

Cheltenham's Royal Statues

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For a small provincial town, Cheltenham is unusual in possessing seven statues of English monarchs, either on public display or in more private settings. From Montpellier Gardens King William IV, wearing royal robes and the insignia of the garter, looks towards Edward VII who stands in front of the Rotunda, dressed in mufti. A more imposing statue of Edward, in coronation robes, graces a niche above one side of the stage in the Town Hall, and this is matched by one of George V. In addition, a bust of Queen Victoria is to be found in The Ladies' College, while effigies of her and Edward VII are mounted on the chapel of Cheltenham College. This article describes the statues and their fortunes and follows other related trails, in particular one that leads to Cheltenham's twin town in Germany, Göttingen.



The statue of King William IV in Montpellier Gardens
Image Eric Miller

King William IV and Cheltenham

Today the statue of King William IV in Cheltenham stands near the eastern edge of Montpellier Gardens, facing the Rotunda. The plaque on the pedestal below it reads:

WILLIAM IV. 1830 – 37.
'ERECTED BY PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION IN 1833
TO COMMEMORATE THE CORONATION OF
KING WILLIAM IV.
MOVED FROM THE ORIGINAL LOCATION IN
IMPERIAL GARDENS TO THE PRESENT SITE IN 1920'

The details concerning the removal are correct, but not the date 1833 nor the reference to a public subscription. Other sources too have given contradictory and confusing accounts of its origin and material composition, as well as differing over its artistic merits. The facts as far as they can be established are set out below.

The statue was unveiled on Coronation Day, 8 September 1831, when the *Cheltenham Chronicle* reported that 'the most gratifying and permanent tribute of regard to our beloved sovereign, by way of commemorating his coronation in Cheltenham, is to be found in the public spirit of a gentleman who has liberally resolved to hand down the loyalty of his fellow townsmen to posterity by placing a colossal statue of his august Majesty in Imperial Gardens¹.... The statue is upwards of 8 feet high, clothed in royal robes, with the insignia of the garter and the collar and badge of St George.... The position is firm, erect and graceful ... the countenance is bold, expressive and animated ... an excellent likeness.'² *Rowe's Guide* of 1845 named the donor as Thomas Henney³, a prominent Town Commissioner and a man of 'public spirit, liberality and benevolence'; there was no mention of a public subscription. On the day of the coronation 1,405 schoolchildren were treated to a dinner of beef and plum pudding and as they marched past the statue Thomas Henney presented each one with a bun (but a minor example of his bounty).

The *Chronicle* stated that the sculpture, in Bath stone, reflected great credit on the sculptor, Mr R Barrett of Bristol, but corrected this the following week, stating that 'this superb work ... was actually wholly and solely designed and executed by Mr W M Gardner ... of this town'. [William Montague Gardner (1804 – 1873) practised as a sculptor and engraver in Cheltenham between about 1830 and 1845. An article about him and his work is in preparation for the next *Journal*. — EM]

It had been hoped that King William would soon visit Cheltenham. When Thirlestaine House in Bath Road was for sale in 1831, it was recommended as a potential royal residence. An advertisement read: 'It is, in fact, worthy of THE REPOSE OF ROYALTY, and would be the only suitable abode for HIS GRACIOUS MAJESTY in the very probable event of his

honouring the Town with his august presence.’⁴ No visit took place, but on the other hand his wife, as Duchess of Clarence, had come for a day in 1827. In her honour a triumphal arch was erected at the end of The Promenade (at the expense of the ever-generous Thomas Henney). The Duchess stayed at Liddell’s Hotel, which was promptly rechristened the Clarence Hotel; and the name Clarence Street also commemorates the occasion. The coat of arms of the Kings of Hanover was placed over the entrance canopy of the hotel. It remains on the building, recently vacated by the Countryside Agency and at present about to be converted into apartments.



The arms of Kings William IV, distinguished by the Hanoverian inescutcheon covering the centre of the shield.
The sculptor was G Lewis.
Image Eric Miller

Cheltenham was soon to develop a particular loyalty to the King, for in 1832 he facilitated the passing of the Great Reform Act, which entitled the borough to its own Member of Parliament, a right which had lapsed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.⁵ The Act had been the achievement of a Whig (Liberal) administration and Thomas Henney was of that party. A Whig, the Hon Craven Berkeley, was duly elected, and the statue understandably came to be associated with the Reform Act.

When the Act was finally passed there was great rejoicing in Cheltenham. Thousands of townspeople and visitors promenaded the streets to admire the ‘transparencies’ which were displayed by hotels, businesses and private householders. The George Hotel was decorated with a huge anchor (for the ‘sailor king’) with the letters W and A (for William and Adelaide) outlined in multi-coloured lamps, with a union jack.⁶

In 1840 the statue was defaced by vandals. These were no ordinary ruffians but, according to the *Examiner*, ‘some sprigs of the aristocracy, who have been some little time located in Cheltenham’. The report ran that one night ‘the statue of our late beloved and lamented King, William IV, which decorates the Imperial Gardens, was ... ornamented in rather an *outré* style; his robes being ermined, waistcoat and continuations (*sic*) scarlet, shoes black and

stockings yellow, with black gaiters, added to which his face was ludicrously marked with a black eye, and all his buttons, collars, etc, appeared of a deep yellow'.⁷ (Were the culprits perhaps anti-Reform Tories?)

In 1856 a letter to the editor of the *Examiner*, purporting to have been written by the statue, shows that mutilation had continued. He had had to suffer 'the savage assaults of rude boys' and also complained that the ravages of time had produced in him a state of things which called loudly for 'reform'. He was 'daily expecting to lose the best part of [his] visage, and then what a horrid guy – a King without a nose'.⁸ The statue quoted the claim in the *Handbook of Cheltenham* (published by the Liberal-leaning *Examiner*) that he had been erected at the expense of 'a few patriotic individuals' on the passing of the Reform Act.



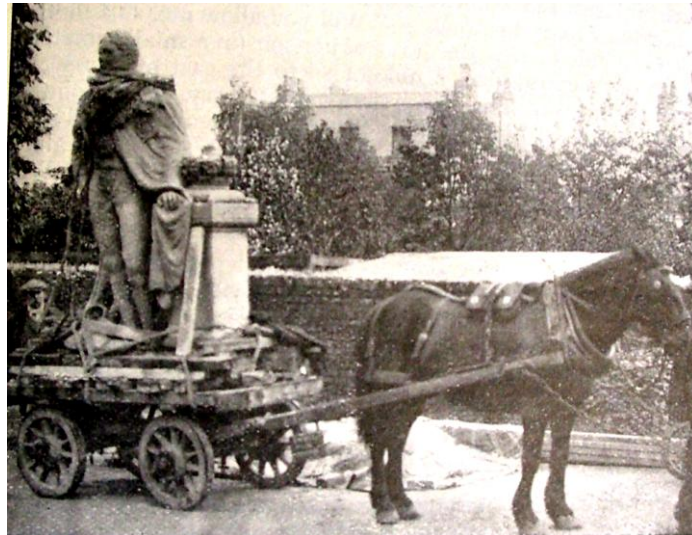
In this view of The Promenade, dated 1900, the statue of King William IV can just be made out on the right, near where the statue of Gustav Holst stands today. It is also marked (but not named) on Merrett's map of 1834.

Courtesy of Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum

Revisiting the subject in 1906, the *Examiner* complained that the statue 'now gazes inanely across the Promenade ... [and] remains as a record of the enthusiasm – if not the artistic taste – of the time'. In 1914, on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of Edward Wilson, the editor of the *Looker-on* recalled that William IV's 'has in its career had the occasional coat of paint. Once it appeared in a coat of many colours, like Joseph's. I have reason to believe that it was for many years without a nose and that the one-time manager of the Winter Gardens modelled one of putty and glued it on.'

Perhaps the statue had become something of an embarrassment. When a bandstand was proposed for the Winter Gardens in 1920, the statue proved to be an obstacle and was moved

to a less prominent position at the east end of the central walk in Montpellier Gardens. Under the heading 'A Royal Removal', the *Looker-On* wrote disparagingly that 'the ludicrous effigy in plaster (*sic*) of William IV has been relegated to the (comparative) obscurity of a site ... in Montpellier Gardens' and protested at 'the infliction of this unsatisfactory statue upon an artistic people'. Certainly, it must have cut a ridiculous figure mounted on a low cart and pulled by a nag.



The statue in transit to its new resting-place in Montpellier Gardens in 1920
Courtesy of Gloucestershire Libraries

Cheltenham's attitude to its statue has always been ambivalent: it celebrated either the coronation or the Reform Act; was either the gift of a private benefactor or of the general public; in 1831 or 1833; a superb work or a ludicrous effigy; made of Bath stone or of plaster. Even the sculptor was at first misidentified. Since its relocation the statue has been generally ignored, except when visitors from Göttingen are taken to see it. Perhaps this article will encourage others to inspect it and form their own opinion as to its aesthetic quality.

Other Statues of King William IV in Great Britain

Statues of William IV are rare, and only five others have been identified anywhere. Appropriately for the 'sailor king' he is represented in the grounds of the Palace of Greenwich, beside King William Walk, and in the area of Devonport Dockyard. The Greenwich statue, in the uniform of Lord High Admiral, originally stood at the junction of Gracechurch Street and King William Street in the City of London. At its base a plaque records that it was moved to its present position in 1936.

There are two statues in public view in Devonport. The most prominent, over four metres high, and visible from a distance, surmounts the grand entrance gate to the former Royal William Victualling Yard. Nearby, in the dockyard at Mutton Cove, is a brightly-coloured

fibreglass copy of a figurehead taken from the prow of the 120-gun warship, *Royal William*. The original wooden figurehead is in store at Devonport Dockyard.

Few people will have had occasion to see another statue in London, as it stands in a corridor of the Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey). There the King holds a scroll – perhaps representing the Reform Act.

There might well have been another example in London, for it was intended to place an equestrian statue of King William IV on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, to match the one of his brother George IV. However, no funds had been allocated and the result was the empty space that still presents a challenge today.

Göttingen's Statue

When in 1951 Cheltenham was linked with Göttingen as its twin town in Germany, those involved were scarcely aware that the two towns already had a rare feature in common: a statue of King William IV. The Hanoverian rulers of England of course also reigned over the German province in which their line originated, first as electors and, from 1814, when Hanover became a kingdom, as kings; Göttingen falls within the boundaries of that province.

In 1837 William IV gave £1400 towards building the splendid Aula (the Great Hall) of the University of Göttingen, founded a hundred years before by George II. To celebrate the gift and the jubilee, the city of Göttingen presented to the University a statue of the King. It stands in Wilhelmplatz, named in his honour. Rather like Cheltenham's statue, its position has been altered, having been turned through 90 degrees so that it now faces the main entrance of the building.



Statue of König Wilhelm IV in Göttingen
Image Jessika Wichner

The King is portrayed as a benevolent ruler and bringer of peace. Inscriptions on the plinth read simply:

WILHELM IV KÖNIG VON GROSSBRITANNIEN IRLAND U. HANNOVER 1830-1837
GUILIELMUS QUARTUS REX PATER PATRIAE

Pater Patriae (Father of the Fatherland) was a title originally applied to certain Roman Emperors and was adopted by the Hanoverian sovereigns.

Among the English students of the university at the time was Walter Copland Perry, later a distinguished historian, barrister and collector, who was studying for a doctorate. He wrote a graphic eye-witness account of the celebration of the jubilee and dedication of the statue.⁹ The ceremony was due to take place on 17 September 1837 and it had been hoped that the King himself would attend, together with three English royal dukes. However, his death in June ‘threw a damp upon the proceedings’.

On the eve of the unveiling five or six hundred students marched to honour the veteran alumnus Alexander von Humbolt at his residence and then assembled round the statue of ‘poor King William, and gave him a hearty *vivat*’. On the day itself processions assembled, comprising the Pro-rector, senior professors, civil and military officers, foreign ambassadors, ministers, representatives of foreign universities and two thousand ‘respectable strangers’ as well as students. These were grouped in seventeen fraternities (*Landmannschaften*), young men from all parts of Europe, distinguished by their national flag and cap. The English contingent of ten was the smallest but ostensibly the most conspicuous. The bearer of the union jack was dressed as a sailor, forever hitching his trousers, and with a clay pipe in his mouth. Perry wrote, ‘The throng upon our part of the procession was immense, and nothing was talked of but “der Englische Matrose”’.

After a church service all proceeded to the quadrangle in front of the Great Hall to witness the dedication of the statue, forming circles around it. The citizens of Göttingen were adorned with oak leaves, and fifty little girls strewed flowers around the pedestal. The new King (Ernest Augustus, Duke of Cumberland¹⁰) ‘was graciously pleased to look out of a window’ upon the proceedings.

The unveiling ceremonies and attendant celebrations in Cheltenham and Göttingen were markedly different. In large part this may be attributed to the university’s leading rôle in Göttingen’s arrangements, while Cheltenham had only recently begun its evolution from small market town to fashionable resort. Today William/Wilhelm IV surveys them both and their twinning partnership unites them in a way that could not apply to Devonport, Greenwich or – needless to say – the Old Bailey.

Other links between Cheltenham and Göttingen

There were other links during the 19th century between Cheltenham and Göttingen. The most outstanding example was Edward Wilson, the Antarctic explorer, who matriculated at the university during the summer of 1892. He wrote admiringly of the students' practice of duelling and poured scorn on those who did not take part.¹¹

Wilson had been a pupil at Cheltenham College, as had Basil Harrington Soulsby, a graduate of Oxford University who studied for a year at Göttingen before returning to Oxford in 1887 to teach German at St Edward's School.

At least three of the teaching staff at Cheltenham College during the 19th century were graduates of Göttingen University:¹²

Dr G F Werner, German master, 1845 -1854;

Dr Franz Kielhorn, who taught in the Classics Department while also studying at Oxford University, 1862 - 1866; he was later Professor of Sanskrit at Göttingen;

Dr Julius Maier, German master, 1872 – 1878, and teacher of Experimental and Natural Sciences, 1879 -1883.

Queen Victoria

At a Royal Academy exhibition in June 1897 a plaster cast of a bust of Queen Victoria, intended for the Ladies' College, was the centre of attraction. Its sculptor was Countess Feodora Gleichen, a great-niece of Queen Victoria¹³



Bust of Queen Victoria in Cheltenham Ladies' College
Image Kath Boothman (by permission of the College)

The artist had been ‘favoured with numerous sittings, an honour now very rarely accorded’, wrote the *Examiner*.¹⁴ It was presented to the College by Miss Eales and past and present pupils of Lansdown Villa, and the finished article was unveiled in the Princess Hall on 16 November 1899 by Princess Henry of Battenberg (Princess Beatrice, the Queen’s youngest daughter). Her visit was treated as a civic occasion. She and her entourage were met at the Midland Station by the Mayor and Corporation and the Ladies’ College Council and a Guard of Honour of 100 men. Thousands of spectators lined the processional route to the College, where the Mayor (Alderman Norman) delivered a loyal address. For the unveiling ceremony the Princess Hall was filled to capacity with dignitaries and pupils, and Miss Beale, the Headmistress, spoke at length of the Queen’s exemplary devotion to service.¹⁵

After the Queen’s death just over a year later the residents of the town were invited to inspect the bust and pay their respects, and many did so. It was draped with a floral wreath, with the inscription ‘In sorrowful memory of our venerated Queen’.¹⁶



Cheltenham College Chapel: Statues of Queen Victoria and King Edward VII
Images: Eric Miller (by permission of Cheltenham College)

When Henry Prothero designed the new chapel for Cheltenham College, opened in 1896, he left two empty niches on either side of the west door. Clearly, it was expected that they would soon be filled: the *Examiner* alluded to their ‘Cromwellian emptiness’. This expectation was fulfilled on 2 April 1898 when a full-length statue of the Queen and Empress, crowned, in robes of state and holding orb and sceptre, was unveiled by the Duchess of Montrose. It had been executed by H H Martyn himself in Farleigh (Bath) stone and was the gift of Old Boys of Park House, under Mr G Pruen. The event was the climax of a weekend at which receptions were attended by both the Duke and Duchess. VIPs, masters in full academic

dress, and the chapel choir were ranged in front of the statue, and some 120 cadets formed a guard of honour and blew their bugles to herald the unveiling.¹⁷

King Edward VII and King George V

It was not long before the second niche on the chapel came to be occupied by a statue of the recently crowned King Edward, in coronation robes. It was presented on 4 March 1903 in a more subdued ceremony. Mr Pruen, this time representing Old Boys of Leconfield House, asked the Principal to accept the gift, hoping that it would serve to remind the boys of their duty to king and country.¹⁸ The style of the sculpture matches that of Queen Victoria, suggesting that it was also the work of H H Martyn & Co, which carried out much of the other work on the chapel.



'Edward the Peacemaker'
Image Eric Miller

Much better known is the statue of the King in front of Montpellier Rotunda, incorporating drinking troughs for dogs and horses and fountains for humans. Uniquely, the King is dressed informally, wearing a Norfolk jacket and plus-fours and placing a protective hand on the shoulders of a young girl. Carved by Boulton & Sons, it represents the King as the Spirit of Peace leading the Spirit of Mischief to the still waters. The idea was that of its donor, Joseph Webster Drew, a lawyer and former town councillor, latterly of Hatherley Court. There had at one time been opposition to the erection of a statue as the town's memorial to the King, some favouring a nursing scheme, for example, but Mr Drew's gift was gratefully accepted. He was in failing health and he died without witnessing the installation of the statue, which took place on 10 October 1914.¹⁹

Anyone visiting the Town Hall today will be familiar with the plaster cast statues of King Edward VII and King George V in their coronation robes. That of Edward VII was first exhibited at a Red Cross sale and offered for auction. The purchaser was reported as Mr T E Whitaker, who public-spiritedly handed it over to the Corporation. (This will have been Thomas Elsam Whitaker, who had an expert knowledge in carving – see *The Best*, the history of H H Martyn & Co, written by his grandson, John Whitaker.) Messrs Boulton & Sons, who had cast it, also promised to make a companion statue of King George. The two were placed on their pedestals overlooking the stage in January 1916.²⁰



Statues of King Edward VII and King George V in Cheltenham Town Hall
(but can anyone be sure which is which?)
Image Eric Miller, by permission of Cheltenham Borough Council

Conclusion

Cheltenham's collection of royal statues is eclectic. Each has been put forward variously and at different times as an object of patriotic devotion, an example to the youth of dutiful service, an encourager of political reform, or a maker of peace. Today they are part of the townscape but it is hoped that this article will prompt readers to give them a closer look. If any other such images are known the author would be interested to hear of them. There are of course some conventional representations of kings to be found on church buildings, for example at Leckhampton, but those are not actual portraits. (Please note, however, that King Neptune, who only reigns over the Promenade fountain, doesn't count!)

¹ More precisely, these were Samuel Hodge's Imperial Nurseries.

² *Chronicle* 8 September 1831, p 3 cols 3-5.

³ English Heritage, which gives the statue Grade I listing, incorrectly spells the name as 'Hannay'. Thomas Henney played an important part in the 19th-century development of Cheltenham, not least in the formation of The Promenade.

⁴ Gloucestershire Archives PX21.2GS and in the press, for example *The Standard*, 5 January 1831.

⁵ Up until the reign of Queen Elizabeth Cheltenham had returned two MPs but, citing the borough's impoverished state, the Lord of the Manor William Norwood petitioned the Queen to be relieved of that obligation.

⁶ *Chronicle* 16 August 1832 p 3 col 3.

⁷ *Examiner* 22 April 1840 p 2 col 6.

⁸ *Examiner* 1856 September 17 p 4 col 3.

⁹ In *The Christian Teacher and Chronicle of Benefice*, vol 4 (1838).

¹⁰ HRH Ern(e)st Augustus, fifth son of George III, succeeded to the kingdom of Hanover, since according to Salic law Victoria, as a woman, could not.

¹¹ George Seaver, *Edward Wilson: Nature-Lover*, 1937 p 25.

¹² *Cheltenham College Register*, 1841 – 1889.

¹³ Lady Feodora Georgina Maud Gleichen (1861 – 1922) regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy. Gleichen was a dynastic title assumed by her father. The name derives from a town in Thuringia and not (though it would have suited the theme of this article) the community of the same name a few kilometres from Göttingen.

¹⁴ *Examiner* 9 June 1897 p 2 col 6.

¹⁵ *Looker-On*, 18 November 1899 pp 1102-1105.

¹⁶ *Examiner* 6 February 1901 p 3 col 3.

¹⁷ *Examiner* 6 April 1898 p 4 col 7; also reported in the *Looker-On*.

¹⁸ *Examiner* 11 March 1903 p 2 col 5.

¹⁹ *Examiner* 6 February 1913 p 7 col 1, and 19 June p 5 col 4, 24 November 1910 p 5 col 2.

²⁰ *Looker-On* 1 January 1916 p 11