Master in the Mark and in the Craft. In 1937 the rank of Past Grand Master was conferred on him by Mark Grand Lodge. In June, 1936 he affiliated with Scottish Masonry when he was received into his father-in-law's lodge, Lodge Glamis No. 99 at the hands of Worshipful Brother Beattie who was the village postman. On St. Andrews Day of the same year he was installed as Grand Master Mason of the Grand Lodge of Scotland. His regalia is in the Grand Lodge of Scotland's museum. The rank of Past Grand Master and Knight Grand Cross of the Temple was conferred on him by the United Religious and Military Orders of the Temple and of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta (Knights Templar).

He was elected a member of the thirty-third degree of the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales, the Dominions and Dependencies of the British Crown in 1932 with the rank of Sovereign Grand Inspector General. It is likely had he not succeeded to the Throne he would ultimately have become Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England after his Great Uncle the Duke of Connaught.

This was of course not to be. His father King George V died on 20 January 1936 and was succeeded by his eldest son King Edward VIII. Three hundred and twenty five days later on 11 December 1936 King Edward VIII abdicated and the Duke of York became King George VI. It is interesting to note that in his diary the new King recorded that he parted from his brother as a Freemason. On his succession to the Throne the King followed tradition by resigning from all of his Masonic offices. Notwithstanding this his interest in Freemasonry remained. He broke with tradition when a month after his Coronation, on 30 June 1937 he was invested as a Past Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England in a ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall. This was to be the beginning of an unprecedented involvement by a reigning monarch in the affairs of the Craft. He again broke with precedent when as a Past Grand Master he installed three successive Grand Masters namely, his brother the Duke of Kent in 1939, his brother-in-law the Earl of Harewood in 1943 and the Duke of Devonshire in 1948. He had intended to install the Duke of Scarborough as Grand Master on 6 November 1951 but was prevented by ill health.

He said of Freemasonry:

"The world today does require spiritual and moral regeneration. I have no doubt, after many years as a member of our Order, that Freemasonry can play a most important part in this vital need."

His reign of sixteen years was marked by tremendous change and upheaval. In 1938 the King and Queen made a state visit to France where on 22 July 1938 he unveiled the memorial to the Australian Dead at Villiers-Bretonneux. In 1939 the King and Queen made the first visit by a reigning monarch to Canada and the United States. During this tour he formed a strong friendship with another famous Freemason, President Roosevelt.

Over the years the King had battled with his speech impediment. He had received treatment from the Australian, Lionel Logue. By the time of his succession his speech had improved but throughout all of his life he experienced great difficulty with his public speaking. Notwithstanding this he made many fine speeches. Perhaps the best example is his inspired Christmas address in 1939 when he said:

"A new year is at hand. We cannot tell what it will bring. If it brings peace, how thankful we shall be. If it brings continued struggle we shall remain undaunted. In the meantime I feel that we may all find a message of encouragement in the lines which, in my closing words, I should like to say to you:

'I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be better than light, and safer than a known way."

May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all."

For those of you who have visited St Georges Chapel at Windsor you will know that these words are inscribed at the gate of his tomb.

During the War the King and Queen refused to leave their people. The Government urged that the Princesses should be evacuated to Canada for the duration of the War. The Queen made the famous reply, "The Princesses would never leave without me, and I couldn't leave without the King and the King will never leave". Throughout the blitz he continued to work at his desk each day and slept at Windsor at night. He became a familiar figure walking through

the rubble after air raids. Buckingham Palace was bombed on a number of occasions and on 13 September 1940 the King and Queen were almost killed when a bomb exploded in a courtyard only a few yards from where they were working.

During the War the King and Queen travelled over fifty two thousand miles by rail. They visited all of the worst affected areas. On 14 November 1940 the King drove by car to inspect Coventry after it had been bombed at a time when the damage was so great that it could not be reached by rail. The King personally designed and instituted the George Cross and George Medal as a reward to civilians for gallantry. On 11 June 1946 England issued two stamps celebrating the allied victory in the Second World War in the design of which he had taken a great personal interest. The stamps depicted a dove bearing an olive branch with a masonic symbol, bricks, a trowel and a square and compasses. It has been said the stamps were intended to bear the message that peace (denoted by the dove and olive branch) could only be built on sure foundations of brotherly love which were represented by the masonic square and compasses.

At the conclusion of the Second World War the rate of social change accelerated. The King was left to preside over a period of enormous change both in Britain and what had been the British Empire. At the conclusion of the War the wartime government which had been led by Brother Winston Churchill was replaced by Clement Attlee. The period between 1945 - 1951 was one to be of unprecedented change. In 1947 the King and Queen undertook a tour of Southern Africa. In the same year the King and Queen celebrated their Silver Anniversary. In November of that year Princess Elizabeth married Prince Philip of Greece. By the end of the year it was apparent that the King's health was beginning to fail.

1948 was also to be a year of continuing change. The King's health continued to fail and on 14 November Prince Charles was born. Two days later the King's tour of Australia was cancelled due to his deteriorating health and on 12 March 1949 he underwent surgery. His health remained poor which caused him to cancel his proposed trip to Australia which was to have taken place in 1951. On 18 September 1951 it was discovered that he might have cancer of the lung and on 23 September that year his left lung was removed.

The King now only had a few months to live. On 25 October 1951 Churchill was returned to office as Prime Minister. As previously mentioned ill health prevented the King from being present at the installation of the Earl of Scarborough on 6 November 1951 at the Royal Albert Hall. The installation was instead carried out by the Earl of Derby. Notwithstanding his ill health he made his annual Christmas speech which was pre-recorded for the first time. His health seemed to improve over Christmas 1951 and his daughter Princess Elizabeth left Britain at the end of January 1952 to undertake a tour on his behalf. He died in his sleep during the early hours of 6 February 1952.

The next day Churchill summed up his life in the following terms:

"His conduct on the Throne may well be a model and a guide to constitutional Sovereigns throughout the world today and also in future generations. The last few months of King George's life, with all the pangs and physical stresses that he endured - his life hanging by a thread from day to day - and he, all the time, cheerful and undaunted, stricken in body but quite undisturbed, and even unaffected in spirit - these have made a profound and enduring impression and should be a help to all.

He was sustained not only by his natural buoyancy but by the sincerity of his Christian faith. During these last months the King walked with death as if death were a companion, an acquaintance whom he recognized and did not fear."

The Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, Most Wor. Bro. John Hargraves Hodgson said:

"His life was one of rich and noble service and fully exemplified the principles and tenets of our great Fraternity. His faith, his tolerance and his understanding won the hearts of not only the peoples of the Homeland, but of all the Craftsmen throughout the world."

Less elegantly but no less sincerely was the Australian politician who said: "We have lost a great bloke". Of him it can be said that he was a monarch who did not think it was derogatory to his dignity to exchange sceptre for the trowel, to practice the mysteries of Freemasonry and to join its assemblies.

Sāndringham Gardens within Hyde Park on the corner of College and Park Streets is a memorial in the City of Sydney to King George VI and his father King George V.

Australia issued the first of a number of postage stamps bearing the portrait of the King on 10 May 1937 to celebrate the Coronation. The King's portrait also appeared on our coins and banknotes during his reign.

By reason by the example he set in public life King George VI is worth remembering. Despite the elapse of time he reminds us of the capacity of the individual to succeed against overwhelming odds.

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KING GEORGE VI ON STAMPS AND COINS



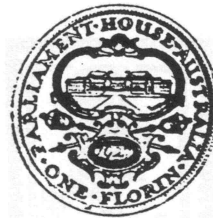
The above stamp issued in 1946 by Great Britain clearly shows Masonic Symbols.

AUSTRALIAN COINS FEATURING KING GEORGE VI

Canberra Florin



The Canberra Florin was the first commemorative coin struck in Australia. It was issued in 1927, the year the then Duke of York, later King George VI, opened Parliament House Canberra, which is depicted on the reverse side of the coin.



The Australian Crown

The Australian Crown is the only coin issued bearing the date 1937. It was struck to commemorate the coronation of King George VI. It was issued again in 1938 and for that reason is not now regarded by numismatists as a purely commemorative issue.



1951 Jubilee Florin

The Jubilee Florin was issued to commemorate the first fifty years since the Federation of Australia.



The 10/- King George VI in Coronation Robes: This stamp (Fig. 15), printed on chalk-surfaced paper and in a colour termed violet, although better described as dull purple, also made its appearance on 1 April 1938.

The £1 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth: The portraits shown together on this stamp were the same as used for the 5/- and 10/- stamps. The £1 stamp (Fig. 16) in a colour officially described as blue-black, and printed on chalk-surfaced paper, was issued on 1 November 1938.



FIG. 15



FIG. 16



FIG. 50

The first new stamp to be issued was the 7½d. The design had been approved earlier, being then intended for a 5½d stamp which did not eventuate. The design, a representation of His Majesty facing to his left, was based on a Dorothy Wilding photograph. As 7½d now represented the international base letter rate, the stamp was printed in blue (Fig. 50). It was issued on 31 October 1951.



FIG. 51

The colour of the current 3d red King George VI stamp (Fig. 49) was changed to green to meet U.P.U. requirements, as 3d now represented the charge for the first unit of printed papers in the international post. In conformity with practice, it was printed on unwatermarked paper and appeared on 14 November 1951. Subsequently, it became available in coil form.

The sculptured profile form of the head of King George VI used on the new 3½d stamp had been based on another Dorothy Wilding photograph. This stamp, in brownish red, was issued on 28 November 1951 (Fig. 51). Later it was made up for sale in booklets containing 12 stamps. The booklet was to have been placed on general sale on 1 July 1952, but in some post offices became available in June 1952.



FIG. 52

The death of His Majesty the King and the accession of Queen Elizabeth the Second on 6 February 1952, did not terminate the issue of stamps portraying King George VI.

The Post Office had announced in December 1951 that new 4½d and 6½d stamps bearing His Majesty's portrait would be issued late in February 1952, while the remaining two stamps necessary to complete the programme occasioned by the July 1951 rates changes — the 1/0½d and 2/6d — had been advanced to the printing stage.



FIG. 53

As all new stamps were required for use as quickly as possible it was decided in the circumstances that no variation would be made in regard to their intended issue. The 4½d and 6½d stamps, in the same design as the new 3½d, were issued on 20 February 1952 (Figs. 52 and 53). The 4½d was primarily intended to meet the rate for a postcard to foreign countries and in conformity with the U.P.U. colour pattern was printed in red. The 6½d was in brown and its main usage was to meet the airmail rate for a ½ oz. letter within Australia.