

## **Loggia Quatuor Coronati n°112**

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### **From Highclere to Altachiara: the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, Italy and the Roman Catholic Church 1850-90**

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‘Highclere’ (‘Altachiara’ in Italian), is a castle near Newbury, in the county of Berkshire, about 50 miles to the west of London. ‘Altachiara’ (‘Highclere’ in English) is a grand villa on a promontory above the Mediterranean coast at Portofino, near Genoa, in Italy. The human connection between the two buildings on which I shall concentrate this morning is Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon. Born in 1831, he inherited the earldom and Highclere Castle when his father, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl, died in 1849. He bought Altachiara, the villa he called ‘our Italian home’ in 1881 and last sojourned there in the spring of 1890, shortly before his death. Carnarvon first went to Italy as a baby, when his parents took him with them on their visit to Istanbul and beyond in 1833, and again in 1838 when he was but seven years old. His interest in Greek and Roman civilisation grew while he was at Oxford University, where he was awarded a first class bachelor’s degree in *Literis Humanioribus* in 1852. He was proficient in both Greek and Latin, and was able to correspond in Italian and French. He was a leading figure in British politics, the British Empire, the Anglican Church and Freemasonry in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet his contribution to those areas of Britain’s social history has generally been overlooked since Hardinge’s biography of him that was heavily edited by his widow and published in 1925. Today, if Carnarvon is remembered at all as a statesman, it is in connection with the annexation of the Transvaal and

his failure to confederate the British colonies and ‘Dutch’ republics in South Africa while he was Secretary of State for the Colonies in the late 1870s. Until recently Carnarvon had also been largely forgotten as a Freemason. However, having retired as Grand Secretary in 2002, and spurred on by references to and comments on him in Professor Jessica Harland-Jacobs’ important work, *Builders of Empire* (2008) and by Professor Peter Gordon’s long article on him in the new edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, I decided to produce an in-depth study of him. The result was my thesis, ‘The 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon (1831-90) and Freemasonry in the British Empire’, for which I was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Sheffield University in January this year.

Though my thesis necessarily touched on Carnarvon’s interest in things Roman and Italian, and mentioned the main occasions on which he commented on the relations between English Freemasonry and the Roman Catholic Church, it did not do justice to those aspects of his life, and that it was I hope to rectify in some small measure this morning.

First, let me briefly describe his political and Masonic careers. Within months of his initiation in 1856, at the age of 25, in Westminster and Keystone Lodge, No. 10, in London, Carnarvon began attending and speaking in Grand Lodge [the United Grand Lodge of England, ‘UGLE’], where he concentrated on trying to persuade that august body to modernise and improve its administration by – for example - giving detailed advance notice of the business to be transacted at its Quarterly Communications, and paying closer attention to the needs of Provincial masons in England and in the UGLE’s lodges throughout the British Empire. Still only in his 20s, Carnarvon was appointed to his first ministerial office as the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies in the Conservative government of Lord Derby, and then in 1860 as the second Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons that had been

created in 1856. He served as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1866 to 1867, during which time he piloted through the House of Lords the British North America Act of 1867 under which Britain's Canadian colonies achieved a considerable degree of self-government, and from which sprang, eventually, their confederation and the first 'Dominion' within the British Empire, then presided over by Queen Victoria. In 1870 Lord Carnarvon, by then a leading Conservative politician, was appointed Deputy Grand Master of the UGLE by Lord Ripon, a leading figure in the Liberal government of the time. When the Liberal government fell, Carnarvon was again appointed Colonial Secretary, and while holding that ministerial office, he was elected Sovereign Grand Commander in the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for England and Wales, and was appointed Pro Grand Master of the UGLE in time to install the Prince of Wales as Grand Master in 1875. Carnarvon's last imperial appointment was as Viceroy of Ireland in 1885/86, but as a Freemason he remained in office as Pro Grand Master of the UGLE and Provincial Grand Master for its Province of Somerset until his death, by which time he had also served as High Steward of Oxford University (in effect the deputy Chancellor of the university), President of the Society of Antiquaries, the Lord Lieutenant (the monarch's personal representative) in the counties of Hampshire and Nottinghamshire), and had published, for example, a translation of the *Agamemnon*, a paper on the French Revolution, and an account of his sojourn among the Druzes in Lebanon. As you will see, we are this morning considering quite a significant figure in British history during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But what about Carnarvon's Italian connections and, in particular, his comments on matters relating to the Church of Rome?

One of Carnarvon's first interventions in the proceedings of the UGLE was on behalf of Catholic freemasons in Belgium and Mauritius. In 1855, shortly before Carnarvon's initiation, the Rev

George Raymond Portal (Carnarvon's friend since his university days, his neighbour, and his introducer to Freemasonry) had proposed in Grand Lodge a vote of sympathy for those French and Belgian Freemasons who, he alleged, were suffering persecution at the hands of intolerant Roman Catholic priests in Mauritius and Belgium.<sup>1</sup> While he was still only a Warden in his lodge, Carnarvon took up their case in February 1857 when he spoke in Grand Lodge and recommended that:

the Grand Lodge having seen with regret the antagonistic position assumed by the Roman Catholic Church towards Masonry, desires the Board of General Purposes to draw up a statement of the principles of the Order, that the same may be sent to the Masters of all Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England in all Roman Catholic countries, to be used by them as they shall think fit...It was painful to dwell on the subject of the motion; on the persecution, which so many of their Brethren abroad suffered, on account of their adherence to Freemasonry. It was the more painful to feel there existed at this day a Hierarchy, which believed its pretensions were upheld, and the cause of religion advanced, by placing under the ban of excommunication, and by inflicting acts of oppression on Freemasons – on individuals who were members of their church, who refused to comply with no ceremony, who did not refuse their assent to a single dogma, and who only claimed the right of entering into membership with the society of Freemasons...In other ages and countries, and even to this day, wherever the Roman Catholic Church had sway, the name of Freemasonry was synonymous with atheist. The pure doctrine of Freemasonry, in those

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<sup>1</sup> See Portal's speech of 1 December 1855, as reported in *The Freemasons Magazine and Masonic Mirror* (1855), pp. 44-45.

countries, continued to be regarded with suspicion – he had himself heard Freemasonry calumniated, traduced and loaded with the most monstrous calumnies...He would not go into the details of the oppression at present. In many parts of the world Roman Catholic Freemasons were at that moment undergoing severe personal inconvenience, and were even interdicted from participating in their civil and religious privileges... The remedy he proposed for this lamentable condition of things he had indicated was simply this – that those Masons well versed in the principles and history of the Order be requested, with the greatest despatch and care, to frame a statement of the principles which governed the Society of Freemasons in every age...He trusted that the statement which his motion contemplated would be framed in a conciliatory and a temperate manner, for he felt assured, if his plan was carried out with judgment and prudence, it would do much to soothe existing prejudice, and to allay unworthy doubt and distrust.<sup>2</sup>

Carnarvon's recommendation was rejected by Grand Lodge on the ground that it was unmasonic to 'vilify the religion of any one of our Brethren' and after the Deputy Grand Master, Lord Panmure, had argued that as the UGLE had no 'authority over the persecutor', that the 'Romish priests' had 'access to our deepest and most sacred secrets', and that the motion would 'give the persecutors the opportunity of offering a direct and open insult to Grand Lodge.'<sup>3</sup>

The next indication I have found that Carnarvon was not essentially ill-disposed towards the Roman Catholic Church are his

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<sup>2</sup> This transcript of a report in the *Masonic Observer* of March 1857 is filed in the *Carnarvon Papers* in the British Library, file reference CP BL Add 60945.

<sup>3</sup> UGLE *Proceedings* February 1857,

diary entries about his visit to Rome in the winter of 1864/5, when he renewed his acquaintance with Cardinal Antonelli.<sup>4</sup> While with Antonelli, Carnarvon viewed the cardinal's collection of crystals and marbles in his private rooms, listened to him talk 'a little about the American War', and heard him express himself 'very decidedly in favour of the South'.<sup>5</sup> No doubt such visits were aided by Carnarvon's other contacts within the Vatican including the English Monsignor Edward Henry Howard, who, like Carnarvon, was a distant relation of the senior lay member of the Catholic Church in England, the Duke of Norfolk. (An earlier Duke of Norfolk, also a Catholic, had been Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in the early 1700s and had presented to the Grand Lodge the sword of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden that is still carried before the Grand Master when he enters and leaves Grand Lodge.) In fact, Carnarvon continued to maintain contact with local leaders of the Catholic Church almost up to his death in 1890. As examples of this I might mention his meeting with Cardinal Moran while on a visit to Australia in December 1887, and his joint appearance with Cardinal Manning at the inauguration of the City of London branch of the Imperial Federation League in November 1888 when they were introduced as representatives of 'the two aspects of the great political movement of our time, met here today to promote...an imperial Federation, if not in diplomacy or laws, at least in the heart and mind.'

While in Rome in 1864 Carnarvon also witnessed the entrance of the pope, Pius IX, into St Peter's Church on Christmas Day.

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<sup>4</sup> Carnarvon had first met Antonelli on 29 November 1857, though from his diary entry there is no evidence that he raised the alleged persecution of Freemasons with him: '...Our conversation turned entirely upon fine arts and antiquities'. Carnarvon added: 'as a Minister he seems as successful as the Papal ministers generally are.' [CP BL Add 60891, 29 Nov 1857] Antonelli (1806-76) was the last of the lay cardinals, and served as the Vatican's Secretary of State from 1848-76.

<sup>5</sup> CP BL Add 60896, 5 January 1865.

as I had no uniform & was afraid in this weather of wearing evening clothes [I] walked about in the crowd.. The entrance of the Pope borne aloft in his gilded chair under a silken canopy preceded by the lighted candles, the bishops, & the great functionaries with a long flame-fashioned sword on the side & the great peacock-tailed fans waving immediately in front of him with an almost oriental Pomp was very striking. Slowly, most slowly he floated along up the nave of the vast temple, the troops & the people who lined the broad avenue in which he moved kneeling down as he passed & as he passed he blessed with his hand the crowd. It was the pomp of a great sovereign rather than the entrance of an ecclesiastic; it had indeed at times the appearance almost of an idol carried along in triumph...

Carnarvon had warned his friend, George Portal, against the excesses of ritualism (a High Church movement within the Anglican Church, much influenced by the practices of the Roman Catholic Church), and it is not therefore surprising that Carnarvon commented somewhat critically on what he had just witnessed in St Peter's Church. However, Carnarvon concluded the day's diary entry with 'yet in spite of all this there was something solemn in the whole spectacle...', and added 'in the afternoon we went to the English Church & heard I am sorry to say a very bad sermon...'. Carnarvon's diary entry for 31 December 1864 reads:

The last day of the year – spent in Rome in the midst of the ruins material, moral, intellectual of the greatest nation that has existed. One more year taken from one's own short course & one year more added to the age of the Eternal City.

Thus within a few diary entries we find evidence of Carnarvon's ambivalent attitude to the Roman Church, his fascination with Roman antiquity, his wide-ranging high-level contacts, and his love of travel in Italy.

Carnarvon was next confronted with Catholicism when in August 1874, as Deputy Grand Master to the Grand Master, Lord Ripon, he learned of Ripon's decision to enter the Roman Catholic Church and to resign from Freemasonry with immediate effect. The *Times* reflected the general reaction to Ripon's conversion in an article doubting his sanity, his loyalty to the Crown, and his eligibility to take any further part in national politics. It went so far as to state that 'To become a Roman Catholic and remain a thorough Englishman are – it cannot be disguised – almost incompatible' and to describe Lord Ripon as 'the man who in the full strength of his powers has renounced his mental and moral freedom'.<sup>6</sup> For his part, however, Carnarvon accepted Ripon's decision, regretfully, adding that 'As regards Freemasonry, the loss occasioned by your retirement will be very serious, and the inconvenience – it is needless to disguise – great.' The Prince of Wales was then elected Grand Master and appointed Carnarvon as his Pro Grand Master. Carnarvon installed him – in the Royal Albert Hall and in the presence of about 5000 Freemasons - a 'gathering unequalled alike in the numbers and social status of those who took part in it', as the *Times* described it. The event constituted a high-water mark in the public recognition of freemasonry in England and the British Empire at the outset of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when it was described by the *Times* as 'a perfectly innocuous, loyal and virtuous Association.' Indeed, the *Times* went further by marking out the difference between freemasonry as practised in England, with its 'solemn protestation of its loyal, religious, and charitable principles', and continental freemasonry where it was 'quite possible that under the pressure of past tyranny Freemasonry was really used...as a means of revolutionary agitation.' Moreover, the *Times* saw the event as 'in great measure a national demonstration' against the 'unjustifiable prejudice' of the Roman Catholic Church, a 'hostile society' at whose

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<sup>6</sup> The *Times* writer was presumably referring to the doctrine of Papal infallibility, published in 1870.

‘dictate’ Lord Ripon ‘threw up’ the office now filled by none other than the heir apparent to the British throne.

Carnarvon does not seem to have visited Italy between 1864 and 1881, perhaps because of the political turmoil there, added to the burden of his official duties. Cardinal Manning, for example, had written to him from the Archbishop’s House, Westminster in April 1877, following a visit to Rome,

From all I saw in Rome & from the political crisis in Italy I think the Italian Government will find itself very much embarrassed & little able to maintain itself against the extreme of its own party. It is Acteon and his dogs. And unless the European Powers come to some understanding I fear there is great confusion to come.<sup>7</sup>

Like Cardinal Manning, Carnarvon lived in constant fear of revolution. Nonetheless, in February 1881 Carnarvon and his young, second, wife wandered along the Riviera to Italy. As he wrote to his old friend, Sir Robert Phillimore:

So charmed are we with this part of the world that I do not feel sure that we shall not buy some little *angulus terrarum ubi viridi certat bacca Venafra*,<sup>8</sup> and endless nooks there along this most lovely shore, where nature is really divine, and where it may also be said that the simple character of the Italian peasants is as yet unspoilt by the demoralizing influences of the rich and fine people of England, and France, and Russia. They are a very pleasant people to live amongst...This bay of Rapallo to my mind compares with anything that I have seen – not excepting the Bay of Naples...<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> From a letter dated 7 April 1877 at the Hampshire Record Office. [ref: 75 M 91 R12 1-20 and 26-36]

<sup>8</sup> From Horace’s *Odes*, book 2.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Hardinge, *The Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert 1831-1890* (Oxford, 1925), vol. III, p. 76.

As Hardinge, Carnarvon's biographer, puts it 'The search for the *angulus terrarum* was crowned with success, and an Italian Highclere, 'Altachiara', rose upon the cliffs overlooking the little land-locked harbour of Portofino...'

For Carnarvon, atheism presented a threat to the stability of the state – and to Freemasonry. That was why, in 1878, Carnarvon recommended to the UGLE that it severely restrict visits by French brethren to English lodges. The 'French', he said, in their 'unprovoked, uncalled for, unrequited revolutionary innovation', had 'blotted out, as one of the necessary and essential fundamental principles of the Craft, the belief in God and the immortality of the soul.' In his opinion, the UGLE, 'the mother Grand Lodge of all Europe' could not remain silent in this matter, and nothing 'would so justify the scurrilous taunts that have been thrown out against Freemasonry at times...as it would be by sanctioning, even by silence, such a step as that which the Grand Orient of France has taken.' On the advice of his committee, Grand Lodge resolved to instruct its lodges:

not to admit any foreign Brother as a Visitor unless (1) He is duly vouched for or unless his Certificate shows that he has been initiated according to the Ancient rites and ceremonies in a Lodge professing belief in T. G. A. O. T. U., and (2) Not unless he himself shall acknowledge that this belief is an essential landmark of the Order.

This crucial resolution soon led to a complete rupture of relations between the UGLE and the Grand Orient of France, and today, as you well know, the Masonic world is still divided by that rupture into two camps: those Grand Lodges which demand of their candidates a belief in a 'Supreme Being' or 'God' and those which do not. For Carnarvon, and for the vast majority of the upper ranks of British society at the time, atheism was associated with republicanism and

worse, and its adherents were considered to be untrustworthy, unworthy of respect and unfit to serve as Members of Parliament, even if so elected. To consort with Grand Lodges that could admit atheists to their ranks would endanger the UGLE's hard-won reputation for respectability and loyalty.

In June 1884, having fortified English freemasonry against any possible atheistic contamination from French freemasonry, and cherishing the English Craft's reputation as an innocuous, virtuous and loyal association, and the distinction the *Times* had drawn between it and certain aspects of Freemasonry as practised on the continent of Europe, Carnarvon he stoutly defended 'English' freemasonry against the charges levelled against freemasonry in general by the encyclical *Humanum Genus* issued by Pope Leo XIII a few weeks earlier. Carnarvon expressed his respect for Leo XIII as a statesman 'with ability and...discretion' but regretted that he 'should have been so far misled by false representation' as to sign, surely 'most undesignedly', such a 'misstatement of facts.' (We note, once again, Carnarvon's respect for the Pope himself, and for the institution he headed.) Carnarvon told Grand Lodge that the encyclical fell into 'two great errors': first, it confounded 'all Masonic bodies in all parts of the world in a common and sweeping charge of condemnation', and secondly it then confounded all of them 'with infidels' and, in politics, with 'revolutionists and anarchists.' While he did not seek to defend 'all Masonic bodies in all parts of the world' he 'fearlessly' denied that these charges could in any way be substantiated against 'this Grand Lodge or any lodge under its rule.' As evidence to support his claim that 'social order and religion have no stronger friends, no truer pillars to rest upon than the Masonic bodies of England' Carnarvon cited not only the rules and constitutions of the 'English' Craft – 'one and all breathing a spirit of religion and of obedience to the law' – and its long line of 'illustrious leaders' such as the Prince of Wales, but also two 'comparatively

recent facts', namely that the UGLE had broken off relations with French lodges on the ground that they had 'erased from their title-deeds and charters the affirmation of the immortality of the soul and the belief in a Supreme God', and that on the Prince's behalf he, as a freemason, had laid the corner-stone of a tower of Peterborough Cathedral (on 7 May). Here, once again, we hear why Carnarvon, the conservative statesman, remained an active and leading freemason for thirty-five years: for him 'English' freemasonry was one of the strongest pillars of 'social order and religion' and a bulwark against the growth of atheism, 'Sedition, Revolution, Socialism, and Communism' which both he and the pope feared.

After his brief residence in Dublin as Queen Victoria's Viceroy for Ireland, where, of course, he had to deal with the position of the Catholic Church and the growth of Irish nationalism, and his visit to Australia in 1887/88, we find Carnarvon back in Italy, touching base with his contacts in the Vatican. In March 1888, for example, he met the Duke of Norfolk in Rome and discussed 'the position & feeling of the Irish and RCs in Australia' with him before Norfolk met the Pope '*officieusement*.'<sup>10</sup> From Norfolk he learnt that 'The Pope is well disposed & knows more of the real state of affairs than he [Norfolk] did.'<sup>11</sup> We cannot tell from this diary entry whether Carnarvon included English Freemasonry in this assessment of the Pope's knowledge, but it is certain that both the Duke and the Pope – and Cardinal Manning – were well aware of Carnarvon's position as the day-to-day head of the English Craft and this may have tempered the Church's attitude towards freemasonry as practised within the British Empire.

I suspect that Carnarvon knew that he was a dying man even before he set off for Australia in 1887. His diary entry for 1 April

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<sup>10</sup> CP Add 60930, 24 March 1888.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March 1888.

1888, where, once again in Rome, he writes of ‘a last visit to S. Peter’s...the greatest of human temples’, sounds a valedictory note. In fact his last visit to Italy, and to Altachiara, was in the spring of 1890, after a long period of illness in London. He and his family reached Portofino in March, and he was soon able to write in his diary:

*8th March* We are back in our Mediterranean home...Now for the next six weeks I hope we shall have a time of very pleasant quiet – reading and writing – and fresh air...

On the 9th of April he wrote:

I think that I have today virtually finished my translation of the *Prometheus*. What I shall now do with it is, as the Italians say *altra cosa*

And on the 20th April:

Our last Sunday probably in Portofino for some time...

Carnarvon died on Saturday, the 28h June, 1890, in his house in Portman Square, London. He had maintained his interest in things Roman and Italian until the end, and he had managed to complete one of his literary works, his translation of the *Prometheus*, in his Italian home, Altachiara, shortly before his death. He was buried in the mausoleum he had built for himself in the grounds of Highclere Castle. The *Italian Connection*, as you might say, of this largely forgotten figure from the history of England and of English Freemasonry, and of Highclere with Altachiara, could not be clearer, or *più chiara*.

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