



Kitchener of Khartoum Mason extraordinary

Of the many famous men who have been Freemasons, the first Earl Kitchener of Khartoum may be considered to have been the most active to patronise the Craft. In an extraordinary life, his onerous military commitment to his country was intertwined with the Masonic duties he pursued on behalf of the fraternity.

He belonged to 15 Lodges and Chapters whilst serving as District Grand Master of Egypt and the Sudan and of the Punjab in India. He was simultaneously Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Army and later in India, culminating in his appointment as Secretary of War before his untimely death in 1916. At the time he was holding active Masonic office.

Horatio Herbert Kitchener was born on 24 June 1850 near Ballylongford, Kerry, Ireland. Following in his father's footsteps into the army, after varied posts he moved to Egypt in 1882. Freemasonry was well established in the area, having been brought to Egypt in 1798 by Napoleon's armies and quickly spread through the region.

The National Grand Lodge of Egypt, formed in 1864, was quickly recognised, particularly in the light of the dignitaries who headed it. Soon, however, disillusioned with the many unrecognised Degrees and Orders being practiced by the National Grand Lodge, England decided to form, for a second time, its own District Grand Lodge, which brought some semblance of order and control.

Kitchener was 33 when he was initiated, almost certainly, in the Italian-speaking **La Concordia Lodge No. 1226 in Cairo in 1883**.

His initiation coincided with the increasing unrest in the Sudan and in 1895 the British government authorised Kitchener to launch a campaign to re-conquer the territory. It is quite extraordinary that during this period of tension and military activity Kitchener found time to develop his Masonic career.

In 1885 he joined the most senior **Lodge in Egypt, Bulwer Lodge No. 1068**. The first English Lodge with which he is associated, his name appears as a petitioner for the **Drury Lane Lodge**, consecrated *in absentia* on **25 January 1886**.

Kitchener became a joining member of the **Star of the East Chapter in 1892** (which, founded in 1891, was only erased in 1966). Finally, at a meeting of the Lodge in 1898, the Master, Gerald Maxwell, welcomes Lord Kitchener as 'The Victor of Omdurman'. Kitchener replies: 'It gives me the greatest pleasure to meet the Brethren of the Lodge, which is the first one I have joined in England'.

On 2 September 1898, General Kitchener led the British and Egyptian troops to victory over Sudanese tribesmen in the decisive battle of Omdurman, reoccupying Khartoum and establishing British control over the Sudan. It is here that he acquired the title of 'Kitchener of Khartoum'.

Meanwhile, Kitchener continued with his vigorous Masonic activities. In 1890 he joined the Greek-speaking **Hellas Lodge No. 1105**, later named Grecia Lodge, and was instrumental in its revival when it began to work in English. He was Master in 1892.

It was also at this time that his interest in the Orders beyond the Craft began. His standing as a national hero, and his enthusiasm for the Craft, ensured his rapid rise through the Masonic ranks in all the Orders. In 1895 he was appointed Past District Senior Grand Warden for Egypt and the Sudan, and in this capacity he was instrumental in the Foundation of the Fatih Lodge under the National Grand Lodge of Egypt and was made Honorary Master.

In the **Royal Arch** he became **First Principal of Star of the East Chapter in 1896**. In the same year he was appointed **Third Grand Principal of the Grand Chapter of Egypt** and received the Past rank of **Grand Scribe Nehemiah** from the Supreme Grand Chapter of England in 1897, the year of his appointment as a **Past Grand Warden of the United Grand Lodge of England**.

In the **Mark Degree**, he became Master of the **Nubia Mark Lodge No. 511 in 1898**. The Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of England also appointed him **Grand Junior Warden of the District of North Africa** in the same year. Kitchener was also made an **honorary member of Lodge of Edinburgh, St Mary's Chapel No. 1, Scottish Constitution**.

In November 1899, Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum was appointed Governor-General of the Sudan and the first District Grand Master of Egypt and the Sudan. Under the new re-established jurisdiction, all previous agreements with local Grand Lodges were cancelled and four new Lodges founded. Three were active in Cairo (Bulwer, Grecia and Star of the East) and one in Alexandria (Zetland). Kitchener was involved in all three Cairo Lodges, where he resided.

On 16 December 1899, Field-Marshal Lord Roberts (an active Freemason) was appointed Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in South Africa and Major-General Lord Kitchener as chief-of-staff. On 13 March, British troops occupied Bloemfontein, and on 1 September, the British annexation of the Transvaal was announced and Roberts handed over his command to Kitchener and returned to Britain at the end of November 1900.

Lord Kitchener attended the meeting on 23 April 1900 and signed a document, still in possession of the Lodge, proposing that a Royal Resolution be sent to the Prince of Wales concerning the health of Queen Victoria. Lord Roberts is also a signatory to this document. Kitchener's overlapping popularity as a national hero and a dedicated Freemason is reflected on the occasion of his visit to Ipswich on 22 September 1902, just before his posting from South Africa to the Punjab in India. Invited to receive the freedom of the borough, Kitchener also accepted **honorary membership in the British Union Lodge No. 114, Province of Suffolk**, at an emergency meeting called by the enterprising Master, G W Horsfield.

The Lodge commissioned an 18-carat gold version of their Past Master's jewel, adding a diamond five-pointed star mounted to the centre of the square and had it inscribed:
Presented to the Right Hon. The Viscount Kitchener GCB, GCMG, Past District Grand Master of Egypt and the Sudan, by the Worshipful Master, Wardens and Brethren of 'British Union' Lodge No. 114 September 22nd, 1902.

Lord Kitchener graciously accepted honorary membership of the Lodge and the jewel, ending his speech:
I thank you all very sincerely for this jewel, which I shall certainly wear - probably in India shortly, when I go there. I thank you all very much for the gift.

In October 1902, Kitchener was posted to India as commander-in-chief of the army, where he remained from 1902 till 1909 and was almost immediately appointed **District Grand Master of the Punjab**. He began to practise what was by now a familiar pattern of active interest in Masonic affairs. In 1903 he joined **Himalayan Brotherhood Lodge No. 459 in Simla**.

In the same year he became the **senior Founder Member of Kitchener Lodge No. 2998**, the first of the many Lodges to which he was to give his name. In 1907 he attended a meeting of the namesake of his mother Lodge, Concordia No. 3102, in Calcutta and assisted at the initiation, passing and raising on the same day of His Majesty Habibullah Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Kitchener was called home and the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith appointed him Secretary of State for War. In spring 1916, Asquith posted Kitchener to Russia in an attempt to encourage the country to maintain the fight against Germany. On 5 June, HMS *Hampshire*, on which Kitchener was sailing to Russia, struck a mine off the Orkneys. The British cruiser sank and Kitchener lost his life.

It was a sad end to an amazing life. In a tribute in the Quarterly Communication of the United Grand Lodge of England on 7 June 1916, Deputy Grand Master Sir Thomas Halsey stated:

Brethren, we were all taken aback yesterday when the news arrived of the loss of our distinguished Brother and that great Englishman, Lord Kitchener... as Englishmen we owe him a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid; and England will hold his name in honour from now onwards, after all of us have passed away, into the remotest generations in the future history of our Country... Lord Kitchener sleeps in the proudest grave in which he could have been laid: in the sea, in one of our English ships, surrounded and supported by those who have so nobly upheld the name of England... Grand Lodge expresses its profound sorrow at the tragic and untimely death of RW Bro Field-Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum and Aspal... The Craft mourns the loss of a distinguished Masonic administrator... (and) will ever hold in grateful regard and admiring reverence the fearless soldier and tireless organiser...

Fitting words to a great soldier and a great Freemason



A memorial card on Kitchener's death



1914: the famous World War I recruiting poster featuring Kitchener



Left to right
Jewel commemorating Kitchener's appointment as District Grand Master of the Sudan; two Founders jewels of Lodges named after him. These jewels were all owned and worn by Kitchener



A patriotic postcard of Kitchener "Unity is Strength"