

THE WEDDING OF THE PRINCE OF WALES

CELEBRATIONS IN THE CITY IN 1863

In the summer of 1862 there were widespread rumours that Edward, Prince of Wales, eldest son of Queen Victoria and the late Prince Consort, was to marry and that his choice had fallen upon the Princess Alexandra, eldest daughter of Prince Christian of Denmark, the heir to the Danish throne. The Times was approving. The Princess, it declared, 'is tall and well looking and has received a most careful education in her own family which is generally esteemed as a model of all the domestic virtues'. Possibly it was this last characteristic which recommended her to Queen Victoria, who met the Princess and her parents, both of whom could trace their descent from George II of England, on a visit to the Continent in the autumn. In November the Queen announced her consent to the betrothal.

The wedding was appointed for 10 March 1863 in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, at which date the Prince of Wales would be twenty-one and Princess Alexandra eighteen years of age. The Princess, accompanied by her parents, was to leave Copenhagen on 26 February for Belgium where on 5 March they would embark on board the royal yacht 'Victoria and Albert', arriving at Gravesend on 7 March to be met by the Prince of Wales who would escort them to Windsor.

The Corporation determined to celebrate the royal marriage by giving the Prince and Princess on the occasion of Alexandra's arrival in England a Public Entry into the City of London.

There were medieval precedents for this. The decorations when the City joyfully welcomed Edward II and his French bride, Isabella, made it look, according to the chroniclers, like the new Jerusalem, and workmen worked overtime and on night shifts to prepare the pageants on London Bridge which greeted Henry V and his bride, Katherine of France, in 1421. The Royal Entry, as the passage of the sovereign through the City was known, whether for a bridal or on return from a Continental expedition, had been one of the most colourful spectacles enjoyed by Londoners in earlier times.

The Court of Common Council determined on the Public Entry at its meeting on 5 February, only one month before the event in question, and not the least remarkable feature of the celebrations was the speed with

which arrangements were made. A Royal Reception Committee was appointed under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor, Alderman William Rose, and was instructed to collaborate with the Livery Companies, the Lieutenancy and other institutions so that the greatest honour should be done to the Princess on her passage through the City. The Committee held its first meeting on 6 February 1863 and met fifteen times, exclusive of sub committee meetings, between then and 6 March.

On 7 March the Prince and Princess travelled by train from Gravesend to the Bricklayers Arms Station in Southwark, a heavy goods station which, again according to The Times, had been converted, in spite of many difficulties, into a 'perfect triumph of the decorative art'. Here Princess Alexandra and the Prince of Wales were greeted by representatives of the railway company, the county of Surrey and the borough of Southwark as well as by the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs. A carriage procession, with an escort of Life Guards, then proceeded from the station to London Bridge where the county and borough representatives detached themselves and where the civic procession, including carriages of many of the Livery Companies, was drawn up in readiness. There had been much agitation about the order of procession through the City, the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, wishing the civic procession to follow the royal carriages and the Corporation insisting that it should precede them. After a deputation waited upon the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, the Corporation gained its point and the carriage of the Lord Mayor immediately preceded that of their Royal Highnesses.

London Bridge had been decorated by the City Architect, J.B. Bunning. The parapets were ornamented with a series of masts or standards surmounted by the Danish emblems of the raven and the elephant and bearing medallion portraits of the succession of the kings of Denmark. Between the standards were 100 tripods filled with incense giving off what was described as 'the most grateful fragrance'. Across the whole width of the bridge roadway was erected a great triumphal arch adorned with a fine selection of royal portraits, coats of arms, allegorical devices, gods, goddesses, statues, and other ornaments not the least striking of which was a representation of Britannia in a chariot drawn by four horses welcoming Alexandra to our shores.

From London Bridge the route, passing everywhere through dense crowds and decorated buildings, was first to the Mansion House where the Lady Mayoress, attended by eight young ladies dressed in white, presented a

bouquet to the Princess. The facade of the Mansion House, we are told, appeared almost as white as marble, two powerful steam fire engines having played upon it with water from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. on two successive mornings. Incidentally, the Mercers' Company subjected the Cheapside frontage of their Hall to the same treatment but with less satisfactory results. The building may have emerged looking whiter than white but the force of the water broke almost all the windows.

The procession continued past St. Paul's, where specially erected galleries capable of seating 10,000 persons stretched from Cheapside to Ludgate Hill, and from thence along Fleet Street to Temple Bar which had been converted into another triumphal arch and was most sumptuously decorated. Once again, as at London Bridge, the City Architect provided satisfaction for the olfactory as well as the visual senses, four tripods at the corner of the arch giving off 'balmy odours'.

Here the civic procession came to an end, much to the regret of the City Press which deplored the fact that the Lord Mayor and civic authorities did not accompany the royal party further than the City boundaries 'because a great deal of the splendour of the pageant was cropped off by such an arrangement', and as we shall see in a moment this did in fact have the most unfortunate and serious consequences. At Temple Bar the Lord High Steward of Westminster took over and the royal party proceeded via Hyde Park Corner to Paddington Station where they entrained for a journey to Slough and yet another carriage procession from there to Windsor.

At Common Council on 12 March the Lord Mayor laid before the Court a letter from the Home Secretary conveying Queen Victoria's appreciation of the loyalty shown to the Royal Family and of the welcome extended to the Princess on her passage through the Metropolis which concluded 'The conspicuous part taken by the City of London in the reception of the Princess, has been most gratifying to the Queen ...'.

Nevertheless there had been a darker side to the celebrations and already the Corporation and the City Police had come in for much criticism. The enthusiasm for the young couple had indeed been unbounded and the crowds immense. The number of police proved inadequate, there were insufficient barriers marking the line of the procession, the ends of side roads joining the processional route were blocked off by makeshift platforms, the men of the London Volunteer Brigade who should have taken up their position in front of the Mansion House where the crowds

were at their densest arrived too late to get through, and the procession itself was often ground to a halt as it tried to force its way through the throng. The crowds, mercifully, were good natured and some of the consequences were no more than a loss of dignity. Four Aldermen past the chair, for example, on their way to London Bridge to take their place in the procession were marooned in their carriage near the Mansion House for half an hour, unable to get through. According to The Times the Commissioner of Police, mounted on a white charger, appeared suddenly upon the scene for a few moments 'but only to prove if one might judge by his gesticulations, his inability to help the four civic dignitaries'. But unfortunately this was not all. Several people were crushed to death and there were more accidents, some of them fatal, on 10 March, the day of the wedding itself, when crowds again thronged the City to see the illuminations. Undoubtedly a major cause of the trouble on the day of the Public Entry, as those who came to the defence of the City were quick to point out, was the Home Secretary's refusal to allow the civic procession to pass outside the City boundaries although the Corporation was quite willing for it to do so and the other authorities such as Southwark and Westminster were anxious that it should. Since the civic procession provided most of the spectacle and pageantry - the royal carriages provided by the Royal Mews were described as very shabby - but was only permitted to pass through one fifth of the whole route from the Bricklayers Arms Station to Paddington, those people who wished to see it inevitably crowded into the City.

One consequence of the criticism was an immediate call for the amalgamation of the City and Metropolitan police forces although in fact crowd control in the West End on the night of the illuminations had been equally ineffective.

But let us turn to happier matters. The Royal Reception Committee in addition to arranging the Public Entry was charged with two other tasks. One was the provision of an appropriate wedding gift for Princess Alexandra. At the Court of Common Council on 19 February £10,000 was voted for this purpose, a curmudgeonly amendment to substitute £5,000 having been negatived by 87 to 57 votes. The Committee had hoped to ascertain the Princess's own wishes but a reply from Windsor Castle indicated that this would be impossible in the time. The letter continued that the Queen would feel some delicacy in specifying the description of present or the person from whom it should be purchased but indicated that she and the Prince of Wales had seen and much approved of a diamond

necklace and ear rings 'brought down' to Windsor by Mr. Garrard. Faced with this heavy hint, the Committee determined upon a single colette diamond necklace and ear rings to correspond and rejected all offers from jewellers to supply emeralds or rubies. In the end five firms were able to produce jewels which met the Committee's requirements but perhaps it should occasion no surprise to learn that the commission went to Messrs. Garrard. This was on 4 March. On 9 March, the day before the wedding, the Royal Reception Committee accompanied by certain of the Officers, journeyed by special train to Windsor where the Lord Mayor on behalf of the Corporation presented the necklace and ear rings to Princess Alexandra. A long letter from the Princess's chamberlain was received by the Lord Mayor a few days later saying that the Princess had found it difficult at the time to find words adequate to express her appreciation and thanking the Corporation again both for their magnificent gift and the welcome accorded her on the previous Saturday.

The other matter which concerned the Royal Reception Committee - and which in fact kept the committee in being until 1865 - was that of a commemorative medal. Beginning with the Opening of London Bridge in 1831 the Corporation had commissioned a number of fine medals commemorative of important civic events and it was decided that the Public Entry of Princess Alexandra should be marked in this way. All the previous medals had been made by Benjamin Wyon who had died in 1858; this was made by his sons, Joseph Shepherd Wyon and Alfred Benjamin Wyon. Three inches in diameter and in bronze, the obverse of the medal bears a charming portrait in profile of the young Princess, the reverse depicts an allegorical scene of the City of London welcoming the Princess. Three hundred and fifty medals were struck. Two medals each were presented to the Prince and Princess and to the Queen.

The royal wedding, as I have said, took place on 10 March. Celebrations, however, were by no means yet at an end. At the Court on 12 March an Address of Congratulation was drawn up for presentation to the Queen and Compliments of Congratulation to the Prince of Wales and to the Princess of Wales and it was determined to ask the Prince to take upon himself the Freedom. It was proposed that on the occasion of the Freedom ceremony a suitable Entertainment should be held at Guildhall and a Royal Entertainment Committee was appointed whose members elected Francis Wyatt Truscott of Dowgate Ward as chairman. Francis Truscott, later Sir Francis, was afterwards to serve as Alderman of Dowgate and as Lord Mayor and was the grandfather of Sir Denis Truscott. The Committee's

first thought was of a Banquet but upon the Prince of Wales being consulted he replied 'that should the entertainment be in the nature of a Ball, it would be very agreeable to the Princess as well as to himself'. 8 June 1863 was determined as the date.

In the mid nineteenth century, of course, the Corporation could do honour to its distinguished visitors untroubled by thoughts of Mr. Michael Heseltine and financial restrictions. The cost of the Ball was to be just over £15,000. At this period the Corporation rarely thought the existing buildings of Guildhall sufficient for Entertainments. On this, as on other occasions, the whole of Guildhall Yard was transformed into a reception room which, with its side corridors, extended across the whole width of the then Yard between the two flanking ranges of buildings and extended forward from the porch to the line of Guildhall Buildings. Let it not be thought that this was a mere awning or tent. On the contrary, the room was decorated in cream and gold, hung with tapestries, furnished with mirrors and divided by 28 clusters of columns into bays and aisles. The columns supported an upper room with a roof of Gothic arches and walls covered with pink and white fluting which was used as a supper room. Two of the rooms in the range of buildings to the east of the Yard, where the art gallery is now but then used as courts of law, were floored over at the same level to provide two more supper rooms. The three supper rooms together could accommodate 1,000 persons. Three staircases were built to give access to them.

The Great Hall which served as the principal ball room was even more sumptuously decorated and the floor was covered with a crimson carpet specially manufactured for the occasion. The Council Chamber where the royal party took supper was hung with tapestries and furnished with a display of gold treasures lent by the Livery Companies and Messrs. Garrard. The Princess's Boudoir had 'pink walls overlaid with a tasteful arrangement of lace drapery' and a toilet service specially manufactured by Messrs. Copeland.

The general company began to assemble about six o'clock and continued to arrive until half past eight. About 2,000 people were present. The Prince and Princess of Wales arrived at nine and were conducted through the Reception Room to the Great Hall where at a Special Court of Common Council the Prince was admitted to the Freedom by patrimony. The Ball opened with a quadrille, the Princess dancing with the Lord Mayor and the Prince with the Lady Mayoress. At a quarter to twelve the royal party was conducted to the Council Chamber for supper and left thereafter, expressing

their gratification at the entertainment, but the general company stayed on, dancing being resumed after supper and continuing 'with great spirit', as the committee's report puts it, until after six o'clock in the morning.

As a footnote it may be mentioned that among the many splendid things commissioned for this Entertainment was china provided by Copeland for the royal table including '60 pierced fine Porcelain dessert plates, mat and chased gold borders, and the Prince of Wales Plume and the City Arms in colour proper in the centre'. After the event much of the specially commissioned china was auctioned among members of the Corporation but it is pleasant that one of the Copeland dessert plates should recently have come back to Guildhall, being presented by Mr. Deputy Leslie Prince a few years ago, and can now be seen displayed in a case in the Ambulatory.

B.R.M.
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