

Signed Album or Visitor's Book page – December 17 – 18 1875

A page from an album or Visitor's Book containing the signatures of eight of the most notable and prolific men in British political and social life of the mid-Victorian era – all of whom attended Albert Edward, Prince of Wales during his tour of the Indian sub-continent from 1875 to 1876.

1. Lord Charles Beresford
2. Major General Sir Arthur Ellis
3. Sir Joseph Fayer
4. Charles Harbord, 5th Baron Suffield
5. Joseph Heneage Finch, Earl of Aylesford
6. Sir William Howard "Willie" Russell
7. General Sir Dighton Probyn
8. Lord Alfred Paget

The following biographies relate to the signatories of the Album page offered for sale herein. The Prince of Wales' tour of India was considered to be a great success that cemented the "Jewel in the Crown" and the status of the Raj in the British Empire. Thirty-two aides and equerries accompanied the Prince of Wales on what has been described as more of a social, convivial event than a state visit by a senior statesman. Certainly, those chosen to accompany "Bertie" were some of the most distinguished men of the mid-Victorian era; and the eight signatures on this document are a "who's who" of the great and good of the day.

Interestingly, the Prince of Wales insisted that all those accompanying him dress for dinner, regardless of whether in a palace ballroom, or in the middle of the jungle. However, as a concession to the heat and humidity of the Indian climate, he did allow dinner guests to cut off the tails of their evening coats – a fashion which caught on and gave rise to the "dinner jacket".

1. Charles William de la Poer Beresford, 1st Baron Beresford GCB GCVO – b. 10 February 1846; d. 6 September 1919.

Lord Charles "Charlie" Beresford, British Admiral, Member of Parliament, Confidante of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII.

Beresford was a popular figure at court and champion of the Royal Navy for much of his distinguished life. Uniquely, his parliamentary career took place while he was still a serving naval officer, a paradox that resulted in not a little confrontation with the Admiralty; and his political position was saved only after the intervention of Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister of the Day.

A career Naval Officer and traditionalist, he was mired in a long-running dispute with Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher over changes to the Navy's practices and the introduction of new technologies. This resulted in him ultimately being crosswise with the First Sea Lord, Winston Churchill who said of him "... since I became first lord of the admiralty...within a fortnight he made a speech in which he said I had betrayed the navy...and ever since he has been going about the country pouring out charges of espionage, favouritism, blackmail, fraud, and inefficiency... The noble Lord nourishes many bitter animosities on naval matters".

In 1874, Beresford was one of thirty-two aides chosen to accompany the Prince of Wales on the tour of India to which this item relates. Queen Victoria objected, on the grounds of his bad reputation (womanizer and possessor of a tattoo acquired on a Naval voyage), but he remained at the Prince's insistence. He was aide-de-camp to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, from 1875 until 1876. In 1891, Beresford had an affair with Daisy Greville (q.v.) which resulted in a contretemps with the Prince of Wales when Beresford's wife found a letter from his mistress and threatened to destroy her reputation (such as it was). As a result, the Prince of Wales intervened and excluded Lady Beresford from his social circle.

2. Maj.-Gen. Sir Arthur Edward Augustus Ellis, KCVO, CSI – b. 13 December 1837; d. 11 June 1907

Soldier and frequent traveling companion of the Prince of Wales

Ellis was an accomplished linguist who traveled widely with the Prince of Wales. Appointed an equerry in 1867, he was also Comptroller of the Royal Accounts from 1901 until his death in 1907. In the army he served with the Grenadier Guards and took part in the Crimea campaign and in India from 1859 – 1866.

3. Sir Joseph Fayrer, 1st Baronet – b. 6 December 1824; d. 21 May 1907

English physician; anthropologist; fisherman and yachtsman - noted for his writings on medicine, particularly the treatment of snakebite in India.

Fayrer became interested in medicine when he witnessed a Yellow Fever outbreak in Bermuda while traveling with his father, a former Royal Navy Commander. He studied medicine at Charing Cross Hospital and became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1847, being appointed medical officer on board HMS Victory. He received a MD in 1849 and was appointed an assistant surgeon to the Indian Medical Service, eventually surviving the siege of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny. He subsequently became Professor of Surgery at the Medical College of Calcutta and personal surgeon to Lord Mayo (in 1869). His time in India was also spent in the study of venomous snakes; and he published an authoritative book on the subject in 1872. He became a fellow of the Royal Society in 1877.

Fayrer was selected to be the surgeon to accompany the Prince of Wales on his Indian Tour (largely as a result of his Indian experience); and was subsequently appointed Physician Extraordinary to the new King in 1901. He published an autobiography in 1900 entitled (not unusually for the time) "Recollections of my Life".

4. Charles Harbord, 5th Baron Suffield GCVO, KCB, PC, JP, DL – b. 2 January 1830; d. 9 April 1914

British peer, courtier and Liberal politician; a close friend of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, subsequently King Edward VII.

"Suffield" was a close friend of the Prince of Wales and served as a Lord of the Bedchamber and Lord-in-Waiting (1868-1872) to the Prince. During the tour of India from 1875 - 6, Suffield served as Albert Edward's Chief of Staff. Under Gladstone's Government he was Master of the Buckhounds from February – July 1886. He also became a member of the Privy Council in February 1886.

Lord Suffield was President of the Royal Cromer golf club in 1887 (in fact Suffield was landlord of the golf club' land). A substantial landowner, he owned 12,000 acre's and had seats at Gunton Park, Norwich, and Harbord House, Cromer.

5. FINCH, JOSEPH HENEAGE, 6th Earl of Aylesford – b. 21 February 1849; d. 13 January 1885.

English nobleman and sportsman, “exiled” to Big Spring, Texas – subsequent cattleman and party animal!

Finch was a close friend of the Prince of Wales who accompanied him on his tour of India where he was responsible for organizing the local sports events and hunting parties. However, he returned home early in 1876 to deal with his unfaithful wife and her companion. The subsequent divorce was very ugly and very public, causing Queen Victoria herself to push him out of polite society of the day.

Finch re-emerged in Big Spring, Texas in 1883, where he acquired a 2,500 acre ranch; a cattle herd; a hotel and bar; and built a meat market. Although the English Earl was something of an anomaly in the West, he rapidly acquired a reputation for being a spectacular host, throwing wild parties and being particularly free with money and alcohol. In January 1885 he threw a two week long party (that was apparently spoken of with awe for years) – however, shortly after its conclusion, the Earl died.

Finch’s significance is thus not so much as a result of his relationship with the Prince of Wales; but rather as a frontier character who helped settle the West – what is referred to as a “remittance man”. Gaining the respect of his peers in as harsh an environment as that of Texas in the 1880’s was no mean feat. And this is especially true of a peer of the realm whose childhood had been, to say the least, privileged.

6. Sir William Howard “Willie” Russell, CVO; b. 28 March 1820; d. 11 February 1907

War Correspondent for the Times newspaper; author; founder of the Army and Navy Gazette.

Willie Russell, an Irishman by birth, was one of the great characters of 19th Century Victorian England. Credited with having been the first of the modern war correspondents, Russell earned his spurs in his 22 month coverage of the fiasco which was the Crimean War. His dispatches to London throughout the campaign brought home to the British public for the first time the horrors of war; and earned him a solid reputation among the British population, while ostracizing him with the British commanders of the campaign. Indeed, Lord Raglan insisted that his officers refuse to converse with Russell. But his graphic descriptions of the horrors of the Crimean campaigns achieved considerable good, including providing the inspiration of Florence Nightingale to become involved in nursing. And it was Russell who coined the phrase “the thin red line” in reference to British troops standing against the superior numbers of the Russians.

Among other journalistic assignments, Russell also covered the coronation of Tsar Alexnader II in 1856; the re-capture of Lucknow (India) in 1858; the American Civil War; and the Franco-Prussian War.

Russell attended the Prince of Wales’ Tour of India in his professional capacity and wrote a book entitled “The Prince of Wales’ Tour: a diary in India; with some account of the visits of His Royal Highness to the courts of Greece, Egypt, Spain and Portugal.”, published in 1877.

He was knighted in 1895. According to reports, during the ceremony Edward VII told Russell “Don’t kneel Billy, just stoop”.

7. General Sir Dighton MacNaughton Probyn VC, GCB, GCSI, GCVO, ISO, b. 21 January, 1833; d. 20 June, 1924

Victoria Cross winner; CO of the famed Probyn’s Horse; Secretary to the Prince of Wales

Probyn is a legendary figure in British Victorian military history, having won the VC at the Battle of Agra during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. A 24 year old Captain in the Bengal army when decorated, he went on to fight in numerous campaigns. Such was his impact on British India that even today the 5th Cavalry (an Indian and subsequently a Pakistani regiment after partition) is still known as “Probyn’s Horse”; and there is a town and surrounding farmlands (owned by the 5th Cavalry Regiment) in the Punjab that retains its pre-independence name of Probynabad.

In later life, Probyn was Keeper of the Privy Purse (i.e. financial controller to the Royal Household); and Secretary to Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. As Comptroller of the Household, he had the unenviable task of keeping track of the reckless spending that the Prince was so well known for and much of his time was spent trying to ensure that the Household did not go bankrupt. Probyn continued as financial advisor and Secretary until the King’s death in 1910.

Probyn, who was devoted to Queen Victoria, was prone to seizures on occasion. The Queen, who was equally fond of Sir Dighton, is said to have carried a knife with her at all times in order to cut open his collar when an attack ensued.

Probyn is documented as having attended the Prince of Wales Indian visit in 1875-6. See “The Prince of Wales’ tour: a diary in India; with some account of the visits of His Royal Highness to the courts of Greece, Egypt, Spain and Portugal”, by W.H. Russell (q.v.) Full text available from:
http://archive.org/stream/princeofwalestou00russuoft/princeofwalestou00russuoft_djvu.txt

8. Lord Alfred Henry Paget – b. 26 June 1816; d. 24 August 1888.

British soldier, courtier and Member of Parliament for Lichfield from 1837 to 1865.

Paget was the fourth son of the 1st Marquess of Anglesey. He became a lieutenant in the Royal Horse Guards. In 1837 he was elected Member of Parliament for Lichfield and held the seat until 1865.

Paget was Chief Equerry and Clerk Marshal to the Queen from July 1846 to March 1852, from December 1852 to March 1858 and from June 1859 to August 1874, when he resigned the office of Chief Equerry and remained Clerk Marshal.

Although Paget was a confidante of the Prince of Wales, it is rumored that he was sent on the Indian tour at the request of the Queen to keep an eye on the activities of her errant son.