

*Royal Kinship: Anglo-German Family Networks 1760–1914.* Conference of the Prince Albert Society and the German Historical Institute London, held at the GHIL, 29–30 September 2006.

This conference focused upon and sought to blend the diverse strands of two important and controversial historical topics. The first of these was the nature and development of Anglo-German relations in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries; the second was the role of monarchical institutions and dynastic connections in modern European history. As Karina Urbach (GHIL), the organizer of the conference, explained in an insightful opening lecture which was read out by Keith Robbins (Wales), both individually and collectively these topics raised significant and interesting points for consideration. Some of these were very broad questions that related to the wider implications of these combined topics. For example, it was clearly legitimate, if not essential, to ask whether the close connections between the British royal family and various different German princely houses led to any meaningful or enduring cultural transfer between the nations over which these dynasties reigned. Equally, however, it was also important to consider questions that related to the narrower issue of the impact on individuals of being part of a transnational family network. Did the 'genetic permeability' that allowed considerable intermarriage between British and German royal families create problems of identity for those caught up in the process? Was it the case, for example, that in an era of increasing nationalism and national definition it was a burden to have a dual heritage, or was it possible for these people to forge mental maps that were truly international? These and other related questions were explored over five different sessions, each of which focused on a different facet of the Anglo-German dynastic landscape.

The first session began by setting out the historiographical and contextual underpinnings to Anglo-German dynastic history. In the opening paper, Daniel Schönflug (Berlin) ranged widely over the question of how dynasties acted and interacted. As he explained in a comprehensive analysis of dynastic marriages, kinship networks could be both inclusive and exclusive. While most royal families sought ties with their fellow princely houses, there were three (the two Serbian dynasties and the Albanian royal family) that never made such connections. Moreover, even royal houses that were

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favourably inclined to such bridal networking were not indiscriminate in the practice of it, but were often influenced in such matters by extraneous considerations such as religious affiliation and dynastic prestige. It was also pointed out both in the paper and in subsequent questions that in an almost Newtonian manner, particular dynastic connections could provoke or call into being alternative dynastic networks. Thus, the Hohenzollern family during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, despite its familial ties to the Romanov and British Coburg families, was conscious of being excluded from this circle by a counter-network, the so-called 'Rumpenheimer clique', that united the courts of Hesse, Denmark, Greece, and Britain in a way that seemed designed deliberately to exclude their Prusso-German cousins. The second paper of the first session moved from the general to the particular by considering the case of the Guelphs, a family which from the time of George I to the death of William IV brought Britain and Hanover into a dynastic if not political union. These direct ties, were, of course, severed on the accession of Queen Victoria, who was barred under Salic law from the Hanoverian throne. However, as Torsten Riotte (GHIL) outlined and exemplified, this caesura did not end all ties. As papers in the Royal Archives at Windsor demonstrate, the fate of Hanover continued to be of interest to the British royal family throughout Victoria's reign. The dispossession of the Duke of Cumberland, Victoria's cousin, from the Hanoverian throne posed particular problems for the British branch of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, as Victoria's eldest daughter was married into the very dynasty, the Hohenzollerns, that had seized the Hanoverian lands. Problematic questions of family, dynasty, property, and Anglo-German relations were, therefore, all entwined together in this case.

The second session moved the focus to the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg. Kicking off the topic was a paper by Clarissa Campbell Orr (*Anglia Ruskin*) which looked in detail at the case of Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. As a member of a very extensive family—largely and confusingly populated by a plethora of Charlottes and Fredericks—and, thereby, possessing numerous cousins dotted liberally about the European dynastic undergrowth, she was intricately connected to the Continent's many royal houses. As a result, her marriage to George III provides an interesting historical showcase for the importance of one of Europe's more minor princely houses in

cementing dynastic connections between disparate royal courts. The unlikely place that Mecklenburg occupied in the development of the British royal family was further illustrated by Rudolf Muhs (Royal Holloway) in his exploration of Augusta of Mecklenberg, who, as the title of his paper made clear, held the distinction of being 'granddaughter, cousin and aunt to a Queen of England'. Muhs's paper was not only valuable for providing a useful chronological extension to the ideas showcased by Campbell Orr, it was also highly significant in terms of what it said about identity formation. The subject of his paper, Augusta of Mecklenburg, considered herself British and was excessively proud of being so. This was despite the fact that by almost every obvious criterion—name, place of birth, first language, her extensive and continuing residency in northern Germany, and the infrequency of her visits to Britain and the limited time she spent there—she would more naturally have fitted the designation German. Given the further fact that her political views and social outlook were not just reactionary but so positively anachronistic as to have been untenable in the context of a limited parliamentary monarchy like Britain's, it is almost inexplicable that she should have felt so drawn to her distant British heritage. Nevertheless, the fact that she did so strongly identify with Britain, even to the point of maintaining a correspondence with Britain during the early years of the First World War, highlights the manner in which identity in a transnational family network was as much, if not more, about self-definition than birth or environment.

The focus of the third session was on Prussia and the connections between the Hohenzollerns and the British branch of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Monika Wienfort (Berlin), whose paper centred on the correspondence between Queen Victoria and her daughter, Vicky, the wife of the Prussian Crown Prince (later, briefly, Kaiser Friedrich III), made the case for the political significance of royal marriages in a nineteenth-century context. Noting the reluctance of many academic (as opposed to popular) historians of the modern era to consider, let alone privilege, the history of royalty and dynastic relations, she suggested that the life of Princess Victoria demonstrated that monarchy was still a key issue. Her contentious role in Prussia-Germany, as a bastion of liberal and parliamentary values in the midst of a conservative, authoritarian, and military regime, highlighted and prefigured the tensions in Anglo-German relations that

were to erupt so forcefully during the reign of her son, Wilhelm II. Her regular exchange of letters with her mother, in which Vicky often expressed decidedly British (and critical) views on her adopted land, also showed that tensions could exist between an individual's dynastic obligations, familial duties, personal inclinations, and political affiliations. This situation strongly illustrated the ambiguities and dichotomies in the relationship between dynasty and nationality in the context of a royal marriage. These themes were extended further by the paper presented by John Röhl (Sussex), who drew upon primary documents in the British and German archives to highlight the place of dynastic politics in Anglo-German relations during the era of Wilhelm II. Wilhelm, as Röhl showed, maintained an extensive correspondence with his British relatives. Possibly because of the Kaiser's rather exalted sense of the role of monarchy, these family letters often served a clear political purpose. His numerous epistles to his uncle, King Edward VII, for example, were often designed less to maintain contact with a relative who Wilhelm in fact loathed, but rather were explicitly sent to distract the king, and, by extension, the British government, from the Kaiser's own political ambitions. Thus during various European and global diplomatic crises Wilhelm attempted, by means of the written word, to smooth over Anglo-German political differences by persuading his uncle that Germany's aims were not as aggressive as they appeared. Unfortunately for Wilhelm, Edward VII recognized these letters for what they were – cynical political ploys designed to mask Wilhelm's global hegemonial aspirations – and not only declined to be lulled, but was, if anything, further strengthened in his conviction about the extent of Hohenzollern hostility. Wilhelm's meetings with other 'British' relatives, for example, Prince Louis of Battenberg, were no more successful in this respect. As a result, Röhl's paper made it more than evident that dynastic relationships played a key, if unsuccessful, part in Wilhelm's diplomatic engagement with Britain. This was revealing in terms of what it said about both the Anglo-German political dialogue and Wilhelm's inability to separate the familial and dynastic from the national and political in his cognitive processes and political behaviour.

Following this examination of Prussia, John Davis (Kingston) provided a nuanced overview of the connection between Britain and Coburg. The prism for this was provided, naturally enough, by

Prince Albert. Following his arrival in Britain as the husband and consort of Queen Victoria, Albert maintained an extensive correspondence with his elder brother Ernst, who would become the reigning duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and head of Albert's house. Albert's letters to his brother are revealing at many levels. First of all, they are family letters and show Albert's extensive interest in the affairs of the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, the finances of its family, and its international standing and prestige. At another level, however, the letters spell out clearly Albert's continued interest in German affairs and his desire to be involved in their development even after his move to Britain as prince consort to a woman who, in German terms at least, was a foreign sovereign. In part, this was no more than a natural and continued interest in the place of his birth. However, Albert also had a personal vision of Anglo-German friendship that he wished to promote. One means of doing this was through marriage alliances and Albert's letters to his brother have much to say on the importance of marriage in dynastic and political terms. He was opposed, for example, to his brother marrying a Catholic princess on grounds of religious harmony and also opposed marriage to a Russian imperial bride for national reasons. Instead he was eager to promote better Anglo-German understanding, a process he believed he had achieved when he married his eldest daughter to the Prussian crown prince. As we know, this did not ultimately develop as Albert had hoped.

The final session focused on the House of Hesse. Two papers were offered on this topic. One, provided by Jonathan Petropoulos (Los Angeles) provided an extensive overview of the connections between the Hessian royal family and their British counterparts. The paper was wide-ranging chronologically and provided an interesting point of comparison with the role of the Coburg dynasty as previously outlined by Dr Davis. The other paper, by Matthew Seligmann (Northampton), focused on the particular example of Prince Louis of Battenberg. The offspring of a morganatic marriage between a Russo-Polish countess and a prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, who was born in Austria and forged a career in Britain, he was a true example of a transnational dynastic figure. However, as his time in the Royal Navy showed, this connection could be both an advantage and a hindrance: while to begin with he achieved choice appointments through his royal connections, he soon realized that any hint of

favouritism could damage his prospects and he chose to emphasize merit over title. That this did not save him in 1914 when he had to resign his office because of his German name and heritage was a telling reminder of the greater power of nationalism over dynasty in the context of twentieth-century total war.

The conference concluded with some thoughtful remarks by Franz Bosbach (Bayreuth), representing the Prince Albert Society, and Andreas Gestrich, on behalf of the German Historical Institute. These included observations on the themes raised: Anglo-German relations, dynastic protocol, nationalism, national affiliation, and identity-formation. It was clear that these were fruitful areas where much research of value could be carried out. The current Common Heritage Project, which seeks to evaluate the holdings of the archives at Windsor, Coburg, and Gotha and thereby highlight Anglo-German connections through dynastic interchange is obviously one outstanding example of this. In the wake of this very stimulating and successful conference there are likely to be others and, it is to be hoped, a volume bringing together the papers from this conference.

Matthew S. Seligmann (University of Northampton)