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5,000 papers reflecting the life and legacy of Prince Albert made digitally available for the first time

Over 5,000 papers and photographs relating to the life and legacy of Prince Albert (1819–1861), consort of Queen Victoria, have been digitally published, marking the completion of the Prince Albert Digitisation Project.

A total of 22,000 archival documents, prints and photographs from the Royal Archives, the Royal Collection and the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 are now publicly available, the majority for the first time, through the website ***Prince Albert: His Life and Legacy*** (www.albert.rct.uk), launched in August 2019 to mark 200th anniversary of Albert's birth.

The final tranche of archival material consists predominantly of Albert's private and official papers and correspondence from the period 1841–61. These papers enrich our understanding of Albert's official duties, detailing his work in the spheres of culture, education and philanthropy, as well illuminating aspects of his personal life, from family relationships to his passion for art and photography. The breadth of this material reflects the myriad responsibilities Albert assumed during his relatively short life as he strove to carve out a meaningful role for himself as Prince Consort.

Excerpts from Albert's now lost diaries, dating from 1841–1852, have also been digitally published. These were selected by his official biographer Theodore Martin shortly after the Prince's death and record a variety of official visits and engagements, foreign and naval affairs, and the renovations of the royal residences.

The Prince Albert Digitisation Project was supported by Sir Hugh and Lady Stevenson in honour of Sir Hugh's sister the late Dame Anne Griffiths DCVO, former Librarian and Archivist to His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, and by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851.

Highlights of newly published material on '[Prince Albert: His Life and Legacy](http://www.albert.rct.uk)'

Albert as husband

Albert's personal papers shed light on his relationship with Queen Victoria, both as a loving husband and unofficial private secretary. The Prince's romantic nature is revealed by **scores of the music he composed for Victoria during their engagement**, including a piece named *Dem Fernen* ('From Afar'), while **handwritten notes** passed between the pair illuminate the highs and lows of married life. A note of encouragement from Albert to Victoria in October 1858 reads simply: 'I declare that I have every confidence in you. A.' In the aftermath of marital rows, Albert often communicated his hurt and frustration through scribbled notes to his wife in German. These were later destroyed by their youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, though not before an unknown individual made photographic copies for the Royal Archives.

Albert as father

Albert's family papers demonstrate the importance he placed on domestic life. His purchase and development of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight as a holiday home fit for nine children is charted through his correspondence, while **birthday cards and poems written by the royal children** offer touching glimpses into family life. In May 1858, the ten-year-old Princess Louise wrote to her father

from Swiss Cottage, the life-sized playhouse he had installed for his children at Osborne, to report: 'we cooked in our kitchen and made some wafers and *schneemilch*' (a type of Austrian pudding).

The great number of **letters Albert received from his eldest daughter Victoria**, Princess Royal (known to her family as 'Vicky'), after she had married and moved to Germany, demonstrates their particularly close relationship. Shortly after the birth of her son and Albert's first grandchild, Wilhelm (later Kaiser Wilhelm II) in 1859, she wrote to her father expressing her concern over the new-born's physical disability, a condition now known to have been Erb's palsy. 'I wonder also what name our little William will bear in History', she speculated.

Albert as reformer

Albert possessed an innate impulse for efficiency and improvement. Early in his married life, he channelled this energy **into reforming the Royal Household and royal finances**. A list of suggested candidates for the vacant role of Master of the Household is annotated by Albert with brief reasons as to why each man was unsuitable – ranging from 'too old' and 'too useful in the Navy' to 'bad temper' and 'French mistress'. This urge to improve often extended beyond the Household, and letters record the Prince's suggestions for the improvement of everything from sewage utilisation to the design of military uniforms.

Having benefited from a thorough education himself in Germany, Albert was deeply invested in the schooling of his children. His files contain correspondence relating to the appointment of governesses and tutors, **lesson timetables and progress reports of the royal children**, including a memo from Frederick Gibbs, private tutor to Albert Edward, Prince of Wales and Prince Alfred, suggesting that the brothers ought to be separated for lessons after they had been caught smoking together.. Albert's most prominent educational legacy was his reform of the curriculum at the University of Cambridge, where he held the role of Chancellor from 1847 until his death. Newly published papers relating to his chancellorship include arrangements for the commissioning of an ode by William Wordsworth to mark Albert's inauguration.

Albert as patron of photography

Almost **1,000 glass plate negatives**, including rare early examples by leading 19th-century photographers such as Roger Fenton, JJE Mayall and Leonida Caldesi, have been added to *Prince Albert: His Life and Legacy*. Glass plate negatives show the entire composition of a photograph, often encompassing various props and background details that were ordinarily cropped or cut out of the subsequent prints. They are of particular interest to photo-historians, who use glass plate negatives to trace photographers' working methods and their individual experimentations with the wet collodion process. These glass plates form part of a **total of 10,000 photographs and prints** collected or commissioned by Albert now published online.

Prince Albert enthusiastically embraced the new medium of photography, which combined his interest in art, science and technology. He believed in photography as an art form and advocated its importance as a documentary device and as a means of sharing knowledge, becoming Patron of the Photographic Society shortly after its foundation in 1853. Albert installed darkrooms at Windsor Castle, and his regular attendance at photographic studios and exhibitions was widely reported in the press.

Albert as visionary

Exercise books from Albert's youth in Coburg, featuring meticulous lists of translations interspersed with **fantastical doodles**, suggest a curious mind matched by an active imagination and aesthetic sensibility. The prince's passion for art and history was put to good use in 1841, when he became President of the Fine Arts Commission, his first official role in England, to oversee the redecoration of the Houses of Parliament. **Excerpts from Albert's diary entries** recounting this project demonstrate his knowledge of British history and enlightened artistic taste.

Albert's enthusiasm for design and technology culminated in his vision for The Great Exhibition of 1851, an event he co-organised. The website brings together the papers of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 and Albert's own correspondence, more than 30 volumes and 3,400 documents in total, charting the genesis, implementation and legacy of this landmark exhibition. Newly published

letters include **Albert's first known mention of the Great Exhibition**: 'I should like to have some conversation with you on the subject of a great national or even international Exhibition', he wrote to Henry Labouchere in July 1849. Between May and October 1851, more than six million visitors attended the exhibition in Hyde Park, a third of the population of Britain at the time. Soon after the exhibition closed, Albert set out **his vision for the legacy of the Great Exhibition** in a typically detailed memorandum. He proposed that the substantial surplus profit from the Exhibition be used to purchase the Kensington Gore Estate, on which several cultural institutions could be permanently established. This part of South Kensington, later nicknamed 'Albertopolis', is today home to world-class museums of history, art and science. They remain a fitting tribute to Albert's wide-ranging interests and the strength of his legacy.

Ends

The Prince Albert Digitisation Project is freely accessible to all on the website *Prince Albert: His Life and Legacy* (www.albert.rct.uk). An introduction to the project can be viewed on the [Royal Collection Trust website](#).

As part of the Project, and in keeping with Albert's keen interest in both education and technology, a selection of archival documents has been used as material for an online course on the creation of digital editions funded by the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Attended by twenty postgraduate students from the University of Oxford, the University of Leicester, and Birkbeck College, these workshops introduced students to the core elements of transcription, editing, and digital mark-up, and provided a forum for the discussion of the documents, their significance and their contexts. The workshops have been converted into an open online course, [Prince Albert's Papers: Creating Digital Editions](#), available on the University of Oxford's Canvas virtual learning environment.

A selection of images is available to download from mediaselect.pa.media or **WeTransfer. Please refer to the attached contact sheet for credit lines.**

For further information and images, please contact the Royal Collection Trust Press Office, +44 (0)20 7839 1377, press@rct.uk.

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Notes to Editors

Royal Collection Trust, a department of the Royal Household, is responsible for the care of the Royal Collection and manages the public opening of the official residences of The Queen. Income generated from admissions and from associated commercial activities contributes directly to The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity. The aims of The Trust are the care and conservation of the Royal Collection, and the promotion of access and enjoyment through exhibitions, publications, loans and educational programmes. Royal Collection Trust's work is undertaken without public funding of any kind.

The Royal Collection is among the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It comprises almost all aspects of the fine and decorative arts, and is spread among some 15 royal residences and former residences across the UK, most of which are regularly open to the public. The Royal Collection is held in trust by the Sovereign for her successors and the nation, and is not owned by The Queen as a private individual.

The Royal Archives contain the official and private papers of the Sovereign and other members of the British Royal Family, together with the records of the Royal Household and the private Royal estates. This unparalleled collection reflects and records some of the most significant moments in British history and provides a fascinating insight into the lives of monarchs and their families.

The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 awards grants and fellowships in support of science and industry to the value of around £4m a year. First established in 1850 to stage the Great

Exhibition, the Commission initially invested the Exhibition's profit by purchasing the land for development of the South Kensington cultural estate of museums, colleges and the Royal Albert Hall. Details of the 1851 Royal Commission's awards are on its website www.royalcommission1851.org.uk. The Royal Commission's Archive contains material from 1849 onwards relating to the organisation of the Great Exhibition, the purchase and development of the 'Albertopolis' estate in South Kensington and the Commission's various awards schemes and their alumni. It is open to bona fides researchers by appointment.