**The Grey-Harris & Co. 2020 Delhi Durbar**

The 2020 Delhi Durbar is to be held in the window of the showroom of Grey-Harris & Co. Clifton, Bristol, from 3 November. It captures the vibrancy and splendour of the 1903 Indian assembly, organised to mark the accession of King Edward VII. David Cartwright’s miniature parade of metal soldiers for sale perfectly recreates this significant historical event, where the cast of 580 processed through Delhi’s dazzling sunshine. With camels, horses and military bands, you can virtually hear the tiny echoes of heralds and elephants in suspended advancement.

**‘The biggest thing ever seen in India’**

Albert Edward, subsequently Edward VII (1841 – 1910), came to the throne later in life, at the age of 58. At this time, the Viceroy of India was the flamboyant George Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Marquess of Kedleston (1859 – 1925), who held the post from 1899. A man of mixed reputation, a contemporary riddle stated: ‘My name is George Nathaniel Curzon, I am a most superior person, my cheek is pink, my hair is sleek, I dine at Blenheim once a week’. Nonetheless, Curzon was also industrious, indefatigable and driven, almost single-handedly masterminding the 1903 Durbar to celebrate the inauguration of Edward and his queen, Alexandra of Denmark.

Taking over two years in the planning, it must have come as a bitter disappointment to Curzon when Edward succumbed to appendicitis, sending his brother and sister-in-law – the Duke and Duchess of Connaught – to India in his stead. The couple arrived with a mass of dignitaries by train from Bombay, just as Curzon and his government hurried back to Delhi from Calcutta. The absence of a king was to be the Durbar’s one and only set-back, however, unless you count the disgraced elephant of Cutch, banished from the opening procession for rampaging out of hand and refusing to obey orders. Mercifully, a clause in the Delhi Durbar Police Act explicitly warned against anybody who ‘rides or drives any animal *or* vehicle in a rash or negligent manner’.

In fact, the 1903 Durbar proved to be the most extravagant of them all; in Curzon’s own words, ‘the biggest thing ever seen in India’. It outshone both Queen Victoria’s earlier ceremony in 1877, and King George V’s third and final Durbar of 1911, and was attended by more than 100,000 people. Such a dazzling display of pomp and pageantry necessitated the conversion of a deserted park near Nirankari Sarovar into a tented city, complete with telephone services, drainage and electricity, a light railway and even a post office with its own stamp. Shops and food stalls sprang up, alongside a Police force with a specially designed uniform, and a hospital. Souvenir guide books were written, maps of the route distributed and commemorative medals struck, two of which appear in the Bristol exhibition.

The actual Durbar ceremony, during which the coronation proclamation was read out to the sound of trumpets, took place on Thursday 1 January, 1903. However, as the photographer and eye-witness James Ricalton reported: ‘There was some marvellous and strange function for each day of the Durbar’. The official programme recorded almost a fortnight of events, beginning with the State Arrival of the Viceroy on Monday, 29 December 1902, and ending with the State Departures of the Viceroy and Duke and Duchess of Connaught on Saturday, 10 January 1903. There was also an Elephant Procession and a grand opening of the Indian Art Exhibition, each of which was documented by Ricalton. In addition, there were polo tournaments, cricket and football matches, a State Ball, bands, fireworks and illuminations. The world’s press dispatched their best journalists, artists and photographers to cover the proceedings, resulting in works like Roderick MacKenzie’s monumental *The State Entry into Delhi* (1903, oil on canvas, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery).

Doubtless the most famous of all the Durbar’s events was the kaleidoscopic opening procession, recreated in the windows of Grey-Harris & Co. by Cartwright’s metal pieces. Marked by fanfare and ceremony, 15,000 spectators lined the route between the Red Fort, former residence of the Mughal Emperors, and the sixteenth-century Jumma Masjid. Participants included his Highness the Nizam and the Maharajas of Mysore, Travancore and Kashmir, a triumphant Curzon and the Connaughts, all parading though the streets of Delhi on elephants. Royals from 166 princely states of India were present, including Rajahs, Nawabs and other minor chiefs. After skirting the great sandstone and marble mosque with its towering minarets, the procession continued on towards Delhi’s main street, the famous Chadni Chowk.

Mary Curzon wore a legendary peacock gown of silver and gold thread, designed by Jean-Phillipe Worth specifically for the occasion and still preserved at Kedlestone Hall, but nothing could outshine the maharajas, with their mahouts and bejewelled elephants. These rugged giants were draped in long silver chains which chimed at every step, resonating their deep cultural significance as they trundled triumphantly up the Durbar route.

**The Cartwright Collection**

‘The Cartwright Collection’ of metal toy soldiers, which makes up the majority of the exhibition at Grey-Harris & Co. and are now for sale, was lovingly acquired between 1985 and 2018. As a former military man, Marlborough toy soldiers have always held a special appeal for David Cartwright, but his idea was to assemble figures depicting the specific participants of the 1903 Delhi Durbar. The collection, many of which are hand painted by David himself, comprise over 580 different figures in 93 sets, including British and Indian troops from various regiments, twelve maharajas, fourteen elephants, camels, marching musicians and several civilian and bazaar sets. The centrepiece being, of course, the Duke of Connaught in all his glory, standing in for the King-Emperor Edward VII. Many toy soldier manufacturers created figures representing this historic event, but most no longer make a Durbar series, adding to the rarity of the collection.

**The Medals**

In addition to the Cartwright Collection, the Grey-Harris & Co. Delhi Durbar includes various other items for sale, including a few pieces of jewellery and two 1903 silver medals. These commemorative badges, struck by the Royal Mint, were awarded to all those who took part in the event. Preserved within the British Library, the 1903 Delhi Durbar Roll records the distribution list of each and every one of these medals, although they were issued unnamed. 140 gold medals were presented to Native Princes and high-ranking British officials, as well as to Curzon, Connaught and King Edward VII himself, whilst a staggering 2,567 more silver pieces were awarded to the Indian State and Police Forces, civil servants, the British Army and other notable civilians.

Measuring 38.5mm in diameter, the medal is larger than most campaign or coronation medals of its kind, and bears the crowned effigy of the king. Designed by the celebrated British medallist, George William de Saulles, the spelling of ‘Darbar’ was derived from the Persian ‘Dar’, meaning ‘gate’, and ‘Bar’, meaning ‘a court’. In Hindustani this had the perfect double meaning of ‘a state ceremony’. On the reverse of the medals, the Persian inscription is bordered by thistles, shamrocks and roses, and reads: ‘By grace of the Lord of the Realm, Edward, King, Emperor of India, 1901’. The medal hangs from a pale blue ribbon, with a central navy stripe.

Ultimately, the Cartwright collection of metal figures are among the most sought-after hand painted items of their kind available today. Together with the medals and other pieces, they form a lasting record of a dazzling ceremonial occasion, and one which ushered in an age of relative peace in India.