

# The Honorary Freedom – An Honourable History...

Many liverymen and guests were present in Merchant Taylors' Hall in November 2017 when the Honorary Freedom of the Musicians' Company was conferred upon the conductor Sir Antonio Pappano, the most recent recipient of the award.

First let it be said that this is the Company's most prestigious honour and is awarded only to the most eminent figures in public life, who have given particularly notable service – often, but not always, as professional musicians.

In the mid-Victorian period Charles Freake (builder, architect and

philanthropist), and Sir Henry Cole, (instrumental in organising the 1851 Great Exhibition and founding the Royal College of Music), were awarded both the Freedom and the Livery 'by Presentation', as the 1876 Court minutes relate, but this was not as we know the Honorary Freedom today.

The first award in its present form was confirmed on 26 April 1904, when the Court 'unanimously resolved that the Honorary Freedom of the Company be presented to Andrew Carnegie Esq of Skibo Castle, Skibo, Dornoch, Sutherlandshire N. B. in recognition and appreciation of the services rendered by him to the Art of Music in these islands'. Accordingly, the following month, Carnegie's installation ceremony took place at Clothworkers' Hall.

Mr Carnegie was indeed generous with his gifts throughout the kingdom and is remembered specially for his benevolence to libraries and civic buildings. So impressed and grateful was he for the Company's award that he donated a \$5,000 United States Gold Bond for the purpose of founding a Carnegie Scholarship.

Other Honorary Freemen soon followed,



**Sir Arthur Bliss, Master of the Queen's Musick, with the Master Captain Evelyn Broadwood 1954**

including His Royal Highness Prince Christian of Schleswig Holstein, a son-in-law of Queen Victoria. He was the first of several members of the Royal Family who have been offered the Honorary Freedom since 1905. In 1921 the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Connaught were recipients and, fourteen years later, the Duke of Kent. Re-discovered recently in the archives was a copy of the Duke's after-dinner speech, together with a table plan of the dinner at Stationers' Hall; all these fascinating mementoes are illustrated on our Archival Project website for all to see. The year after the Duke's tragic death in 1942, his widow, Princess Marina, received the Honorary Freedom. In 1993 their daughter-in-law, Katherine, Duchess of Kent, herself a keen singer and music lover, was a



**The first page of the Honorary Freemen Declaration Book from 1904**

recipient. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (1966), His Royal Highness Prince Philip (1989) and his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (2003) have also honoured us by accepting.

But back to musicians; composers have featured strongly in the list since 1908, when three knights joined the ranks of the Honorary Freeman: Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Walter Parratt (Master of the King's Musick). Elgar, Stanford and Edward German were recipients and, following the Second World War, Vaughan Williams, Bax and Bliss were soon joined by Britten, Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies, among others. Singers and instrumentalists too have been prominent among Honorary Freeman: Sir George Henschel, H. Plunket Greene (soloist in the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*), Harold Darke the organist and Sir Yehudi Menuhin, doyen of violinists.

It was some years before a woman was offered the Honorary Freedom; in 1920, Charlotte, Lady Cooper, an amateur musician, and wife of the Master Sir Ernest Cooper, was the first, for 'services to the Red Cross', followed by the Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent, mentioned above. The next 'non-royal' woman Honorary Freeman was jazz singer Dame Cleo Laine (in 2002) but since then mezzo-soprano Dame Janet Baker (2011) and organist Dame Gillian Weir (2015) have graced the list – still a very long way behind the men!

For those who enjoy their politics, it is worth mentioning Neville Chamberlain (1939) and Sir Edward Heath (1973), both of whom received the Honorary Freedom during their residence at 10 Downing Street.



#### **HRH The Prince Philip 1989**

As part of the short installation ceremony, the new Freeman signs the special Honorary Freedom Declaration Book, first used by Carnegie in 1904; this contains the signatures of Honorary Freeman up to the present day and can be seen in its entirety on the Archive Project website.

The conferring of the Honorary Freedom is familiar throughout the City Livery movement and we are privileged that so many eminent figures have accepted the Company's invitation – 62 to date.

Do check out the fascinating Archival web pages about the Honorary Freedom, which offer much more detail about the history and the distinguished recipients of this award.

[www.wcomarchive.org.uk/~hon-freedom](http://www.wcomarchive.org.uk/~hon-freedom)

**Pastmaster PAUL CAMPION**