


# The Roman Catholic Church and Freemasonry from UK Foreign Office files 1855–95

*The consistency of the UGLE's responses  
to the Vatican's charges since 1855*

 N 20 NOVEMBER 1894 THE GRAND MASTER MASON OF SCOTLAND, Sir Charles Dalrymple, of Newhailes, Musselburgh, wrote to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Kimberley,<sup>1</sup> about a Memorial he had received from the Scottish Constitution Lodge 'Star in the East' No. 640 in Yokohama, Japan. Its members sought Her Majesty's Government's protection from the possible effect of the Japanese government's implementation of the the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation that Lord Kimberley had signed on 16 July 1894.

The Foreign Office's brief for Kimberley's response included reports of HMG's earlier interventions with the Papal authorities about British Freemasonry. These reveal, probably

1. John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, *KG, KP, PC, DL* (1826–1902). Foreign Secretary (again) 1894–5. Signed Treaty with Japan in 1894.

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*To be presented to the Lodge 26 June 2025*

for the first time, the following points of interest: the limited extent of the FO's knowledge of Freemasonry; Pope Pius IX's immutable abhorrence of Freemasonry and his regret – in 1861 – that the Prince of Wales was to become a Freemason (though the Prince was not initiated until 1868). They also bring into question the subjects Lord Carnarvon<sup>2</sup> discussed with Cardinal Antonelli in 1857 and 1864, and provide further context to the Pro Grand Master's protest in the United Grand Lodge of England in 1884 against Pope Leo XIII's encyclical.

The paper concludes with the UGLE's response to the Vatican's confirmation in November 2023 of its charges against Freemasonry – and a question about the lead up to the initiation of the Prince of Wales in 1868.

### The Lodge 'Star in the East' Memorial<sup>3</sup>

In their Memorial of 25 September 1894 the senior members of the Scottish Constitution Lodge 'Star in the East' in Yokohama, Japan, begged their Grand Master Mason in Edinburgh, Sir Charles Dalrymple,<sup>4</sup> to ask the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Lord Kimberley] to have a protocol attached to the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation of 16 July 1894. The protocol would be intended to guarantee that they and their 'successors in perpetuity' – as British subjects – would retain 'the freedom we have hitherto enjoyed in Japan' and 'our rights and privileges as Freemasons.' The Memorial was to be circulated to all the Scottish and English lodges in Japan in the hope that they would support the claim to enjoy 'at least equal rights with those accorded to religion.'

### Sir Charles Dalrymple's Letter to Lord Kimberley<sup>5</sup>

Writing on 20 November 1894 to 'The Earl of Kimberley, KG', Sir Charles introduced himself as 'Grand Master Mason of Scotland' and added 'Baronet MP' after his signature. He brought to Lord Kimberley's attention:

a subject of great importance to Masonic Lodges in Japan holding from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, namely that the 'Masonic body in Japan are [sic] very apprehensive that under a new treaty recently made and ratified between Her Majesty the Queen, and the Emperor of Japan, which places British Residents under Japanese jurisdiction, and as Japanese law does not permit any institution or meeting of any secret society

2. 4th Earl of Carnarvon, 1831–90, initiated in 1856, Grand Master (Mark) 1860–62, Pro Grand Master (UGLE) 1874–90.

3. FO files at the National Archive, Kew, Nos. 134508 and 535.

4. Sir Charles Dalrymple, *PC, DL, JP* (1839–1916). Grand Master Mason of the Grand Lodge of Scotland 1894–96. Created a baronet in 1887, he was an MP for Ipswich from 1886 and was sworn of the Privy Council in 1905.

5. FO Nos. 133615–7.

upon the soil of Japan, the work of Masonic Lodges may be interfered with and their charitable objects prevented.

In presenting the Memorial Sir Charles hoped that Lord Kimberley 'may be able to allay the fears of the Freemasons in Japan or arrange for some addition to the Treaty by which the rights and privileges of the Masons may be secured.'

## The Foreign Office's advice to Lord Kimberley<sup>6</sup>

When the Office looked through its files to find what it had previously recorded about Freemasonry an official minuted as follows:

Such correspondence as appears to have taken place on the subject of the treatment of Freemasons does not throw much light on the point now raised by Sir Charles Dalrymple and the Freemasons in Japan. It has a religious rather than a political bearing, but it goes to show the line of argument adopted on one occasion by HM's Govt.

The case arose in the Mauritius in 1854, when the Governor of that Colony reported that the Roman Catholic Bishop in the Island, Bishop Collier,<sup>7</sup> had given effect to an instruction of Pope Clement XII of the year 1738 for the excommunication of persons enrolling themselves as members of Secret Societies, and had denied the Mass for the dead and other religious offices of his church in the case of persons who had enrolled themselves as Freemasons. The Roman Catholic Freemasons, stated to be a numerous body in the Colony, regarded the proceeding of this bishop as one of great oppression and severity, and claimed the protection of HM's Govt on the ground of their rights as a branch of the Gallican Church.<sup>8</sup>

The Secretary of State for the Colonies<sup>9</sup> considered it inexpedient to interfere directly, but suggested that an intimation might be conveyed to the authorities of the Church of Rome that serious dissatisfaction would probably spread amongst the large Roman Catholic population of Mauritius if the Bishop persisted in his course. (C.O. 30 Dec/54)

This was done through HM Minister at Florence. Mr. Lyons<sup>10</sup> (attached to that Legation, but resident at Rome) reported that the Roman authorities considered that

6. FO files 134219, 256, 303, 310, 334, 337, 351, 400, 403, 417, 430.

7. William Bernard Allen Collier (1802-90), born in Leyburn, Yorkshire, Bishop of Port-Louis, Mauritius, 1847-63.

8. According to Wikipedia, Professor John McGreevy defines Gallicanism as 'the notion that national customs might trump Roman (Catholic Church) regulations'. See J. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: Norton and Co., 2003) 26.

9. Sir George Grey, from 12 June 1854 till 8 February 1855.

10. Richard Bickerton Pemell Lyons, 1st Earl Lyons, GCB, GCMG, PC (26 April 1817 - 5 December 1887), later Lord Lyons, created 1st Baron 23 November 1858. According to Wikipedia (5 January 2025) 'Lord Lyons died before he had formally received the title of Earl: however, because the notice of his investiture with the title of Earl had appeared in the *London Gazette*, he is usually, nevertheless termed 1st Earl Lyons'. On 4 December 1887

the Bishop had acted in accordance with the rules of the Church and that it would be difficult to interfere. He stated that the Pope<sup>11</sup> had always expressed great abhorrence of Secret Societies, and had, in a recent allocution, applied to them the words from the Gospel of St John:<sup>12</sup> 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father will ye do', although, he added, it could hardly be supposed that the Pope intended the strong expressions he made use of to apply in all their force to such societies as the Freemasons. Moreover, the privileges of the Gallican church, he said, were hateful to Rome, as were appeals from the Civil Powers on Ecclesiastical matters.

In the course of this correspondence the Freemasons of Mauritius Memorialized the Queen on this subject, and amongst other remarks they asked whether Freemasonry, which in most civilized countries was presided over by a Prince of Royal Blood, could, consistently with reason, be classed among those secret societies mentioned in the Bulls.

Lord Clarendon<sup>13</sup> minuted this Memorial to be sent to Mr Lyons 'who will call serious attention of Cardl. Antonelli<sup>14</sup> to the exasperation caused by the conduct of the Bishop, who evidently has mistaken the real character of Freemasons in the Colony'; adding that 'H.M. Govt. would much prefer' the removal of the grievance by the Papal Govt 'to the matter being brought before Parliament, when the question of stopping the Bishop's salary would undoubtedly arise.' (C.O. 28 Jan. & 8 Feb. 1855)

Mr Lyons spoke strongly to Cardinal Antonelli of the bitter feeling which had grown up in Mauritius, and the probability of the creation of a schism to the prejudice of the Roman Church, as a result of the matter coming before the British Parliament. Eventually Cardinal Antonelli informed Mr Lyons that the Propaganda<sup>15</sup> would recommend Bishop Collier to act with the utmost prudence and conciliation which the conscientious discharge of his spiritual duties would permit, – that being all which Religion and the Laws of the Church would allow of its doing. (Mr Lyons, Nos. 10, 13 and 17 of 1855).

In connection with the Pope's impression of Freemasonry, it may be mentioned that in an Interview in 1861, between Mr Odo Russell<sup>16</sup> (who succeeded Mr Lyons at Rome)

Lord Carnarvon (then in Australia) mentions the rumour of Lyons's reception into the Roman Catholic Church. According to Wikipedia (5 January 2025) Lord Lyons had been totally incapacitated by a stroke in November 1887. However, the Bishop of Southwark, Dr Butt, 'felt so convinced of his disposition and intention that he received him into the Church and administered to him extreme unction.' Lyons died on 5 December.

11. Pope Pius IX (13 May 1792–7 February 1878) was head of the Catholic Church from 1846 to 1878.

12. John 8:44.

13. George William Frederick Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon, *KG, KP, GCB, PC* (12 January 1800–27 June 1870), Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1853–58.

14. Giacomo Antonelli (2 April 1806–6 November 1876) was the Pope's Cardinal Secretary of State from 1848 until his death.

15. Propaganda of the Faith, a congregation of the Roman Curia of the Catholic Church in Rome, responsible for missionary work and related activities.

16. Odo William Leopold Russell, 1st Baron Amptill, *GCB, GCMG, PC* (20 February 1829–25 August 1884) was the father of Arthur Oliver Villiers Russell, later 2nd Baron Amptill (1869–1935), Pro Grand Master of the

and the Pope, His Holiness said that he greatly regretted to hear that the Prince of Wales was about to become a Freemason, as he believed, from a book he had bought at Monte Video years ago, that the principles of freemasonry were anti-Christian. Mr. Russell replied that he believed our Freemasons to be a philanthropic Society, and that the most high principled persons belonged to it, including the King of Prussia. The Pope replied that Prince Murat<sup>17</sup> was also a Freemason, but that in no way changed his belief that Freemasonry was based on infidel principles. (Mr. O. Russell 5. 16 Jan'y 1861)

Another case arose in Brazil in 1873. A young bishop of Pernambuco, fresh from Rome, issued an interdict against Freemasons and against all fraternities who admitted them amongst their members. Riots resulted, for the Freemasons appear to have been ubiquitous in Brazil. The matter was referred by the Brazilian Govt. to the Council of State, who reported that the bishop's conduct was illegal and unconstitutional. The bishop disregarded this decision, but H.M's Minister reported that the result would be that the bishop would have to leave Brazil. (Mr. Matthew nos. 18 & 22 of 1873)

Such prosecutions of members of Secret Societies abroad as are on record, have been in connection with such associations as the Nihilists in Russia, the Camorristi in Italy, etc, and, in these cases, as the result of crimes committed against the state or against Individuals; but there is no analogy between these associations and Freemasonry, as far as the information available to the public enables one to judge; and it is scarcely conceivable that any civilized State should desire to strain its laws, framed no doubt with a view to the protection of the Govt. against revolutionary combinations, to the detriment of an association of Individuals whose functions appear, by their showing, to consist mainly of works of Charity. The Japanese Law, quoted in the memorial from the Japanese [sic] Freemasons, has for its object the preservation of peace, and declares, among other things, that "should the Police consider such meeting calculated to injure public peace or good order, they may attend & superintend it". It is true that it also declares that "any combination or meeting of a secret nature is interdicted", but it is doubtful whether this "Peace Preservation Regulation" could or would be made applicable to the Freemasons. In any case, the matter appears to be one which will have to be considered on its merits if ever it arises, - it could hardly be made the subject of a Treaty Stipulation. The effect of introducing into a Treaty a clause exempting Freemasons from its operation, or granting them any exceptional advantages, would no doubt be to call forth applications for similar treatment from other quarters. There are probably many associations or individuals besides Freemasons who consider that their interests would be better safeguarded under the existing regime in Japan than under that which will replace it when the time arrives for the Treaty to come into force; and it would be difficult to resist one claim while favouring another.

UGLE 1908-35.

17. Lucien Charles Joseph Napoléon, 3rd Prince Murat (16 May 1803-10 April 1878), was elected the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France in 1854.

But if, when the treaty is in force, any case of hardship should arise in which the Freemasons (being British subjects) were the sufferers, it would of course be open to H.M. Govt to represent the matter to the Govt of Japan, at the same time pointing out the real character of the Freemasons, as was done in the Mauritius case, and emphasizing the fact that the fraternity is acknowledged and tolerated throughout Europe and America and includes the most exalted personages in its ranks.<sup>18</sup>

A superior official, 'F.B', then added his proposal that Lord Kimberley should reply:

that the new Treaty will not come into force for at least five years, that the Japanese law quoted in the Memorial may before then be so modified as not to affect meetings of Freemasons, that when the question becomes a practical one it may possibly be desirable to make friendly representations to the Japanese government as to the philanthropic objects of Freemasonry, but at present it is not advisable to take any action to endeavour to obtain a modification of the law, and in any case it is not a matter which can properly be made the subject of a Treaty Stipulation.'

Kimberley approved that line of response with his initial K in red ink on 13 December 1894.

### UGLE and the Vatican: Comments and Context

The UGLE learnt officially of the alleged persecution of Freemasons in Mauritius in time for its Quarterly Communication held on 5 December 1855, when it was able to present to the Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France, RW Bro. Heullant, the following resolution:

That this Grand Lodge do sympathise with the Brethren in the Mauritius upon the persecutions they have experienced, and can only feel that they have proceeded from an entire ignorance of the principles of Freemasonry, which, while they inculcate Love and Honour to the Most High, Charity and Relief to the distressed, and Truth to all men, enforce obedience to the laws of every state which may, for the time, become the place of their residence, and whose protection they receive.

The lack of any further action by the UGLE in this matter and several other matters led to general criticism of the allegedly sclerotic 'dais' by, among other W. Bro. Revd George Portal. Once his friend, the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, had been initiated (in Westminster and Keystone Lodge No. 10 on 5 February 1856) and then quickly qualified as a Warden to attend Grand Lodge meetings, he too raised the matter of the Catholic Church's attitude towards Freemasonry and proposed at its Emergency Meeting on 11 February 1856

That Grand Lodge, having seen with regret the antagonistic position assumed by the Roman Catholic Church towards Masonry, desires the Board of General Purposes to

18. FO 134 400, 403, 417.

draw up a statement of the principles of the Order, that the same be sent to the Masters of all Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England in Roman Catholic countries, to be read by them as they shall think fit.

Bro. John Havers,<sup>19</sup> PSGD, powerfully demolished Carnarvon's motion:

I never listened to such observations in Grand Lodge with respect to any existing religious system. It is a new thing in my experience to hear reproaches uttered in Grand Lodge against any system of religion. We are taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion, and to strive, by the purity of our own conduct, to demonstrate our superior excellences. No matter what his object, if any Brother is permitted in such terms to rate the professors of another religion—that which is applicable to one is applicable to all - if you rate Romanism, why not Judaism, Methodism and the Scotch Kirk. It is contrary to our laws, both in letter and in spirit, and opposed to the traditions of our Order. I do hope, therefore, that such expressions will be confined within the walls of Grand Lodge;<sup>20</sup> ... I am sure that I shall carry with me the hearts and feelings of all when I say that, as Masons, we must not, on any account, vilify the religion of any one of our Brethren. I entirely agree, however, with the noble Brother who has moved this resolution, in deploring the intolerance of any religion which can refuse its consolations to members of our Society. We know, and we are proud to acknowledge, that we interfere with no man's religion or politics.

I am treading now on delicate and dangerous ground, but if you will give me your indulgence I shall be able to show you not only that this motion cannot be carried out, but that the plan proposed is utterly inadequate to accomplish the objects desired, viz. the condemnation and diminution of persecution. The means by which this object is proposed to be accomplished are, that the Board of General Purposes should draw up a statement of the principles of Freemasonry. What power has the Board of General Purposes to draw up such a statement, and what statement can they draw up superior to 'the Charge' which already exists? Is there anything which the Board of General Purposes knows which every Freemason does not know? Then, what do you propose to do with this statement? ... Are you going to send it to the persecutors? No! You are going to send it to the victims of the persecution ... The priests are the persecutors, and they are only carrying out their orders ... We should not remonstrate with individual priests, but with the Pope himself. We ought to get some Brother to represent the matter who has some interest with him ...'

In the ensuing discussion one member commented to the effect that both the RC Church and Freemasonry were voluntary associations, and it was for individuals to decide whether to belong to one or the other – or both. Another speaker opined that anything

19. Pres BGP 1858–60.

20. Havers's wish perhaps explains why the *Proceedings* of this Emergency Meeting of Grand Lodge are not to be found with the others but in the *Freemasons' Monthly Magazine* of 1 March 1857, 196–201.



more than a message of sympathy to the persecuted would risk exacerbating the situation. Carnarvon's motion was lost, but he continued to make his view plain in meetings of other lodges.

In May 1857 Carnarvon was installed as Master of Westminster and Keystone Lodge and exalted in the Royal Arch. In June he became a Mark Master Mason. One cannot doubt that he was fully charged, Masonically, to converse about Freemasonry. Later that year he spent some time in Italy and on 29 November 1857 he was introduced to Cardinal Antonelli by none other than the Mr Lyons of the British Foreign Office, who in 1855 had spoken 'strongly to Cardinal Antonelli of the bitter feeling which had grown up in Mauritius', as noted above. Carnarvon had known Lyons for a long time: even as a seven year old, according to his biographer,<sup>21</sup> he enjoyed a friendship with him. Is it not at least possible that Carnarvon and Bickerton Lyons discussed their mutual interest in the Vatican's attitude towards Freemasonry? And as Cardinal Antonelli was bound to have remembered the subject of his previous meeting with Mr Lyons (the alleged persecution of Freemasons in Mauritius) and may already have received intelligence of Carnarvon's activities as a Freemason, is it not surprising that Carnarvon found it worthwhile to record in his diary about his meeting with Antonelli only that 'Our conversation turned entirely upon fine arts and antiquities' – though he did add that 'as a Minister he seems as successful as the Papal ministers generally are.'<sup>22</sup> In December Carnarvon also met the Roman Catholic bishop of Cochin China. Hearing that 'within the last two years . . . nineteen of his flock have been martyred', Carnarvon commented: 'It is very satisfactory to find such common ground as this where it is possible to sympathise with the followers of a Church which in general one must so strongly condemn.'<sup>23</sup> While in Rome Carnarvon also called on Edward Howard, who had been ordained on 8 December 1854 by Cardinal Wiseman, the Archbishop of Westminster, in the Venerable English College.<sup>24</sup>

Carnarvon had another meeting with Antonelli in 1864 (by which time Carnarvon had been the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons, and Howard had become the Pope's domestic prelate), but again no evidence has been found that they discussed the Roman Church's attitude to Freemasonry. However, on 31 January 1878 Carnarvon briefed Sir Michael Hicks Beach, his successor as Secretary of State for the Colonies (and a fellow member of Westminster and Keystone Lodge) on Mauritius and the Roman Catholic archbishop there since 1871, Benedict Scarisbrick (from

21. A. Hardinge, *The Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, Fourth Earl of Carnarvon 1831–1890* (London; Edinburgh : Humphrey Milford, 1925).

22. BL Add 60891.

23. BL Add 6089.

24. Edward Howard of Norfolk (1829–92) was a nephew of the Duke of Norfolk and was created a Cardinal in 1877.



Liverpool).<sup>25</sup> More importantly, at the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge on 4 June 1884 Carnarvon – by then the Pro Grand Master – addressed Grand Lodge at length on the new Pope's<sup>26</sup> charge against Freemasonry and he submitted a motion 'in the most temperate language that we can command, but at the same time the most decisive, to protest against this charge, and to spread far and wide our protest against it':

First: That this Grand Lodge has seen with great regret the recent Encyclical letter in which the charges of Atheism, Sedition, and Vice are made against Masonry in general without discrimination or qualification;

And Secondly: That this Grand Lodge, whilst it does not deny that meetings for political and seditious purposes have in some countries been held under the pretence of their being Masonic Lodges, can only express its astonishment and regret that English Freemasonry should by some strange misapprehension of facts be included in this sweeping charge, which the law, practices, and traditions of the Order, as well as the position of its rulers, clearly prove to be utterly without foundation.

Unlike Carnarvon's 1856 motion, this resolution was seconded by the now RW Bro. John Havers, PJGW, PPresBGP, and carried unanimously.

Remarkably, in November 2023, 160 years after the report about the young Catholic bishop's conduct in Pernambuco in 1863 (see above), the UGLE had to consider how to respond, if at all, to a related issue that had arisen in the Philippines, following the Vatican's recent confirmation that Catholic doctrine is irreconcilable with Freemasonry.<sup>27</sup> On this occasion, and before the Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge on 13 December 2023, the Board of General Purposes included this passage in its restatement of the relationship of English Freemasonry and religion:

The Board has been giving the most earnest consideration to this subject, being convinced that it is of fundamental importance to the reputation and well-being of English Freemasonry that no misunderstanding should exist inside or outside the Craft.

It cannot be too strongly asserted that Masonry is neither a religion nor a substitute for religion. Masonry seeks to inculcate in its members a standard of conduct and behaviour which it believes to be acceptable to all creeds, but studiously refrains from intervening in the field of dogma or theology . . .<sup>28</sup>

25. BL Add 60911.

26. Leo XIII, since 1878. (Giacchino Vincenzo Raffaele Luigi Pecci, 2 March 1810 – 20 July 1903)

27. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/vatican-confirms-ban-on-catholics-becoming-freemasons-2023-11-15/>: Reuters' report that the Vatican's doctrinal office, in response to a bishop from the Philippines alarmed by the growing number of Freemasons in the country, had issued its opinion, dated 13 November and signed by Pope Francis, that active membership in Freemasonry by a member of the faithful is prohibited because of the irreconcilability between Catholic doctrine and Freemasonry.

28. UGLE's 'First Rising' issued in early December 2023.

For his part, at the meeting itself on 13 December 2023 the Pro GM – unlike his predecessor in 1884 (see above) – did not mention the Roman Catholic Church but added this comment to the BGP’s statement:

... [we] find ourselves having to state publicly again that Freemasonry, as practised by this Grand Lodge and the others represented here today, is secular, non-religious, and non-political. It is neither a religion nor a substitute for religion. Our members must profess a belief in God, a faith that remains personal to them. Our proud history of religious tolerance has nothing to do with the ‘indifferentism’ of which we are wrongly accused . . .<sup>29</sup>

In so doing the ProGM and the BGP were but confirming Grand Lodge’s reasons for refusing to support the motion proposed by Lord Carnarvon in 1856. *Plus ça change.*

### A Question to Conclude

This article ends with a question: what led the Pope in 1861 to tell Odo Russell that he understood that the Prince of Wales was about to become a Freemason? Neither in Masonic records nor in the Royal Archives has any evidence yet been found that the Prince of Wales had shown any such intention before his initiation in Stockholm in 1868 – or that the UGLE was aware of his initiation until it was reported in the press. A clue may lie somewhere in Oxford in the years 1859 to 1863. For the first two of these the prince was

technically registered at Christ Church ... while undergoing a little gentle tuition. In March 1863 the Brethren of Apollo [University Lodge] held a torchlight procession to celebrate his wedding. And in June that year the prince and princess were guests of honour at a Masonic Commemoration Ball in Oxford’s new Corn Exchange.<sup>30</sup>

Is it possible that the idea of initiating him was first planted by someone while the Prince was at the University, and that the festivities of 1863 were meant to encourage its development?



29. ProGM’s address in Grand Lodge, 13 December 2024, published in UGLE’s *Proceedings*.

30. J. M. Crook and J. W. Daniel, *Oxford Freemasons* (Oxford: Bodleian Press, 2018), 59.