

# The Emir of Afghanistan (1872-1919)

Freemason

A Royal Occasion

A Royal Masonic Occasion

(An Account of the entry of H M Habibullah Khan Amir of Afghanistan into Freemasonry)

By Sir Henry McMahon

Edited by Brian Coak 2011



Kabul 1879 & First 1839 -1842 & Second 1878 -1881 Afghan Wars



**H.M. Habibullah Khan** became Amir of Afghanistan on his father's death on 3.10.1901 by premogeniture, 'first born'.



The British Government in 1906 invited the Amir of Afghanistan to visit India and on his acceptance of the invitation, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, the Chief Commissioner of Baluchistan, was placed in charge of all matters connected with his stay in India. The Amir arrived at the Indian Frontier at Landi Kotal on 2 January 1907, accompanied by a numerous retinue, which included escorts of infantry and cavalry.

Then 34 years of age Habibullah had never before set foot outside his own country. He was, said Sir Henry, a man of very superior intellect and surprisingly, well informed on all general subjects.



A few days after his arrival, he astonished Sir Henry McMahon (left) by expressing a wish to become a Freemason, but not knowing his motives, Sir Henry gave him no encouragement. The Amir returned to the subject on several occasions without success. It was not until 22 January that Sir Henry realized how very much the Amir was in earnest when he had an urgent appeal for assistance in the matter on which had for a long time set his heart. He begged that it could be done; it should be without the knowledge of any of his staff or people.

Why the Emir should want to become a Mason, or how he came to learn anything about Freemasonry, Sir Henry was never able to discover. All the Amir ever admitted was that he had met good men who were Masons. He knew Freemasonry to be a good thing and wanted to enter it and knew something about operative Masonry was evident from the facility with which he recognised the various Freemasons marks on the stones of the old Moghul Emperors' tombs and places that they visited; such as those of the Emperor Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri; of the Emperor Humayun at Delhi and others.

The problem was one of extreme difficulty. The only Masonic Lodge in India which in any way met the requirement of the case was one in Calcutta, Lodge Concordia No.3102, with a small but exclusive membership restricted to British Civil and Military Officers of high standing. The Amir and his retinue were to arrive in Calcutta in six day's time on 28 January, and were to stay there for only one week. If the Amir were to be made a Mason it could only be in Calcutta, and whatever Masonic work had to be done must be done at one and the same meeting.

Apart from the Obligation of Secrecy, which it would be hard enough to ensure at even one visit to a Lodge, the crowded schedule of traveling and of official and social engagements made it impossible to fit in more than one Masonic meeting. In other words, if the Amir were to be made a Mason all three Degrees must be given to him at the same meeting 'on sight', and all Degrees must be waived. Only thirteen days were available to accomplish all this. Impossible as the matter seemed, Sir Henry was sufficiently impressed with the possible advantages of fulfilling the Amir's wish, to make a very strenuous effort.

Lord Kitchener at 33 was Initiated in 1883 in La Concordia Lodge No.1226 Cairo, UGLE, 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.



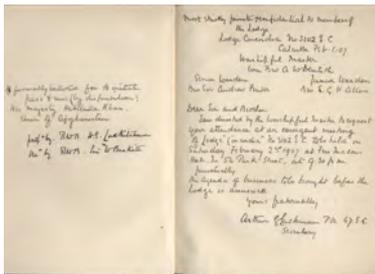
In 1903 he joined Himalayan Brotherhood Lodge No. 459 in Simla. In the same year he became the senior Founder Member of Kitchener Lodge No. 2998, the first of the many Lodges to which he was to give his name.

In 1907 he attended a meeting of the namesake of his mother Lodge Concordia No. 3102, in Calcutta and agreed to assist at the initiation, passing and raising on the same day of His Majesty Habibullah Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan. Most fortunately, Kitchener was, at the time, District Grand Master of the Punjab.

Sir Henry McMahon at once communicated to him the facts of the case, begging him to telegraph for an all-embracing dispensation to meet the many requirements of the occasion, to the Grand Master, the Duke of Connaught, who happened to be on a visit to Ceylon. This he did forthwith, and at once came the reply, "I approve of the Amir receiving three Degrees and give dispensation. Welcome him into the Craft in the name of Connaught". (*Kitchener & Staff*)



With these difficulties removed the rest of Sir Henry's task proved much easier. Getting into communication with the W. M. of Lodge Concordia, W Bro A. W. Dentith, he found him willing and eager to give all necessary assistance. It remained only to take every possible step to ensure absolute secrecy. W. Bro. Dentith called an emergency meeting of his Lodge for 2 February at 9.30pm, which notice was given by summons (handwritten), which he delivered by hand. (*Left*)



To understand the vital importance of secrecy, it is necessary to remember that this was the very first occasion on which the ruler of Afghanistan had ever ventured to leave his country. He had done so against the wishes and advice of his bigoted advisors, who prophesied that nothing but evil could come of his association with foreign infidels, and that his absence would give dangerous opportunities to ill-wishers to ferment conspiracy and trouble. It was, therefore, a matter of vital importance to prevent any knowledge of this present action from coming to the ears of his followers and then to the Afghan public. It would give his enemies at home a handle with which great harm could be done.

Among the numerous public engagements, the Amir was accordingly arranged a dinner on 2 February with the Commander-in-Chief of India, Lord Kitchener.

In the ordinary course when dining out the Amir was always accompanied by various members of his Afghan staff, but on this occasion the Amir, at the last moment, expressed a wish to go unaccompanied by any staff, as a special compliment to his friend, Lord Kitchener.

Thus he and Sir Henry went alone. Immediately after dinner, at which only Lord Kitchener and his small personal staff were present, the party drove unobserved to the Masonic Hall Park Road (*below*). There Lodge Concordia were waiting to receive them, and the proceedings of the evening began forthwith.

The Officers of the Lodge were:-

- ❖ W.M. W.Bro. A.W. Dentith, ICS.
- ❖ S.W. W.Bro. Sir Andrew H.L. Fraser, KCSI
- ❖ Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.
- ❖ J.W. W.Bro. Sir Charles G.H. Allen, ICS
- ❖ Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation.
- ❖ Secretary The Ven. W.A.G. Luckman
- ❖ Archdeacon of Calcutta.
- ❖ Treasurer W.Bro. J.C.E. Branson, ICS
- ❖ Accountant General of Bengal.
- ❖ Chaplain W.Bro. the Rev. Canon, T.E. Cole.
- ❖ S.D. Bro.General Sir Ronald MacDonald KCIE
- ❖ R.E., GOC, Presidency Brigade.
- ❖ J.D. Bro.W.D.R. Prentice, ICS.
- ❖ I.G. Bro.Major D. McCay, IMS.
- ❖ Tyler Bro.Captain PGH Hogg, RE.



(It is interesting to note that at least three Royal Engineers were present on this historic occasion. Lord Kitchener himself and General MacDonald were sappers as was, of course, Captain Hogg.)

The W.M. opened the Lodge at 9.45pm and then vacated the chair in favour of W. Bro. G. Lane Anderson the Deputy District Grand Master of Bengal. His Majesty Habibullah Khan Amir of Afghanistan was then proposed as a candidate for initiation by R.W. Bro. His Excellency Lord Kitchener, District Grand Master Punjab, (Commander-in-Chief India); seconded by R.W. Bro. Sir W. Burkitt, District Grand Master Bengal (Chief Justice of the United Provinces) and the ballot proved unanimous. The First, Second and Third Degrees were then conferred on the candidate in full (with the exception of the perambulations in the First and Second Degrees) by W. Bro. Lane Anderson, assisted by R.W. Bro. Lord Kitchener who gave portions of the First and Third Degrees.

An unusual feature of the proceedings was the fact that the candidate expressed his unwillingness to take part in any portion of the ceremony until he clearly understood its nature. As his knowledge of the English language was very imperfect it was necessary to explain everything to him in his own language – Persian. Knowing the likelihood of this, Sir Henry McMahon had volunteered to carry out the duties of Junior Deacon in the First Degree and of Senior Deacon in the Second and Third Degrees and throughout those ceremonies he had to carry out a running interpretation of each portion of the ritual in Persian, which naturally lengthened the proceedings of the evening. This task, moreover, was not made lighter by Lord Kitchener, who, at the conclusion of the Third Degree, delivered a somewhat lengthy but impressive address on the value of Freemasonry, which also needed translating into Persian.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, which were conducted in a very impressive manner, the WM resumed the chair and in a few graceful words bade the Amir a warm welcome into Freemasonry and membership of the Lodge. The proceedings terminated at midnight when the Amir was introduced personally to the officers and members of the Lodge, among whom the following were present:-

Sir James Meston, KCSI (later Lord Meston of Agra and Dunotter) (Financial Secretary to the Government of India). Col C.D. Phillpot, (Secretary to the Board of Examiners). Sir Robert Holland , KCIE, ICS, who took his departure and returned to Lord Kitchener's house whence Sir Henry McMahon, at a later hour, escorted him home.

To mark his gratitude to Lodge Concordia, the Amir presented the Lodge with a very handsome silver cup, the copy of the Koran on which he took his Obligations is now in the library of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Sir Henry McMahon recorded that so successful proved the measures taken to ensure security, that notwithstanding the curiosity of the Amir's own following, and the strong searchlight of the public and press which played on every action or movement of the Amir's during his visit to India, no knowledge of his Masonic episode ever came to light until after his return to Afghanistan. Then, from some unknown source, rumours of the Amir having become a Freemason began to spread, and the fanatical Mullahs of the country seized upon them for the purposes of trouble. On this coming to the Amir's knowledge he summoned the leading Mullahs to appear, and at a public Durbar informed all present that he was not only a Freemason but proud of being one; that he had become one to the benefit of his country and that if ever a Mullah were found to criticize his action in this matter he would pay for it with his head.

Sir Henry McMahon stressed that he could not conclude the historic account of the Amir's entry into Freemasonry without recording the important consequences of it.

That the Amir was profoundly impressed by Freemasonry became very evident to Sir Henry McMahon from the frequency with which, whenever they were alone together, the Amir kept harking back to the Masonic evening in Calcutta – to the various portions of the Ceremony and to what had been therein communicated to him.

Friendly and cordial as became his feeling toward British people during his intercourse with them, a feeling which grew deeper and stronger each day of his stay in India, Sir Henry McMahon regarded it of far less importance than the sense of confidence and trust in us that gradually grew up in his mind and which he carried away with him to Afghanistan. Sir Henry was convinced that his experience of Freemasonry played no small part in creating that trust and preserving it unweakened through the years to come.

Among his last words to Sir Henry on leaving India was the expression of a solemn vow to prove a faithful friend of England as long as England kept faith with him. How loyally he kept his word was proved throughout the Great War of 1914-18, when time after time missions were sent to Cabul from Turkey and Germany offering him alluring temptations of territory and power if he would only take their (the winning) side against us in the war. Not only did he hold out loyally against temptation, but, thanks to his firm hand on his country and the border tribes, the North West Frontier of India enjoyed complete peace throughout the war; so much so that Britain was able to denude British India of British and Indian forces and to send them to the other fields of war. The value of this to us was incalculable, as was soon proved when, within a few weeks of the end of the Great War, our loyal friend and ally was struck down by the hand of a cowardly assassin; the firm hand that had kept peace on our frontier was removed; Afghanistan feuded against us and British troops were sent rushing back in great strength to India. If this had been necessary during the war, the history of that war might have been changed.

The faithful friendship of his Majesty Habibullah Khan Amir of Afghanistan was by no means an unimportant factor in the successful issue of the war, and it is pleasant to think that Freemasonry played its part in creating and cementing the friendship that led to that result.

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, the first time a military man had held the post. 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 his colourful military & Masonic life.

*Footnote:*

*A copy of this report was read out in open Lodge in Faith and Confidence Lodge No. 8222, Winchester, by the late W Bro Lt Col FG Kemp PPJGW (Hampshire and the Isle of Wight). SLGR on the 21st May 1983. He passed to the Grand Lodge above on the 2nd August 1984. Recopied by W bro Lt Col CHL Turner (ret'd) PPGSwdB Faithand Confidence Lodge August 1992. Lodge Concordia No 3102 now meets in London. Cabul is now spelt Kabul.*

## The Amir Bro. Habibullah Khan's Demise

The Amir had been a loyal friend to Britain a relatively secular, reform-minded ruler who attempted to modernize his country.



In February 1919, Emir Habibullah Khan went on a hunting trip to Afghanistan's Laghman Province. (*Laghman Palace left*) Among those in his retinue were Nasrullah Khan a brother, Habibullah's first son Inayatullah, and Habibullah's commander-in-chief Nadir Khan.

On the evening of 20 February 1919, Habibullah was assassinated while in his tent leaving Nasrullah the heir successor to the Afghan throne.

The remainder of Habibullah's party journeyed south-east to Jalalabad, and on 21 February 1919 reached the city, whereupon Nasrullah immediately declared himself Emir, supported by Habibullah's first son Inayatullah.

Upon receiving the news, Amanullah Khan, third son of Habibullah by Habibullah's first wife, immediately seized control of the treasury at Kabul and staged a coup.

He took control of Kabul and the central government and imprisoned Nasrullah's supporters. On February 28, 1919, Amanullah proclaimed himself Emir, and on 3 March 1919 Nasrullah was arrested by Amanullah's forces.

On 13 April 1919, Amanullah held a Durbar (a royal court) in Kabul which inquired into Habibullah's death. It found a colonel in the Afghanistan military guilty of the crime, and had him executed. It also found Nasrullah complicit in the assassination. Nasrullah was sentenced to life imprisonment and was assassinated approximately one year later while in the royal jail.

## Afghanistan Battle of Kandahar British Forces 1880



## Afghanistan Battle of Kandahar Coalition Forces 2011



## Afghanistan Battle of Kandahar Taliban Forces 2011

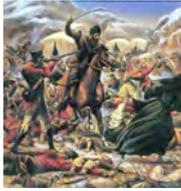


## Afghanistan Battle of Kandahar Life in 2011





## AFGHANISTAN



### First Afghan War Tribesmen Defeat the British Battle of Gandamak 1842

#### Casualties:

The entire force of 690 British soldiers, 2,840 Indian soldiers and 12,000 followers were killed or in a few cases taken prisoner. The 44th Foot lost 22 officers and 645 soldiers, mostly killed. Afghan casualties, largely Ghilzai tribesmen, are unknown.



### Second Afghan War British Defeat Tribesmen at Battle of Kandahar 1880

2nd Gurkhas & 92nd Highlanders repel attack by Tribesmen at Kandahar March

Highlanders, Sikhs and Gurkhas & British and Punjabi cavalry defeat Afghans being pursued across the plain on the far side of the river by the after the Battle of Kandahar.

**Casualties:** Roberts' force captured all Ayub Khan's guns, including the 2 guns captured from the Royal Horse Artillery at Maiwand. British and Indian casualties were 248 killed and wounded. Afghan casualties were estimated at around 2,500.

#### Masonry Kandahar Today



***"Wars are not won by evacuations" (W.Churchill 1874-1965)***

Brian L. Coak