

Honours conferred at the personal initiative of the Sovereign on New Zealanders and those with direct New Zealand connections

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Towards the end of the nineteenth century the British Prime Minister had almost complete control over the award of all imperial honours. Early in 1896 the premier, the Marquess of Salisbury, was asked by Queen Victoria's Private Secretary to give his views on a proposal by Her Majesty to institute an order which would be entirely in her personal gift. His lordship offered no objections. He made the proviso, however, that the Government must not be asked to contribute to the expenses incurred thereby. As a result of this consultation, the Royal Victorian Order was instituted on 21 April 1896.

Awards of the Royal Victorian Order were, and remained, at the sole discretion of the Sovereign. Although in the early years the Order was conferred on persons whom the Sovereign particularly wished to honour, today it is used to reward personal services to the Crown, and to members of the Royal Family.

The Knights and Dames Grand Cross of The Royal Victorian Order (GCVO) who are associated with New Zealand have normally been Governors-General. Dame Catherine Tizard, Governor-General 1990-96, was appointed in 1995. The Honourable Sir David Beattie, Governor-General 1980-85, was made a GCVO in 1981. The Honourable Sir Denis Blundell, Governor-General 1972-77, was appointed in 1974. Lord Porritt, Governor-General 1967-72, was appointed in 1970, and the Most Reverend Sir Paul Reeves, Governor-General 1985-90, was made a GCVO in 1986.

Other New Zealanders include Lord Grey of Naunton, Governor of Northern Ireland 1968-73, who was appointed as GCVO in 1973, after a long and distinguished career in the Diplomatic Service.

Brigadier Lord Ballantrae (Sir Bernard Fergusson), Governor-General 1962-67 became a GCVO in 1963. Lieutenant-General Lord Norrie, Governor-General 1952-57, was appointed in 1954. Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe, Commander-in-Chief Grand Fleet 1914-16, and Governor-General of New Zealand 1920-26, was appointed GCVO in 1916. Viscount Cobham, Governor-General of New Zealand 1957-62, and Lord Steward of Her Majesty's Household 1967-72, became a GCVO in 1972.

There have been many appointments over the years to the lower grades of the Royal Victorian Order, mainly in connection with arrangements for royal visits to New Zealand.

The Royal Victorian Chain was instituted in 1902 as an honour related to, but not forming a part of, the Royal Victorian Order. This is usually conferred upon foreign Sovereigns, especially those who are non-Christian and therefore ineligible to be made Knights of Order of the Garter. Senior members of the Royal Family, and of the Royal Household, and former Archbishops of Canterbury, have also received the Chain, which confers no title or precedence.

The Order of Merit was instituted on 23 June 1902, the award of which was again to be in the hands of the Sovereign. The twenty-four members, who receive no title or precedence, are eminent men and women in the arts and sciences. A military division of the Order also exists, and is rarely conferred upon very senior military naval and air officers.

New Zealanders who have been appointed members of the Order of Merit have included the British-based scientist Lord Rutherford in 1925, the historian Professor John Beaglehole in 1970 and the British-based Roman historian Sir Ronald Syme in 1976. The former Commander-in-Chief Grand Fleet, and subsequent Governor-General of New Zealand, Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Jellicoe, was appointed in 1916. The retired Chief of Air Staff Royal Air Force, and later Governor-General of New Zealand, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Newall was made an OM in 1940.

The Most Ancient Order of the Garter was created in about 1348, and is one of the earliest and most illustrious of the principal orders of European chivalry. Indeed, it is the only one which retains its ancient ceremonial character. However, with other honours, it passed into the control of the Prime Minister, with the gradual concentration of patronage in the hands of that official. The Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle, dating from 1687, but with an officially adopted legendary origin "lost in the mists of time", was also in the hands of the Sovereign's first minister by the nineteenth century.

In December 1946 Attlee, then Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party, and Winston Churchill, Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, agreed that henceforth both the Order of the Garter and the Order of the Thistle should be non-political honours. In future they would be conferred by the Sovereign without any previous formal submission tendering the advice of the Prime Minister. It was understood, however, that prior to the publication of any new appointments the Sovereign would inform the Prime Minister. This understanding is still followed.

The Garter is awarded to men (and since 1987 women) of distinction, of English and Welsh descent, and to those of Irish descent since the abeyance of the Order of St Patrick. Overseas subjects of the Sovereign, and foreign sovereigns also receive the Garter, whilst Scottish subjects, and those of Scottish descent, are eligible for the Thistle.

New Zealanders who have received the Garter include the author, lecturer and mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary in 1995, the Chief of the British Defence Staff Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Elworthy in 1977, and the former Governor-General and Prime Minister the Right Honourable Sir Keith Jacka Holyoake in 1980. The former Governor-General of New Zealand the Right Honourable Viscount Cobham was made a Knight of the Garter in 1964.

The only person directly associated with New Zealand to be made a Knight of the Order of the Thistle was former Governor-General Brigadier the Right Honourable Lord Ballantrae, the former Sir Bernard Fergusson, in 1974.

These personal royal honours are still awarded to overseas subjects of the Queen even where the other imperial honours are not now conferred. However, Governors-General have continued to receive British awards and decorations even after this has ceased to be

customary for other citizens of the particular realm. Thus Roland Michener, Governor-General of Canada 1967-74, received the Royal Victorian Chain in 1973.

While these honours, such as the Order of the Garter, constitute part of the royal honours system, the position of the peerage is much more limited in application to the United Kingdom. Yet the last British-born Governors-General of Canada all received peerages, the last, Earl Alexander of Tunis, in 1952. Similarly Viscount Slim, the penultimate British Governor-General of Australia, was made a peer- the last, Viscount De L'Isle, having already been elevated from baron prior to his appointment. In New Zealand, most Governors-General were made peers until Lord Porritt, the last British-based appointee, though New Zealand-born. These peerages were for services to The Queen, and to the countries concerned.

The Prime Ministers of the Queen's realms have generally continued to receive royal honours. The former Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau was made a Companion of Honour in 1984, as was John Diefenbaker in 1976. Almost all of Her Majesty's prime ministers have been members of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, even where judicial appeals no longer lie to the Privy Council. Lester Pearson was the last Canadian to be made a Privy Counsellor, but Australian Prime Ministers have all been Privy Counsellors until now, excepting those of the Labour Party, the last of those members to receive this appointment was Arthur Calwell, in 1967.

Richard Bennett (Prime Minister 1930-35) had the distinction of being the only Canadian prime minister to be ennobled, as Viscount Bennett, in 1941. No Australian or New Zealand prime ministers have been ennobled, but several have received baronetcies, such as the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Ward, Prime Minister of New Zealand 1906-12 and 1928-30, who was made a baronet 1911.

The Prime Minister's Advisory Committee on Honours recommended in 1995 that existing British awards be replaced by a New Zealand Order of Merit. The only British awards which would continue would be those which The Queen awards personally. The Government accepted the report of the Committee on 15 February 1996. It was particularly significant that The Queen, although font of honour, was not consulted until after the committee had completed its task and had publicly released its recommendations. Indeed some senior cabinet figures had wanted an end to all honours, including the personal Orders of The Queen. The personal prerogative of The Queen remains, and the example of Canada would suggest that the personal awards of the Sovereign are likely to prove resilient.