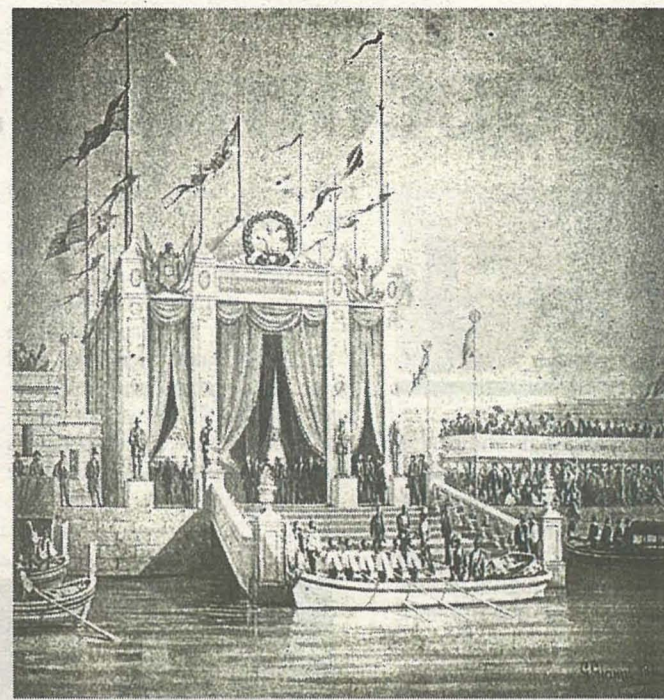




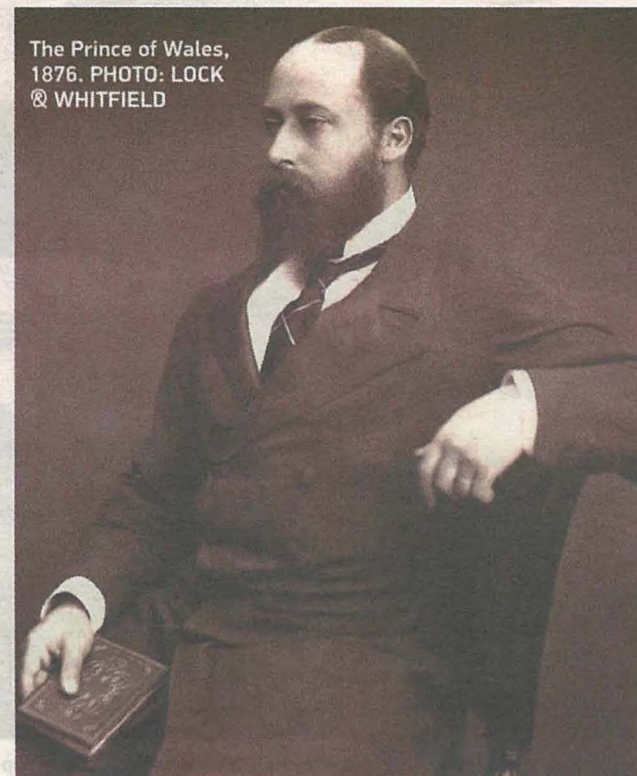
Landing of the Prince of Wales at Marsa. PHOTO: WESTFIELD & CO



Close-up of the landing of the Prince of Wales. PHOTO: G. GIANNI. COURTESY OF MARQUIS NICHOLAS DE PIRO



Sydney Prior Hall's sketch of the Prince. COURTESY OF ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II 2017



The Prince of Wales, 1876. PHOTO: LOCK & WHITFIELD

The Prince of Wales' visit to Malta in 1876



CHRISTOPHER GRECH

King Edward VII made several visits to Malta both as King and Prince of Wales. His first visit was in 1862 when he was 21 years old.

After the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria withdrew from public life and so it was decided that the heir apparent should undertake a series of foreign tours so that the British monarchy would maintain a visible presence on the world stage, thus reinforcing the strength of its empire.

In 1860, the Prince of Wales undertook a tour of North America, which was a great success diplomatically. A tour to the Middle East followed in 1862 and the Prince stopped briefly in Malta on both the outward and return journeys.

In October 1875, the Prince left England for an eight-month tour to India, stopping at various locations on the journey to and from the sub-continent. It was on the journey back home that Edward spent some time in Malta. The initial plans were for him to spend just 24 hours on the island; however, after he was inundated with invitations, his stay was extended to five days.

For a few days before the Prince's arrival, the weather in Malta had been windy and squally; however, on Thursday, April 6, Malta awoke to a calm, cloudless sky and comfortable temperatures. Just before 10am, the guns of the coastal forts of St Elmo, Tigné and Ricasoli announced the approach of HMS Serapis, which had borne the Prince to and from India. This was the signal for hordes of Maltese, as well as foreigners, to line the streets and bastions.

Shortly after 10am, the salutes from the inland forts announced the arrival of the Prince of Wales in Grand Harbour. Once the Serapis had anchored, a small flotilla of boats headed for the designated landing place at Marsa. The Prince led the way in his State barge, which looked appropriately regal with the Royal Standard fluttering at the bow and its blue silk canopy offering protection from the strengthening sun.

Next came Governor Sir Charles van Straubenzee in his barge accompanied by his staff, followed by a third barge carrying the Chief Secretary, Crown Advocate and other officials. As the procession progressed

through a cordon of ships of the fleet, with sailors mounted at the yards, blue jackets roared a hearty three cheers.

The Prince landed at Marsa, where an ornate pavilion hung with crimson damask and fringed with gold, had been erected for the occasion. The words 'Welcome to the Prince of Wales' were emblazoned across the structure and four figures in black armour stood guard on pedestals in front of each of the columns.

As Prince Edward mounted the crimson-clad steps that led up from the water's edge, to be greeted by the Governor, the enthusiastic crowd erupted into a deafening cacophony of cheers. Standing on the dais, in front of the throne which was reputed to have been used by Queen Adelaide when she visited Malta in 1838, the Prince listened attentively to the short welcome address read out by Salvatore Cachia Zammit, the senior member of the Council of Government chosen to represent the people of Malta.

This speech, which seems cringingly obsequious by today's standards, expressed Maltese pride at being loyal British subjects, stating: "We beg to express to your Royal Highness the earnest assurance of our deep attachment and unabated allegiance to her Majesty our beloved Queen and her Royal house."

"The initial plans were for him to spend just 24 hours on the island; however, after he was inundated with invitations his stay was extended to five days"

The Prince replied with equal grace and flattery, commenting: "This island has many agreeable recollections and associations for me... I can assure you that the loyalty which has been displayed on various occasions to the British Crown by the inhabitants of these islands is neither forgotten or unappreciated by her Majesty." Mr Cachia Zammit then presented to the Prince the beautifully illuminated parchment on which the address was written. This was enclosed in a solid silver case, covered with crimson velvet and adorned with Maltese silver filigree work at its ends and the Prince of Wales' plume in the centre.

The members of the Council of Government and other distinguished persons were



HMS Serapis in Grand Harbour, 1876. PHOTO: WESTFIELD & CO

then presented to the Prince by the Governor, following which he mounted his carriage and proceeded to Valletta, preceded by deputations from many towns and villages waving their colourful flags and, of course, accompanied by their own bands.

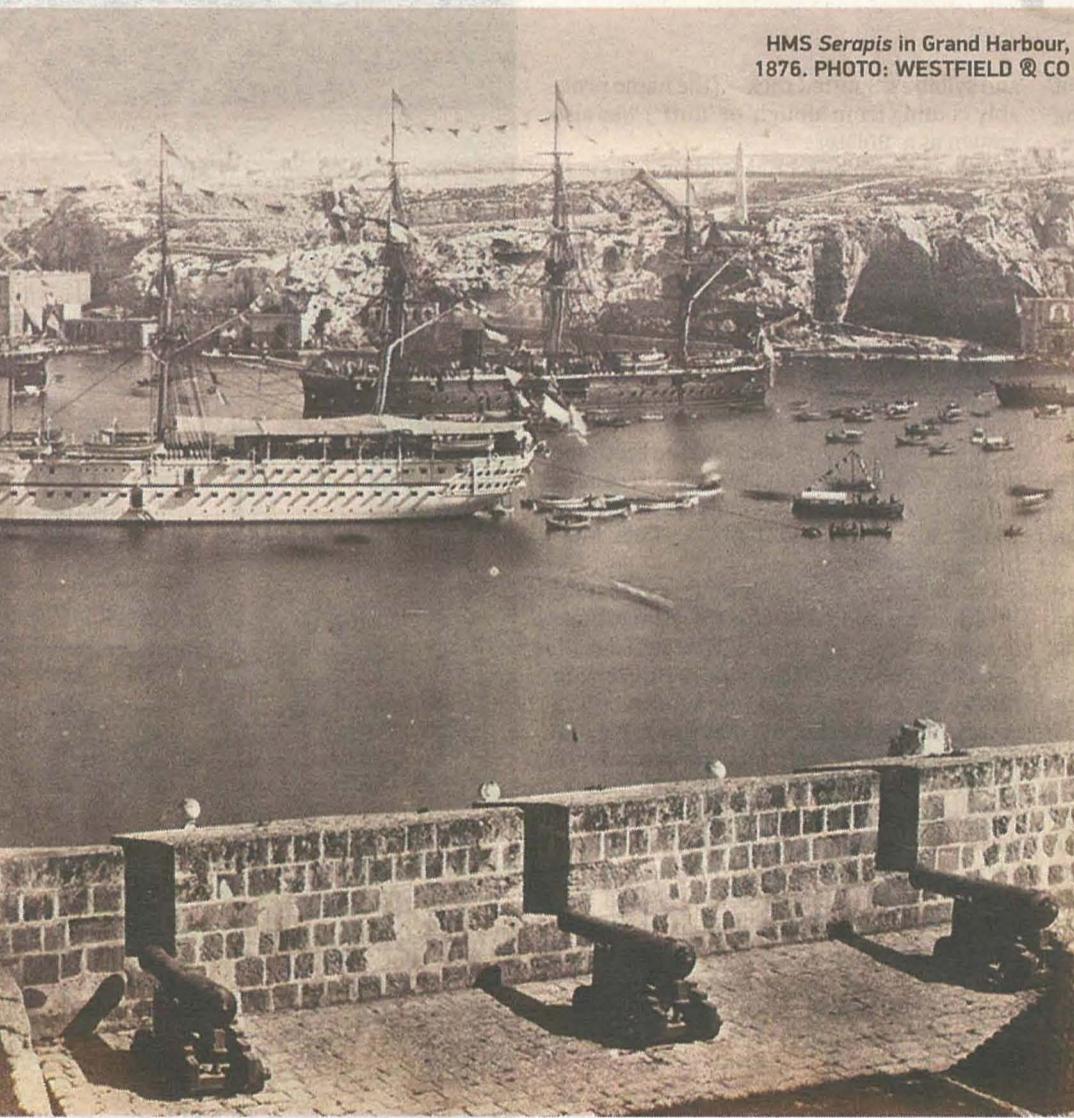
Along the route, the procession was joined by the students of the university with their own band as well as representatives of the legal profession; deputations from the Agrarian Society and the Society of Arts also joined the cavalcade. At the Mall in Floriana, the pupils of the primary schools and the orphanages sang the national and the Prince's anthems. Here deputations from the commercial classes, land surveyors and civil engineers also joined the procession.

Throughout the route, masses of people, Maltese citizens in their finest clothes, and

many other nationalities in a variety of colourful costumes as well as naval and military officers in full dress, cheered the royal visitor.

On entering Valletta, a royal salute was fired from St James Cavalier. The whole length of Strada Reale was lined with the soldiers of the Royal Artillery, the Royal Malta Fencible Artillery and the Royal Engineers. Deafening cheers greeted the Prince and showers of red and white roses rained into his open carriage, many of which he caught and returned with a kind smile and bow to the infatuated donors.

On reaching the Palace, Prince Edward was greeted by Lady van Straubenzee. The Prince then received the Archbishop of Malta, the president of the Courts, and other dignitaries. The Prince later appeared on the balcony and was cheered over and over again, the bands playing his anthem.

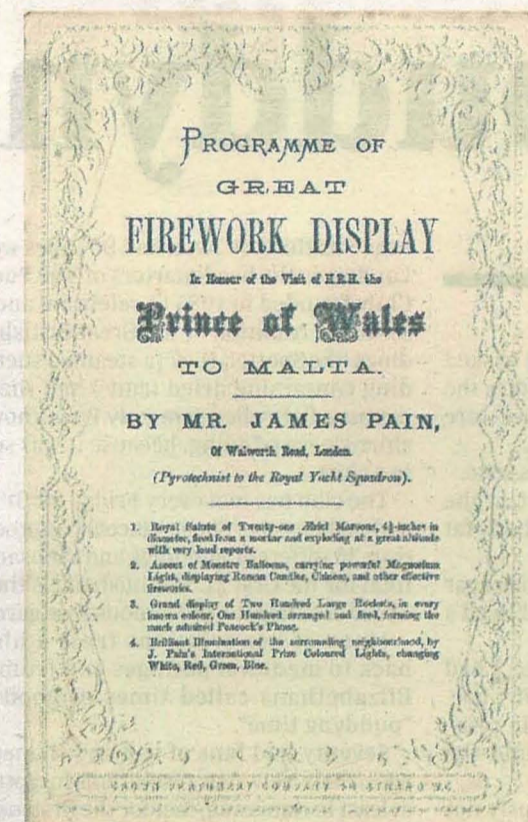


Shortly after this, the Prince drove along Strada Reale in a carriage, with his Excellency the Governor and Lady Straubenzee, to the Lascaris Saluting Battery from where he viewed the illumination of the fleet and a pyrotechnic display by Mr Pain (pyrotechnist to the Royal Yacht Squadron) on Corradino Hill.

The naval display was impressive; however, as the reporter for the *London Evening Standard* wrote: "Great expectations had been raised, by the show to take place at Corradino; but circumstances seem to combine against their arriving at anything like what was announced. After the discharge of rockets from the ships of war, the real display to which everybody was anxiously looking as something never seen before in Malta was of the mildest nature... and the disappointment was very great."

The next day, Friday, the Prince rode out to the Floriana Parade Ground and reviewed all the troops in the garrison. The Prince then presented new colours to the 98th regiment, after which he took the general salute. Referring again to the *Evening Standard's* account: "His Royal Highness remaining at the Saluting post, presenting, on his noble charger, a most dignified and royal appearance. Both rider and animal seemed as if one piece, neither moving a muscle, the plumes in the Prince's cocked hat, gently rippled by the breeze, being the only moving part of the picture." This event was skillfully recorded by artist Sydney Prior Hall, who the Prince had invited to accompany him on his tour of India.

That same evening a grand ball was held at the Union Club in Valletta to which 800 guests had been invited. The ball was a great success and the Prince seemed to enjoy himself, dancing several waltzes and finally leaving at about 2am.



James Pain's pyrotechnic programme.

On Saturday morning, the Prince observed military manoeuvres and in the afternoon he attended the Manoel Theatre, the New Opera House still being unserviceable due to the damage caused by the fire of 1873. There he was welcomed enthusiastically by the audience and watched a special performance, comprising of excerpts from the operas *Masaniello* and *Martha*.

His Royal Highness attended divine service at the collegiate church of St Paul on Sunday. The newspapers seemed to delight in recording that, attired in ordinary morning dress, he walked to the church by way of Archbishop Street, which was lined with a respectful crowd. That afternoon the Prince visited Boschetto and lunched with the Governor at Verdala Palace.

At noon on Monday, April 10, the Prince watched torpedo experiments that were held in Sliema Creek and afterwards was ferried in his blue steam barge, with snowy canopy and shining brass funnel, to the *Hercules* in Grand Harbour, where he lunched with Admiral Drummond. After lunch he watched the naval regatta that took place in the harbour. That evening he hosted a dinner aboard the *Serapis*.

The next morning, at 8am, the *Serapis*, with his Royal Highness on board, and accompanied by the *Raleigh* and *Osborne*, left the harbour under a salute from the *Hercules*, *Hibernia*, *Invincible* and all the forts. Enthusiastic crowds lined the bastions and waved farewell to the Prince.

His next visit to Malta would not happen until 1903 when he returned to our shores as King.