

Lord Charles Beresford (1846-1919)



he safest place to start an enquiry into the antecedents of any significant member of the aristocracy other than the two obvious sources of *Burkes Peerage* or the G.E. Cockayne, Hon. Vicary Gibbs and others' *The Complete Peerage*, is to turn to the Oxford University's *Dictionary of National Biography*, where we find the following:

'BERESFORD, Lord Charles William De La Poer, Baron Beresford (1846-1919), admiral; entered navy, 1859; Conservative MP, Waterford, 1874-80; took part in bombardment of Alexandria (captain and mentioned in dispatches), 1882, and Nile expedition, 1884-5; CB for rescue of Sir C. W. *Wilson, 1885; MP, East Marylebone, 1885-6-9; fourth naval lord of Admiralty, 1886-8; rear-admiral, 1897; MP, York (1897-1900), Woolwich (1902-3); vice-admiral, 1902; chief in command of Channel Squadron and KCB, 1903; commander-in-chief, Mediterranean, 1905; admiral, 1906; commander-in-chief of Channel Fleet, 1907-9; opposed Admiralty policy; MP, Portsmouth, 1910-16; retired and received GCB, 1911; baron, 1916.'

The most obvious anomaly which springs to mind on reading this paragraph is that he is described as Lord Charles &c., &c., Beresford closely followed by the information that at various times throughout his life he was MP for, variously: Waterford, East Marylebone, York and latterly Portsmouth which he could not have done had he been able to take his seat in the House of Lords. The reason for this is that the designation 'Lord Charles Beresford' was a courtesy title – had he been a peer he would have been styled 'Charles, Lord Beresford' and not the former, which we associate with the name of our Chapter and the Lodge from which it depends. The reason for this is that he was the *second* son of the 4th Marquess of Waterford who died in 1866 when Charles was twenty years old.

Turning to *The Complete Peerage* and disregarding information already gleaned from the *DNB* reference *supra* we can find out a bit more about the more ordinary aspects of his life. Second son of John de la Poer Beresford (the *DNB* is actually incorrect in ascribing capital letters to the 'de la' part of his name) and Christiana, 3rd da. of Charles Powell Leslie, of Glaslough, Monaghan, Lord Charles Beresford was born on 10 February 1846 at Philipstown, King's County, Ireland and *bap.* there. He was educated at Bayford School and Mr. Foster's School, Stubbington, Hants; Cadet HMS *Britannia* 1859; Sub-Lieut. RN 1866; Lieut. 1868.

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He was promoted Commander in 1875 and became the Naval aide-de-camp to the Prince of Wales on his visit to India in 1875 during which he was undoubtedly able to forge the beginning of a relationship which later enabled him to send the telegram which is preserved in books of quotations, to this day, and of which more later.

He was in command of the Royal Yacht *Osborne*, from 1879-81 and promoted Captain in 1882, serving in the Egyptian Campaign in the same year. He was in command of HMS *Condor* at the bombardment of Alexandria, and was Governor of that city after the bombardment, having been mentioned in despatches.



**Lord Charles Beresford as
a young man**

He served on Lord Wolseley's staff in the Nile Expedition of 1884-85, for the relief of General Gordon the names from which campaign were celebrated in the streets of much of the new housing in Strood at the time – Gordon Road, Slatin Road &c., &c.

Beresford was in command of the Naval Brigade at the battles of Abu Klea, Abu Kru, and Metemmeh as well as being in command of the expedition for the relief of Sir Charles Wilson being thrice mentioned in despatches on that occasion and for which he was subsequently made *CB* (Companion of the Bath) in 1885. He became a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty between 1886 and 1888 although he resigned the office on a question of the strength of the Fleet. From 1893 to 1896 he was in command of the Steam Reserve, Chatham, becoming Naval aide-de-camp to Queen Victoria in 1897. He was promoted Rear-Admiral in 1897 and visited China on a special mission at the request of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Great Britain, during the period 1898-99, publishing a report on his return in a volume entitled: *The Break-up of China* (1899).

There followed, as if by natural progression, a series of promotions – Rear-Admiral Mediterranean Fleet, 1900-02; Vice-Admiral 1902; he was made a *KCB* (Knight Companion of the Bath) and *KCVO* (Knight Companion of the Victorian Order) in 1903; Commander of the Channel Squadron, 1903-05; Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet, 1905-

1907; Admiral 1906; *GCVO* (Grand Commander of the Victorian Order), in 1906 and Commander-in-Chief Channel Fleet, 1907-09. On hauling down his flag in March 1909, Lord Charles challenged the whole policy of Sir John Fisher and the Board of Admiralty, and later, in 1912, a year after his retirement, gave an account of his views in a book called *The Betrayal*. There is, however, little trace of this well-known controversy in his *Memories* (1914).

He finally retired from active service in 1911 whereupon he was made *GCB* (Grand Commander of the Order of the Bath). Retirement did not mean that he ‘put his feet up’ however, as he became Hon. Colonel of the Royal Marine Brigade in 1914 and as a final accolade was created Baron Beresford of Metemeh and Curraghmore, co. Waterford, in 1916. He received an honorary Doctorate of Civil Laws from the University of Oxford, an honorary Doctorate of Laws from Liverpool University and also held three medals for saving life. In addition he held the Grand Cordon of the Medjidie; the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour; the Grand Cross of the Saviour of Greece as well as the Grand Cross of St. Olav of Norway.

As for his marital status, he was married on 25 June 1878 to Mina, first da. of Richard Gardner, *MP* by Lucy, 1st da. of Count Augustus Mandelsloh.

Finally he *d.* at the age of seventy-three, at Langwell, Berriedale, in Caithness on 6, and was *bur.* on 13 September 1919 in Putney Vale Cemetary after a State funeral in St. Paul’s Cathedral, when his Barony became *extinct*. *The Times* obituary notice of 8 September 1919 included the following:

‘None ever came into contact with Lord Beresford without being captivated by the charm of his winsome personality. Breezy, genial, good-humoured, and sweet-tempered, with all the *bonhomie* of an Irishman, all the frankness of a seaman, and all the shrewdness of a man of the world, he was beloved by his officers, almost idolized by his men, a cynosure in Society, and a prime favourite with the people. Such qualities have their defects, and he was certainly not without them. But they were also associated with very high professional attainments. [...] He took his profession very seriously. [...] He was seen at his best afloat [...] take him for all in all, he was a first-rate sea officer, and a man of rare personal and social charm.’

Beresford originally joined the Royal Navy in 1859 at the age of thirteen and started his training as a cadet at the naval training academy HMS *Britannia*. His first appointment was to the flagship of the Mediterranean

fleet, HMS *Marlborough*. On HMS *Galatea*, commanded by Queen Victoria's son the Duke of Edinburgh, he toured the world, witnessed executions in Japan and got himself tattooed.

Beresford's honorary title as second son meant that he was eligible to enter the House of Commons. He combined the two careers of the navy and that of a member of parliament, making a reputation as a hero in battle and champion of the Navy in the House of Commons. He entered Parliament as a Conservative in 1874, representing County Waterford and retained his seat until 1880. Not unnaturally, some difficulties arose with the Lords of the Admiralty, who objected to a junior officer debating the Navy publicly in the House of Commons but Beresford's parliamentary career was saved by the intervention of the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, who feared the loss of the seat to an opposition party, should Beresford be forced to resign. He was therefore able to remain as an MP while continuing to serve in the Navy and he became a Commander in 1875.

Just prior to this in 1874, Beresford was one of thirty two aides chosen to accompany the Prince of Wales on a tour of India. HM Queen Victoria objected, on the grounds of his bad reputation, but he remained at the Prince's insistence. The tour was a lively mixture of social engagements and animal hunts. The Prince insisted on dressing for dinner, even in the jungle, but allowed the concession of cutting off the tails off their evening coats, creating what we now know as the dinner jacket. He was aide-de-camp to the Prince of Wales, *later* HM King Edward VII, from 1875 until 1876.

During his service under Edward VII, he became involved in an affair with Daisy Greville, Countess of Warwick (i.e., Frances Brooke), with whom Edward was also involved romantically. The affair strained his friendship with Edward, even though Edward was himself married to Alexandra of Denmark.

Beresford was a well-known and popular figure who courted publicity and was widely known to the British public as 'Charlie B'. He was considered by many to be a personification of John Bull and indeed was normally accompanied by his trademark, a bulldog.

His later career was marked by a longstanding dispute with Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher, over reforms championed by Fisher introducing new technology and sweeping away traditional practices. Fisher, slightly senior to Beresford and more successful, became a barrier to Beresford's rise to the highest office in the Navy. Beresford rose to occupy the most senior sea commands, the Mediterranean and Channel fleets, but failed in his ambition to become First Sea Lord.

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Charlie 'B' and his Bulldog (1919)



Lord Charles Beresford

Egypt and Sudan

In 1882 Beresford was captain of the gunboat *HMS Condor* when it took part in the bombardment of Alexandria during the Egyptian war of that year when he won the admiration amongst the British public for taking his ship inshore to bombard the Egyptian batteries at close range.



In 1884 and 1885 Beresford joined the staff of the Gordon Relief Expedition under (*later* Sir) Garnet Wolseley, along with the Naval Brigade and a Gardner machine gun, to the qualities of which Beresford was much attracted.

Re-election to Parliament, promotion to Rear Admiral

In 1885 he was again elected to Parliament, this time as MP for Marylebone East, and re-elected at the 1886 general election. Beresford constantly pushed for greater expenditure on the navy, resigning his seat in protest on this issue in 1888. The Naval Expenditure Act of 1889, which increased naval spending, was passed partly as a result of public pressure resulting from this action. From 1889 until 1893 he was the captain of HMS *Undaunted*, which was part of the Mediterranean Fleet.

In 1898 Beresford was promoted to rear-admiral and again entered Parliament, this time representing York. He retained this seat until 1900, although he spent much of his time in China and from 1900 onwards was second in command of the Mediterranean Fleet. A dislike steadily developed between Beresford and Jackie Fisher who was then commanding that fleet. Shortly after his arrival, Beresford took a company of men ashore and used them as stand-ins for ships to practice manoeuvring and assembling a fleet. Fisher noticed the display and publicly sent a signal demanding to know why Beresford had landed his men without permission. Lord Charles resented his superior as a social climber from unknown origins, while Fisher, in turn, was jealous of Beresford's inherited wealth and social position.

As Admiral

Beresford returned to Parliament in 1902, this time for Woolwich, but resigned in 1903 when he was promoted to admiral and appointed chief of the Channel Fleet. He was in command of the Mediterranean Fleet from 1905 until 1907. David Beatty, then a captain serving under Beresford, commented that Beresford's command of the fleet was characterised by 'rigid training and discouragement of initiative'. Beresford aspired to reach the navy's most senior post, First Sea Lord, but the position was held by Fisher, who was widely respected. Mandatory retirement at sixty-five would have led to Fisher departing in 1906, but promotion for Fisher

to Admiral of the fleet also brought with it an extension of retirement age to seventy. Beresford himself would reach retirement at sixty-five in 1911, unless he too could achieve the same promotion. As this seemed unlikely, the only possibility was if Fisher resigned, or was obliged to. Beresford set about organising a campaign criticising his handling of the Navy and its reforms.

Beresford transferred to command of the Channel fleet from 1907-1909. He was complimented as having ‘no superior as a seaman’, but his time in charge was described as ‘principally a processional career around the ports of Britain.’ ‘...I do not recall that



any serious problems of war were either attempted or solved [but] Lord Charles received deputations, addressed crowded meetings in his honour, and became freeman of innumerable cities’(Andrew Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command* [London: John Murray, 1996). It was noted that his personality seemed to have changed for the worse, and historians have suggested that he might have suffered a minor stroke at some time before 1907 (Gordon, *op. cit.*). In 1907 and 1908 there were two signals incidents with Admiral Percy Scott; in 1907 Scott objected to being taken off gunnery practice to clean ships for viewing by the Kaiser and in 1908 Scott disobeyed an order from Beresford which would have resulted in a collision.

By 1909, Beresford had managed to gain sufficient support for an official enquiry to be opened by the Prime Minister into Fisher’s conduct at the admiralty. The enquiry exonerated Fisher, but sufficient damage was done to his reputation that he was obliged to retire slightly early, in 1910, in anticipation of a forthcoming general election. After his term with the Channel Fleet finished in 1909, Beresford returned to Parliament



at the January 1910 general election, representing Portsmouth. In 1912, it was proposed by George V, who knew Beresford, that he might be promoted Admiral of the Fleet, but it fell to Beatty, now naval secretary to First Lord Winston Churchill to point out that others would be more deserving of such a promotion. Beresford had been somewhat left behind by the technological innovations and changes in the navy during the last years of his service as an admiral. It is likely that he would have performed poorly had he continued as an admiral into World War One.

However, at times during his career he supported proposals to reform the fleet signal book, which might have made it more suitable for wartime use, and had championed reforms in fire control, where understanding of how best to use the new big guns on Fisher's dreadnought ships lagged behind their ability to hit at long ranges.

Fisher was replaced as First Sea Lord by Sir Francis Bridgeman. Bridgeman proved to be unsatisfactory, and Churchill resolved to replace him with the Second Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg. Beresford questioned the matter of Bridgeman's resignation, officially said to be for reasons of ill health, by challenging Churchill in the House of Commons. Churchill responded, saying of Beresford that '... 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'. The House of Commons supported Churchill, considering that Beresford's attack was a continuation of his dispute with Fisher, who was now acting privately as advisor to Churchill.

On the eve of World War I, Churchill and First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg made the crucial decision to cancel the scheduled dispersal of the British fleet following practice manoeuvres, in order to preserve the Royal Navy's battle readiness. Nonetheless with the outbreak of war, rising anti-German sentiment among the British public, newspapers, and elite

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gentlemen's clubs (where resentment was inflamed by Admiral Lord Charles Beresford despite Churchill's remonstrances) drove Churchill to ask Prince Louis to resign as First Sea Lord on 27 October 1914, which Louis did amidst an outpouring of appreciation from politicians and his naval comrades.

Masonic Traces

Although this vignette was not designed to be other than a straight-forward biography of the man outwith his Masonic career, it has to be said that there are very few traces of either Lord Charles Beresford or the Lodge and Chapter which bear his name in the canons of Masonic literature. However his Lordships name does appear, as one might expect, in the *Masonic Yearbook Historical Supplement* (2010, Ed. Currie & Hogg), where the entry is given as follows:

Junior Grand Wardens		
Date of		Date of
Appt.		Death
1886	Charles Beresford, Adm. Lord, <i>KCB, GCVO</i>	1919

No hint of his involvement in the doings of Grand Lodge or Chapter have as yet come to light although the field is wide open for an examination of the Minute Books of Grand Lodge and the Grand Chapter.

Mention of the Lodge is to be found in the year following that of its Warrant as can be found recorded in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Volume V, p. 73, under the heading 'Chronicle':

The Lodges warranted by the United Grand Lodge of England in 1891 are as follows;
2404. Lord Charles Beresford. Chatham, Kent.

Mention of a visitor to the *Quatuor Coronati* Lodge, No. 2076, is to be found in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* Volume 32, p. 162 Sat 8 Nov 1919 (Shum Tuckett Master):

Also the following Visitors:- G. H. Stainer, Lord Charles Beresford Lodge No. 2404; And again on Thurs 24 June 1920.

In *Grand Lodge 1717-1967*, p. 261, we find the following:

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A number of Lodges were constituted in the Royal Marines, the oldest of which received a Warrant from the Moderns in 1759. It is now the Lodge of Fortitude, No. 105 E.C., at Plymouth. The Antients constituted the Lodge originally named Royal Marine Lodge, No. 243, in 1787, now named the Gillingham Lodge of Benevolence, No. 184 E.C. Lord Charles Beresford Lodge, No. 2404, was constituted in 1891 at Chatham, and the Royal Marine Portsmouth Lodge, No. 6423, at Portsmouth received its Warrant in 1947.



Charles de la Poer Beresford, Baron Beresford by Charles Wellington Furse

And finally – that telegram!

Telegram to the Prince of Wales, declining a summons to dine, quoted in R. Nevill, *The World of Fashion, 1837-1922* (1923), ch. 5: Very sorry can't come. Lie follows by post.