

## The Duchess of Teck: The People's Princess

The memorial by Richmond Gate to the Duchess of Teck may be restored soon. There is also a plantation in the Park named after her – making her the Park's most commemorated former resident. But why?

The Duchess of Teck, Princess Mary Adelaide, was the daughter of Prince Adolphus, youngest son of George III. She was born in 1833, spent her early life in Hanover and married the German Duke of Teck in 1866 at the parish church in Kew.

In 1869 Queen Victoria gave the couple the use of White Lodge in Richmond Park as their residence and they lived here nearly all the rest of their lives. They had four children and in 1891 their daughter May married Prince George, the future George V and she became Queen Mary. Their son, the future Edward VIII, was born and baptised at White Lodge.

The Duchess of Teck believed that charitable works were the best use of a princess's time, and she took an active role especially with hospital and children's charities. Being aware of the needs of the poor and having the "common touch" she became very well loved and was known as the 'People's Princess' – a term that today is associated with the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

Queen Mary had been involved in her mother's charitable work and, in this respect, set the ethos of her 26-year reign and that of her descendants, including our present Royal Family.



The Duchess was also famous for her extravagance – she liked entertaining and fine clothes and jewellery, but also gave substantially to charity. Her debts increased, despite a parliamentary allowance and financial help from her family. In 1883, she and the Duke fled abroad to escape their creditors. However, within two years they were once again living in White Lodge.

This 19<sup>th</sup> century People's Princess is commemorated by the Teck Plantation near Sheen Gate, planted in 1905, eight years after her death, and by the Teck Memorial just outside Richmond Gate. The commentary plaques on this were removed or stolen long ago and the drinking fountains no longer work, but Park management has recently cleared the overgrowth of plants that largely obscured it from view.

But why commemorate the Duchess with a drinking fountain? Maybe this was a way of continuing the care she gave to so many people from her home in Richmond Park.

*Photo: The Duchess of Teck and her daughter Mary (May) with kind permission of the Church of St John the Baptist, Kingston Vale.*