

# The Prince of Wales visits Guelph, 1919

## The Debut of Prince Charming, Celebrity Ladies' Man

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Article abstract

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# The Prince of Wales visits Guelph, 1919

## The Debut of Prince Charming, Celebrity Ladies' Man<sup>1</sup>

by Cameron Shelley

### Introduction

On 21 October 1919, Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David Windsor, that is, the Prince of Wales and future King Edward VIII, arrived in Guelph for a quick visit. He met local dignitaries, gave speeches, shook hands, awarded medals, went in a parade, toured the local military hospital, the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC), and had lunch at Macdonald Hall.

Of course, the visit was not merely a courtesy call but a consequence of the Great War. When that conflict broke out in 1914, Canada had joined the cause of

the British Empire and made an important contribution in blood and treasure. The war turned out to be vastly more strenuous than anyone had anticipated. In numerical terms, about 630,000 men and women from Canada had served in the military out of a population of roughly eight million.<sup>2</sup> About 61,000 members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force were killed and 172,000 wounded. The federal government incurred a staggering debt of roughly \$2 billion for the effort. The country had endured tremendous strain by the time the conflict ended.

Mindful of this fact, and wishing to set the tone for its future relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Thorold Tronrud and anonymous reviewers for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Cook, and J.L. Granatstein, "Conclusion," in *Canada 1919: A Nation Shaped by War*, Tim Cook and J.L. Granatstein, eds., (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), 291–304.

## *Abstract*

*On 21 October 1919, the Prince of Wales and future King Edward VIII visited Guelph, Ontario. The visit was a part of his tour of the Dominion to thank the country for its contributions to the Great War and re-assert the imperial order that the war had so badly shaken. The visit was mundane in most respects except for the Prince's visit to the Macdonald Institute, a school dedicated to teaching home economics to the nation's young women. There, the Prince had a unique opportunity to put on his debut appearance as an eligible, young bachelor before the admiring gazes of the dazzled girls of the Institute. In this respect, the stop in Guelph was a signal success for the Prince's own mission to distinguish himself from his father and to enhance his celebrity as "Prince Charming" to the impressionable young women of the Empire.*

**Résumé:** *Le 21 octobre 1919, le prince de Galles et futur roi Édouard VIII a visité la ville de Guelph, en Ontario. Cette visite faisait part de sa tournée du Dominion visant à remercier le pays pour ses contributions à la Grande Guerre et à réaffirmer l'ordre impérial que la guerre avait si durement ébranlé. La visite était banale à bien des égards, à l'exception de la visite du prince à l'Institut Macdonald, une école dédiée à l'enseignement de l'économie domestique aux jeunes femmes du pays. Là, le prince a eu une occasion unique de faire ses débuts en tant que jeune célibataire devant les regards admiratifs des jeunes filles éblouies de l'Institut. À cet égard, l'escale à Guelph a été un franc succès pour le prince dans sa mission de se distinguer de son père et d'accroître sa célébrité en tant que "prince charmant" auprès des jeunes femmes impressionnables de l'Empire.*

with Canada, the British government arranged for the Prince of Wales to tour the Dominion. There was some diversity of opinion regarding the main goal of the tour. King George V saw it as a way of re-asserting the status quo ante bellum, with Britain, the mother country, back in charge of a worldwide empire of which Canada was a part. The Prince would tour the nation much as his father had done in 1901, reminding Canadians of their place in the old, imperial order.

The British government, however, saw in the tour an opportunity to revise this relationship, exploiting the charm of

the young Prince to prompt Canadians to remain attached to British leadership, in part, through attachment to the person of the future King himself. Prime Minister David Lloyd George took this view, comparing the tour to a "first-class carnival" for the various Dominions, with the Prince in the leading role.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Canadians' enthusiasm for the Prince might well help to reduce demands from the Dominion for restructuring of the Empire during upcoming Imperial Conferences.<sup>4</sup> As such, Canada would remain very much a British Dominion but its loyalty would be commanded less by the

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Beadle, "Canada and the Abdication of Edward VIII." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 4:3 (1969), 33–46.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Ziegler, *King Edward VIII: The Official Biography*. (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1990).

dignity of the monarchy and more by its celebrity.

The Prince himself desired to win the hearts of Canadians and achieve celebrity status. In this, he would distinguish himself personally from his old, aloof and publicity-averse father.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Edward went further by presenting himself as an eligible young bachelor and ladies' man. His visit to the Macdonald Institute in Guelph gave him a particular opportunity to popularize this aspect of his public persona.

In this article, the visit of the Prince of Wales to the Royal City in 1919 is reviewed. In many ways, it was typical of his stops in Canada's small cities. However, it is distinguished by the Prince's publicly seeking out the crowd of young women then attending the Macdonald Institute. This part of the visit enabled him to launch his public image as "Prince Charming," the royal, eligible bachelor, to all the young women of the Empire.

### *On the road*

The Prince's itinerary for his Canadian tour was ambitious, to say the least. It began with his arrival in Halifax aboard the battlecruiser *HMS Renown* on 17 August followed by a visit to Charlottetown (19 August). Then the Prince cruised to Quebec on 21 August and travelled thence to Toronto (24 August)

and Ottawa (27 August). From there, trains and steamers took him across Ontario through Port Arthur and Fort William (8 September), and then across the country to Victoria (23 September) and back to Toronto (17 October), visiting numerous cities in between and with pauses here and there for fishing and shooting expeditions and visits to ranches and famous beauty spots. From Toronto, he then took a trip around southwestern Ontario through Hamilton, Niagara Falls, Brantford, Guelph, Stratford, Woodstock, Chatham, London, Windsor, and Galt. Finally, the Prince journeyed through Toronto to Montreal and back to Ottawa (30 October). In total, the trip would cover some 8,800 miles or 14,000 km.<sup>6</sup>

Guelph may have been on the itinerary for a number of reasons. Both the Prince's father and grandfather had visited the city on their tours in 1860 and 1901 respectively.<sup>7</sup> Each of those visits had been only a few minutes long, allowing the visiting royals to step from their trains, thank the assembled for their loyal reception, then reboard to head to their next stop. Since Sir Joseph Pope, who had organized the 1901 trip, organized the Prince's tour in 1919, this may have been sufficient reason to put it on the new schedule as well.<sup>8</sup>

On 30 May 1912, the Duke and

<sup>5</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>6</sup> "Prince to See all Canada," *The Globe*, 9 August 1919: 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Easterbook, "Many Members of the Royal Family Visited Canada's Royal City," *Wellington County History* 11 (1998), 61–88.

<sup>8</sup> Edward, Duke of Windsor, *A King's Story: The Memoirs of the Duke of Windsor*. (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1947/1951), 140.

Duchess of Connaught, along with Princess Patricia, visited Guelph, the Duke being the Governor General of Canada at the time.<sup>9</sup> This visit was of several hours duration and involved a tour of the town for the Duke (on foot, as he was a fan of walking for exercise) plus visits to the Provincial Reformatory, the Ontario Agricultural College, and the Macdonald Institute.

The presence of these three institutions may well have prompted the Prince's visit in 1919. In 1917, the Provincial Reformatory had been re-purposed as the Speedwell Military Hospital, where military veterans were treated and trained for civilian occupations, providing the Prince with soldiers to visit. The Agricultural College was a significant national educational institution. The Macdonald Institute, with its all-female student body, presented Edward with a unique opportunity to frame and promote himself as an appealing celebrity. For these reasons, Guelph ticked several boxes that made it a good fit with his plans.

### *Goals of the tour*

As noted above, the tour was about more than simple gratitude for the Canadian contribution to the war effort. As the Prince noted in his autobiography, the British establishment was profoundly rattled by the overthrow of

empires in Austria, Germany, and Russia. In particular, his father, King George V, was dismayed by the ousting and later execution of his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, whom the King was fond of.<sup>10</sup> The end of the war brought relief but also a less deferential attitude towards the old establishment, both in Britain and abroad. Many blamed that establishment for causing the conflict. There were labour strikes, protest marches, and riots among the soldiery impatient with the slow process of demobilization.<sup>11</sup>

The monarchy sought to calm the situation by returning the Dominions to their pre-war relationship with the mother country. King George V wanted his son to act as an ambassador to the Dominions, thanking them for their indispensable service and also giving them a look at their future King. As he saw it, his son's job was to help knit together the sinews of the Empire and deference to the monarchy that had been strained by the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

The Prince held a different view.<sup>13</sup> Referring to the "leveling process" of his experiences in the military, he was not interested in assuming a distant, regal relationship with his subjects. Along the same lines, he held that the relationship of Great Britain and its former colonies should be more like one among siblings. A tour of the Dominions would provide

<sup>9</sup> Easterbrook, "Many Members," 69–70.

<sup>10</sup> Edward, *A King's Story*, 131–32.

<sup>11</sup> Desmond Morton, Desmond, "Kicking and Complaining': Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918–19." *Canadian Historical Review* 61:3 (1980), 334–60.

<sup>12</sup> Edward, *A King's Story*, 132–34.

<sup>13</sup> Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 86.

him with a chance to meet their people at a personal level and to begin building this new relationship. He expressed this view in a letter to his father during the tour:<sup>14</sup>

I'm rubbing it in that altho. not actually Canadian born I'm a Canadian in mind & spirit & come here as such & not as a stranger or a visitor & that goes down well!! These Dominions do appreciate being put on the same level as the U.K. ... they've done so much to pull the Empire out of the war victoriously that one must recognize their established status as self-governing states of the Empire...

Personally, the Prince saw the tour as an opportunity to establish himself as a character on the world stage who was more approachable and relatable than his father.

So, when the government of Canada approached the British government to propose a royal visit, the opportunity was welcomed by all for various reasons.

### *Enthusiastic reception*

The Prince of Wales gained a cordial reception in Quebec. Relations between English and French Canada had been greatly strained by events such as the Conscription Crisis of 1917, in which French-speaking men were drafted for service in what many Quebeckers

considered a British conflict.<sup>15</sup> So, the Prince was pleasantly surprised when his overtures promoting the wisdom of uniting English and French people in one nation went over well.<sup>16</sup>

In Ontario, his reception became enthusiastic, to the point of being overwhelming.<sup>17</sup> On one occasion, at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto, the Prince was physically lifted from his horse by a crowd of veterans who mobbed him during a ceremony:<sup>18</sup>

The next thing I knew I was being lifted off the horse's back by strong hands and passed like a football over the heads of the veterans. Disheveled, shaken, and breathless, I eventually found myself on the platform, clutching the crumpled notes of my speech.

The Prince confessed that he found this sort of response to his appearance exhilarating. It was his first taste of what Ziegler describes as "the heady, dangerous wine of mass adulation."<sup>19</sup>

He also shook hands whenever they were offered, which was often, resulting in physical injury to his right hand:<sup>20</sup>

It all started with a man in the crowd thrusting an outstretched hand toward me. "Put it right here, Ed," he said. "I shook hands with your granddad." Within a week my right hand was blackened and swollen and extremely painful... On the advice of my doctor, Surgeon Commander Newport, who

<sup>14</sup> Edward, *A King's Story*, p 144–45.

<sup>15</sup> Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie, *Embattled Nation: Canada's Wartime Election of 1917*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Edward, *A King's Story*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Edward, *A King's Story*, 144.



warned me that my right hand might be permanently disabled if I went on using it, I retired it temporarily from Imperial service, and offered the left instead.

Again, the Prince found the uncustomary familiarity of Canadians a tonic and reveled in it.

His Royal Highness also impulsively bought a piece of Canada, a ranch near Calgary, during his stay in the area. This purchase also reflected his goal of becoming personally invested in the Dominion. The tour of Canada seemed to all a rousing success in the making. It was in this setting that the Prince's train pulled out of the station and headed for Guelph.

### *Arrival and parade*

At around 9 a.m. on 21 October, the Prince of Wales arrived at the Grand Trunk (now VIA) station in Guelph.<sup>21</sup> Despite the persistent drizzle, a large crowd had assembled to greet His Royal Highness. The ceremony followed a familiar script. The Prince was greeted by a reception committee, consisting of Mayor James E. Carter, M.P. Hugh Guthrie, the city Aldermen, and a guard of honour consisting of fifty members of the Guelph War Veterans Association. Numerous handshakes followed:<sup>22</sup> "The Prince inspected the guard, shook hands with each member, and those wearing medals or ribbons were questioned as to where and when they were won. He also inspected each member of the band, and

shook hands with them."

The Prince and the committee then crossed Wyndham Street to a platform that had been erected for the purpose in front of the City Hall. There, Mayor Carter read a prepared speech. As the first pages of the local newspaper, the Guelph Mercury, of that date are missing, the text of that address is not fully available. However, the final sentence is printed in the back pages and reveals the overall tone of the mayor's oration:<sup>23</sup> "...continue to enjoy the loyal affection and homage of the millions comprising the British Empire, of which it is our glory and privilege to be a part."

The mayor anticipated the King's wish to restore the old order and lent his support. In his response, the Prince accepted the mayor's homage on behalf of the monarchy and mentioned its previous connection with Guelph:<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Mayor.—I thank you most sincerely for your hearty welcome and loyal address. Your warm expression of attachment to the King and Queen has touched me very much, and I will not fail to convey it to them on my return. Their Majesties have, I know, a very pleasant recollection of their visit to Guelph eighteen years ago.

After this, the Prince described how his visit met the goals of the tour, making particular mention of the OAC:

It is always my first pleasure on these occasions to see the veterans of the great war, with many of whom I made my first ac-

<sup>21</sup> "Prince visits Royal City," *The Globe*, 22 October 1919: 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "Guelph Accords...", *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, 21 October 1919.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

quaintance as a comrade in arms at the front. But I also have looked forward to seeing the picturesque city for myself, and to visit the famous Ontario Agricultural College, with which it is so closely associated.

He then finished on a personal note by extending his own sympathies to Guelphites who suffered as a result of the war:

I know that the war services of Guelph were very great, and I wish to congratulate all your citizens, men and women, on their fine contribution to the united effort which has finally given us victory and peace. No one realizes more keenly than I how much endurance has been needed in the last five years, not only by those who went to the front, but also by those who stayed behind; and I should like to assure all homes which have suffered or lost of my sincerest sympathy.

Following a speech from the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), the Prince presented medals to three soldiers: a Distinguished Conduct Medal to Bombardier Black and Military Medals to Sergeant Harland and Bombardier Haycock. At that point, the Prince and the committee embarked on a motor car parade through the streets of Guelph. *En route*, Guelphites gathered to cheer and wave Union Jacks. Edward continually doffed his cap and waved, and did not allow the top of the car to be put up, despite the drizzle, so that the cheering citizens might be better able to see him. As a result, he later admitted that he was soaked to the skin. The pa-

rade proceeded up Wyndham and Woolwich streets to Clarke Street, then back and thence down to York Road and on to Speedwell hospital.

### *Speedwell Hospital*

The Guelph Reformatory, widely known as the “Prison farm” at the time, had been built just outside the city shortly before the war as a place where low-risk convicts could be rehabilitated through farm labour. However, shortly after opening in 1915, the facility was turned over to the Canadian Military Hospitals Commission for use as a place of recuperation and vocational training for returning soldiers:<sup>25</sup>

The facility was officially known as the Guelph Military Convalescent Hospital, but was named ‘Speedwell’ by its residents—mostly soldiers from southwestern Ontario. At Speedwell, disabled soldiers received therapy while others received training in agriculture, woodworking and motor mechanics. Soldiers were required to wear their uniforms and the military command structure remained in place. Hospital staff had either served overseas or with the military stationed in Guelph. This included doctors and 18 nurses.

The hospital remained in use until January of 1921, at which point it reverted to being a prison.<sup>26</sup>

The presence of the hospital gave the Prince another opportunity to meet with soldiers and thank them for their service.

<sup>25</sup> “GCC Historical Background.” *Infrastructure Ontario*, (no date), 9. <<http://www.infrastructure-ontario.ca/Templates/News.aspx?id=2147488051&langtype=1033>> (accessed on 8 December 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Brook Durham, “‘The Place is a Prison and You Can’t Change It’: Rehabilitation, Retraining, and Soldiers’ Re-establishment at Speedwell Military Hospital, Guelph, 1911–1921.” *Ontario History* 109:2 (2017), 184–212.



Having arrived there, he was greeted by the staff and given a tour, during which he was presented with several gifts made by the residents. One was a bust of the late King Edward VII made by a local sculptor, H.H. French. He also received a hand-carved cigarette case from Pte. L.B. Sterling. The Prince was well pleased with both gifts. He presented the Royal Red Cross Medal to nurse L.M. Gray who had served four years in France. He chatted amiably with a number of the soldiers, shook hands with many, toured the vocational training facilities, and signed autographs.

At that point, he was ready for the culmination of his visit, an appearance at the OAC and Macdonald Hall.

### *The OAC and Macdonald Hall*

The Prince of Wales arrived at the OAC at about 11:15 and was greeted by College President George Creelman and senior administrators in front of the Main Building (now Johnston Hall).<sup>27</sup> The OAC was opened in 1874 after the new Province of Ontario decided it required an institution to help make its agricultural sector more productive and competitive.<sup>28</sup> Modelled on American land-grant colleges and sited in Guelph due to its proximity by train to Toronto and ready availability of a variety of farmlands, the OAC had become

noted for developments in areas such as animal husbandry and what is known today as crop science. As the new owner of a Canadian ranch, the Prince found the OAC a congenial place to visit.

After a short chat, the entourage proceeded to the Biological Building (now the McLachlan Building) for a tour of the museum there. With the time approaching noon, the party crossed the street to have lunch at Macdonald Hall.

Founded in 1903, the Macdonald Institute was a post-secondary school whose mission was to teach home economics to young women.<sup>29</sup> Rural education in general, and for women in particular, had largely stagnated at the level of the one-room schoolhouse since Confederation. As a result, rural women in Canada were often ill-equipped to help run increasingly modernized farms of the type advocated by the OAC. Prompted by reformers such as Adelaide Hoodless,<sup>30</sup> tobacco magnate Sir William Christopher Macdonald established the Macdonald Institute, sited next to the OAC, for teaching modern methods of Domestic Science to young women. Students from all over Ontario and beyond learned the latest approaches to housekeeping, household finance, hygiene, and cookery with professional instructors in a well-equipped facility. Graduates would be able to fulfill the demands of their roles as wives and

<sup>27</sup> "The Prince of Wales' Visit" *The OAC Review*, 32:3 (1919), 134.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander M. Ross, Terry Crowley, and Terrence Allan Crowley, *The College on the Hill: A New History of the Ontario Agricultural College, 1874–1999*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> James G. Snell, *Macdonald Institute: Remembering the Past, Embracing the Future*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Cheryl MacDonald, *Adelaide Hoodless: Domestic Crusader*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1986).



Figure 1: The Prince of Wales posing on the front steps of Macdonald Hall. From a postcard produced by J. Beagles & Co., in the author's collection.

mothers on modern, Canadian farms.

The Macdonald Hall was also constructed on the site to accommodate students during their studies.

The school was popular and the presence of a large group of marriageable young women next to the OAC proved popular with the OAC's all male students as well as the visiting Prince.

At the Hall, the Prince was treated like a movie star. So impressive was his reception that the *Toronto Daily Star* dedicated almost its entire column about the Prince's visit to Guelph to this event:<sup>31</sup>

The ladies [of the residence] were all set to receive him. Under the skilled direction of the ubiquitous movie men they had been rehearsing for more than half an hour royalty's

favorite air, "Johnny's in Town." The drenching rain of the morning had just ceased as the Prince appeared. The two balconies and the windows were crowded with smiling girls in white dresses. A hurricane fluttering of handkerchiefs greeted him as he stepped from under the trees. The opening notes of a piano pealed out, and the girls crashed out "Johnny's in Town." The Prince smiled delightedly.

Waving white handkerchiefs up-and-down was a common way for women to cheer at that time. There can be little doubt that Edward was indeed delighted that he had so dazzled these young women.

Inside the gymnasium, the Prince was waited on by some of the residents and fed a meal prepared by them in the Hall's kitchens. Afterwards, the girls fought over the items he left at the ta-

<sup>31</sup> "Prince Won Hearts of all Guelph Co-eds," *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 October 1919, 24.



Figure 2: The Prince of Wales speaking with OAC President Dr. Creelman at the OAC barns. Courtesy of Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library (RE1 OAC A0234).

ble:<sup>32</sup> “One of them proudly displayed to her envious fellows afterwards the butt of his cigarette. Another had a piece of celery, a third a piece of pie crust, and a fourth a lump of sugar.”

There, the Prince gave a short speech of thanks and the whole party proceeded to the front steps for photographs (see Figure 1). In the photo, Edward can be seen holding a cigarette and sporting a flower in his lapel given him by the Mac girls. To the right of him in front stands Mary Watson, Principal (Dean) of the

Macdonald Institute, and behind him is Katherine Fuller, the Matron of the Hall. They are all laughing about an incident that occurred during the commotion as it was staged. The *Star* describes it in this way:<sup>33</sup> “In the vivacious scramble one girl’s umbrella handle got twisted. She was sure the Prince had done it. ‘I will buy you another,’ he offered, laughing. ‘No, indeed,’ she replied, pertly. ‘I’ll just keep it as a souvenir.’”

Guelph historian Robert Stewart gives a slightly different account:<sup>34</sup> “The

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> R.A.M. Stewart, *A Picture History of Guelph*. Vol. 1, 2 vols. (London: Murray Kelly Printing & Lithography, 1976), 12.

*Figure 3: The Prince of Wales with OAC dignitaries on the steps of the Field Husbandry Building, now Zavitz Hall. Courtesy of Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library (RE1 OAC A0234).*

general merriment was caused by the fact that the end of a cigarette thrown away by the Prince burned a little hole in the umbrella of the maiden on the extreme left, with the result that H.R.H. gallantly desired to replace it.” Stewart’s account, along with his reproduction of the same photograph, may come from a clipping of the front page of the *Mercury*, now missing from the archives.

After this raucous luncheon, the Prince returned to the OAC where he met the College students, shaking hands with the veterans and taking special notice of the disabled ones. He gave them a short speech in the Gymnasium Building (since demolished). Although the text is not recorded, Edward spoke of his particular desire to see the College:<sup>35</sup>

He said he had heard of its good work, and having purchased a ranch in Alberta, he might make use of some agricultural knowledge which he hoped would enable him (using his own words), “to have some money in the bank.” He acknowledged the College Yells and three hearty cheers by his famous smile.

After this assembly, the Prince resumed his tour of the College, visiting the stables and barns (Figure 2; now demolished) and the Field Husbandry Building (Figure 3; now Zavitz Hall).

His campus tour completed, the



Prince returned to his car to be driven back to the train station. Before he could leave, however, his car was surrounded by the young women from Macdonald Hall, begging for souvenir cigarettes:<sup>36</sup> “He took out his case, stuck one in his mouth, and then emptied the whole lot into their outstretched hands. There was much giggling and scrambling for the precious smokes.” Only then was the car permitted to leave. He arrived at the train station and had departed for Stratford by 3pm.

<sup>35</sup> “The Prince of Wales’ Visit,” 134.

<sup>36</sup> “Prince Won Hearts of all Guelph Co-eds,” 24.



### *Spectacle and celebrity*

Two aspects of the Prince of Wales's visit to Guelph are notable: the involvement of new media of celebrity and the Prince's particular attention to the girls of the Macdonald Institute.

The most novel media of celebrity for the Prince's visit were postcards and movies. The image of him surrounded by the Mac girls on the steps of the Macdonald Institute appears to be the only photograph of the Prince's visit to Guelph to be reproduced commercially. In particular, it was reproduced as a postcard by J. Beagles & Co. of England, a firm that specialized in images of celebrities and nobility.

This fact marked a tangible publicity coup for the Prince. Picture postcards had become the subject of a public mania during the Edwardian era, with some six billion sent through the UK mail alone from 1902 to 1911, and remained intensely popular.<sup>37</sup> Collected, traded, and used for casual correspondence, picture postcards like those produced by J. Beagles & Co. were often used to note and record significant events of the day. The fact that the Prince's encounter with the Mac girls passed the bar required for mass publication in Britain confirms that the image was of general interest and would shape his public profile.

The composition of the postcard image is also significant in this regard.

The picture shows the Mac girls looking admiringly at the Prince, who appears pleased with the attention. The fact that the young women in the picture are shown gazing at him suggests that he is, indeed, worthy of such attention and, furthermore, is happy to receive it. So, although the group image is less intimate than a simple portrait, it more effectively positions Edward as an object of public, and especially female, celebrity.

In addition to postcards, the Prince's tour was recorded by the "movie men" mentioned above, who helped to stage-manage and film the Prince's public appearances on his tour. Filmed highlights of the tour were packaged as movies that audiences could view in cinemas. For example, movie highlights of the Prince's visit to Guelph were shown in town shortly after the visit concluded.<sup>38</sup> (Unfortunately, these recordings are not included in surviving films of the trip, although highlights from other stages of his visit remain available today.<sup>39</sup>) Featuring in films just like movie stars and other idols would also help to increase the Prince's celebrity, especially as they focused on of the attention of crowds.

Of course, this was nothing new for British royalty. Royal appearances and spectacles had long been used to make favourable impressions on the public.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Julia Gillen and Nigel Hall, "Any Mermaids? Early Postcard Mobilities," in *Mobile Methods*, Monika Büscher, John Urry and Katian Witchger eds., 20–35, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 21.

<sup>38</sup> "Moving Pictures in Guelph," *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, 7 November 1919.

<sup>39</sup> For example, *Prince of Wales Tour across Canada 1919*, British Pathé. <<https://www.britishpathe.com/>> (accessed 11 November 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

In many respects, the appearance of the Prince of Wales in postcards and movies along with magazine articles and books, was simply a continuation of earlier uses of public appearances.

Nevertheless, representations of the Prince's tour of 1919 marked a significant departure from earlier ones: The Prince was much more intimate with Canadians than his predecessors were. He was mobbed by enthusiastic crowds, severely bruised by shaking hands with onlookers, and even manhandled by veterans. His father decried this intimacy as a loss of royal dignity but the Prince defended it by arguing that it established a personal relationship between himself and Canadians.<sup>41</sup>

While not of quite the same intimacy as being passed overhead like a football, the account of the Prince's encounters with the Mac girls suggests a physicality of the sort that the King deplored. Having a gaggle of Canadian girls jostle with him, trail him across campus singing to him, fight over his food scraps, and surround his car before permitting him to leave would have been deplorable and unwelcome in earlier eras. Yet, the Prince was quite pleased with it, in part because it presented him as modern celebrity instead of a Victorian nobleman.

Of course, the postcard image of the Prince at the Macdonald Hall does not depict any injury or violence. Yet, it did show the immediate results of the Prince

jostling with the enthusiastic Mac girls as they scrambled to squeeze onto the steps with him. As such, it is properly seen as a significant record of his pretensions to a sort of fame not acceptable to his predecessors.

### *Prince Charming*

The Prince of Wales's visit with the Mac girls also signifies a new role for women in His Highness's quest for celebrity. The postcard resembles what is today known as a "photo op."<sup>42</sup> In the twentieth century, politicians and celebrities got into the habit of staging events like signing documents or visiting hospitals as a way to secure images that would generate positive publicity when disseminated. What is interesting about this photo op is that it involves women of low social status, not debutantes or representatives of prominent social organizations that the Prince typically met, such as the IODE. Through his interactions with the Mac girls, Edward sought to appeal to the common, female audience, with a few pennies to spend on postcards or watching movies.

A survey of contemporary news articles supports this impression. For the most part, articles that mentioned women during his tour tended to focus on those with whom the Prince danced, for example, printing the names and portraits of his dance partners at Government House in Toronto.<sup>43</sup> The *Toronto*

<sup>41</sup> Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, p 117–18.

<sup>42</sup> Kiku Adatto, *Picture Perfect: Life in the Age of the Photo Op* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> "Toronto Girls Danced with the Prince," *Toronto Daily Star*, 26 August 1919.





Figure 4: HRH The Prince of Wales at military ball, Montreal. Courtesy of the British Library HS85/10/36443.

*Daily Star* also printed a series of short articles about women who had danced with the Prince's grandfather on the latter's 1860 tour, thus emphasizing the continuity of the Royal appeal to prominent women and debutantes.<sup>44</sup>

Shorter articles or sections related humorous anecdotes of brief and unscripted encounters the Prince had with average Canadian women. For example, one article relates how, when Edward was shaking hands with people out a window at a brief train stop, one woman pur-

loined the cigarette he was smoking and put it in her purse.<sup>45</sup>

The *Star's* article about the Prince's visit to Guelph focused on his visit with the Mac girls and was also one of the few whose title describes women's (admiring) reactions to him: "Prince Won Hearts of all Guelph Co-Eds: Girls of Macdonald Hall Vied with One Another in Honouring H.R.H."<sup>46</sup>

Emphasis in the media on this part of Edward's visit could be viewed as helping to achieve the official aims of the tour.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., "Maids Danced with Prince, He was Here in Sept. 1860," *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 August 1919.

<sup>45</sup> "Private Tim Murphy gets Prince's quarter," *Toronto Daily Star*, 25 October 1919.

<sup>46</sup> "Prince Won Hearts of all Guelph Co-eds."

During the war, women had assumed a number of roles and occupations previously reserved for men. Afterwards, they were widely expected to relinquish them to returning veterans and resume domestic roles. As the mission of the Macdonald Institute was to prepare young women for careers as wives and housekeepers, the Prince's appearance could be construed as an endorsement of the old order. However, it seems clear that Edward's encounter with the Mac girls helped mainly to advance his representation as a real-life "Prince Charming" to all women, as noted explicitly in the subtitle of the J. Beagles & Co. postcard: "Prince Charming among the students."

Contrast the Prince's visit with that of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Princess Patricia in 1912. Although the Guelph and Toronto newspaper accounts of the event noted that the royals enjoyed a luncheon at Macdonald Hall and were warmly received by the students, there is no mention of the Duke charming the girls, winning their hearts, or being mobbed by them.<sup>47</sup> As an older, married man the Duke simply did not fit into that narrative. As a famous, eligible young bachelor, the Prince of Wales certainly did.

Of course, there was nothing new in a Prince of Wales attracting women's attention. On their tours of Canada in 1901 and 1860, the Prince's father and grandfather had encountered many women for

a variety of reasons, from acknowledging their presence in welcoming crowds to social functions such as balls and in audiences to seek patronage for worthy causes.<sup>48</sup>

In particular, the 1860 tour was noted for the numerous balls staged in honour of Edward's grandfather, then an unmarried young man of 19 years of age.<sup>49</sup> The Prince danced often and with gusto with many of the young belles at each venue. The Prince's many dances and the rapturous attention he received from his partners and all women present was much noted in press accounts of his tour.

Similar attention was heaped on the Prince of Wales in his tour of 1919. For example, a collage by photographer John A. Miller shows Edward at a military ball in Montreal, 29 October, where he is depicted as the focus of much feminine attention. (See Figure 4). No doubt, the collage reflects the common expectation that women at balls would be eager to dance with him.

What distinguishes Edward's encounter with Mac girls is their low social status. Since they were not debutantes or dignitaries, they could not twirl with him across a dance floor but could only wave, sing, or hustle for personal souvenirs—or jockey for position in his photo op. The fact that this kind of interaction constituted His Royal Highness's playing the role of Prince Charming was something new.

<sup>47</sup> "Royalty Visited Central Prison Farm," *The Globe*, May 31, 1912: 4.

<sup>48</sup> Carolyn Harris, "Canadian Women's Responses to Royal Tours from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," *Royal Studies Journal* 5:1 (2018), 15–33.

<sup>49</sup> Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, 150ff.

### *Scripted or spontaneous?*

Given that the visit to the Macdonald Institute set the stage for the Prince of Wales's public persona as Prince Charming, the question naturally arises as to what extent the effect was anticipated and planned.

No source directly addresses this matter but circumstantial factors point to deliberate planning. There certainly would have been no difficulty in anticipating and staging this sort of response to the Prince among the Macdonald students. It was common knowledge locally that they were often on the lookout for eligible bachelors among the young men of the OAC across the street:<sup>50</sup>

Many of the young women "paired off" with men from the OAC, so much so that by the early 1910s the Mac program, particularly the short program, had already earned the famous nickname, the "diamond ring" course.

So, the opportunity for Edward to por-

tray himself as a figure of romantic interest to young women in general was present and the luncheon at Macdonald Hall was certainly conducted to take advantage of it. In addition to having the Mac girls rehearse a song of greeting, the Prince's staff had distributed souvenir photographs of the Prince in conjunction with his arrival. (See

Figure 5). Perhaps this measure helped to stoke the fervor of the young ladies at the appearance of the man himself.

One other element of the visit suggests that the Prince's encounter with the Mac girls was intended to be central to the Guelph stop: It is curious that no mention was made of John McCrae, author of "In Flanders' Fields." The poem and its author were already well known around the world, as

was his association with Guelph and the OAC. Indeed, a memorial plaque

dedicated to the memory of McCrae had already been made and was soon installed at the Guelph Collegiate Institute, McCrae's alma mater, on 13 November 1919.<sup>51</sup> Mc-



Figure 5: Souvenir cabinet photo of the Prince of Wales distributed to the residents of Macdonald Hall. Courtesy of Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library (RE1 OAC A0234).

<sup>50</sup> Snell, *Macdonald Institute*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> "Unveiling of Memorial," *The Guelph Evening Mercury*, 12 November 1919.

Crae and his work must have been known to the Prince and his entourage, not to mention everyone in Guelph, but no mention of either is recorded during his tour. It may be that the matter was simply overlooked in the tumult of the very busy trip. However, it may well be that making a fuss about John McCrae was not compatible with the Prince's personal goal of having the press focus on him and the impression he made on the young women of Macdonald Hall.

Altogether, the events surrounding Edward's stop in Guelph seem to have been designed to promote his celebrity to young women in particular. It may have been a lucky accident that the Prince happened to damage a young woman's umbrella but it still produced a broadly appealing image.

### *Aftermath*

If the primary purpose of the Prince of Wales's visit to Canada was to restore the old order, it was not finally a success. As the Prince himself realized, such a restoration was not possible in view of the shattering of the old order resulting from the Great War. Canadians went on to develop an identity for themselves that was increasingly at odds with the old notion of the nation as a junior member of the British Empire.

However, the Prince's effort to establish his own public profile was more effective. The label of "Prince Charming" certainly stuck. During a private trip that the Prince made to Canada in

1923 to visit his Alberta ranch, Ernest Hemmingway, who was a reporter for the *Toronto Daily Star* during the 1919 tour, wrote to Ezra Pound from Toronto: "The Prince gets here on Tuesday. Prince Charming, the Ambassador of Empire, the fair haired bugger."<sup>52</sup>

As Prince Charming, Edward was regarded as an idol to the unmarried young women of Britain. British businesses continued to churn out images of him for the consumption of the same. One image of the Prince in naval uniform, glancing upwards and smiling beatifically, became especially popular in the mid 1920s, increasingly to its subject's regret.<sup>53</sup>

It was reproduced on innumerable chocolate or biscuit boxes, turned into hundreds of thousands of postcards, adorned the window ledges of countless housemaids, nestled in the blotters of a whole generation of susceptible schoolgirls. It was the image of Prince Charming, and it made its subject sick. He did not want to be a fairy prince, that was certain, but did he want to be a prince at all?

The Prince of Wales's stop in Guelph in 1919 was brief, only one event among many in his effort to establish himself and the Royal family as global celebrities. However, the stop did provide him with the opportunity to launch one aspect of that celebrity, namely his profile as "Prince Charming" to the sundry young women of the Empire. In this purpose, the Prince was rather successful, perhaps even more than he bargained for.

<sup>52</sup> Ziegler, *King Edward VIII*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.