Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century

Helen Trompeteler, Queen Victoria and the Photographic Expression of Widowhood. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 33 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.4717>

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Queen Victoria and the Photographic Expression of Widowhood

Helen Trompeteler

After Prince Albert's death in 1861, Queen Victoria began an extended period of mourning that remains indelibly linked to perceptions of her identity and visual representation. This article firstly addresses the place of photography in the construction of family memory and examines how Victoria used photography to articulate her private grief and to remember Albert in the context of both her immediate and extended family. Secondly, I seek to establish the ways in which this private image is made public and is circulated by Victoria to generate popular empathy and support for political ends. Lastly, I touch on the global reach of this, and question how mourning and widowhood are implicated in international royal networks and imperial power. Thus, the article reveals the photograph of the mourning widow as more than just an illustration of Victoria and her grief; rather, it shows how the medium shapes that grief and makes it useful for monarchy and empire.

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Introduction

After Prince Albert's death in 1861, Queen Victoria began an extended period of mourning that remains indelibly linked to perceptions of her identity and visual representation. During the Victorian era in Britain, death permeated everyday life, especially for the poor and middle classes. Infant mortality rates rose throughout the nineteenth century. Additionally, the 1860s and early 1870s saw a succession of dangerous epidemics in Britain and Europe, such as typhoid (in the early 1860s), cholera (1866–67), and smallpox (1870–71). Therefore, for these audiences, Victoria's personal grief would have spoken to a commonality of shared experience.

What characterizes Victoria's mourning is the centrality of photography. Despite being a young technology, photography had been quickly adopted by the Victorians for its perceived veracity, in part informed by interest in phrenology and physiognomy. The widespread concept of likeness in relation to photographic portraiture also connected with early perceptions of photography as being associated with magic or the supernatural.[1] The aura that Victorian publics associated with early photography can also be attributed to the unique material qualities of early processes. Daguerreotypes, with their silver mirror-like surface, had to be intimately held and tilted so that an image could fully appear and recall the sense of encountering a sitter. Viewing stereographs was also an enormously popular pastime. Stereographs, which consisted of two photographs mounted side by side, could be viewed through a special viewer to create depth and a lifelike three-dimensional effect.[2] Informed by these approaches and perceptions, photography became an important ritual and focus point for families to process grief and loss.

By the time of Albert's death, photography had already become part of the visual ritual of mourning, but it had a particular relevance for Victoria, as the monarch. Photography is what enabled her to mourn in private and yet be monarch in public; indeed, the photograph enabled the public and private to be synthesized. Moreover, the photographic image of Victoria in mourning became the template for her public image throughout the rest of her reign, an image which similarly balances the public and the private, duty and affect.

This article will explore this in three sections. First, I will address the place of photography in the construction of family memory and examine how Victoria uses photography to articulate her private grief and to remember Albert in the context of

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[1] Mary Warner Marien, *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History 1839–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 76.

[2] Jonathan Potter, *Discourses of Vision in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Seeing, Thinking, Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 145.

both her immediate and extended family. Secondly, I will seek to establish the ways in which this private image is made public and is circulated by Victoria to generate popular empathy and support for political ends. Lastly, I will touch on the global reach of this, and question how mourning and widowhood are implicated in international royal networks and imperial power. Thus, the article reveals the photograph of the mourning widow as more than just an illustration of Victoria and her grief; rather, it will also show how the medium shapes that grief and makes it useful for monarchy and empire.

‘To do good was your aspiration and you were joy and happiness to us’: mourning photography and family memory

During the 1850s Queen Victoria and Prince Albert regularly employed and commissioned photographers to document their growing family and important family occasions. They also expressed their devotion to one another through the purchase and commissioning of photographs.[3] These family photographs were intended for private use by members of the royal family and their immediate circle, but the Queen was evidently aware of the power they possessed to reveal emotion and intimacy.[4] In 1852 she commissioned photographer William Kilburn to make her daguerreotype portrait with her five eldest children. Displeased with what she perceived as an unflattering image of herself, she scratched out her face on the plate while leaving the images of the children intact. Albert’s early death inevitably changed the future scope and development of Victoria’s private collecting of photography. His interests were diverse and wide-ranging, encompassing many subjects across the sciences and arts. While Victoria continued several of Albert’s album series and projects after his death, her personal interests lay especially in portraiture, and her private collection of photographs expanded in this area. Photography became a vital means for the royal family to express their grief and memorialize Albert’s central role within family life. The prolific nature of Victoria’s commissioning of family portraiture signals her desire to use photography to emphasize the continued stability of her family during an extended period of personal crisis.

In a small album of photographs documenting interiors at Windsor and Frogmore immediately after Albert’s death, Queen Victoria added an inscription on the back

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3 Privy Purse bills and receipts in the Royal Archives evidence the extent of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert’s commissioning of photographers during this period. See Royal Collection Trust, ‘Collecting Photographs’ <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-archives/prince-alberts-personal-papers/collecting-photographs> [accessed 28 November 2021].

4 These family photographs laid the foundations for the Photographs Collection of the Royal Collection <https://www.rct.uk/collection> [accessed 28 November 2021].

page: ‘To do good was your aspiration and you were joy and happiness to us.’[5] This phrase illustrates the intimate relationship between compiling photograph albums and perpetuating family memory. Many family mourning photographs included one of William Theed’s posthumous busts of Albert.[6] Theed was one of Victoria and Albert’s favourite artists, and the original commemorative bust was executed under Victoria’s close supervision. In mourning photographs sculpture is used as a stand-in for Albert to emphasize his continued presence at the heart of the family. The technical limitations of photography at this time often add to the ethereal nature of such photographs, with the soft contrasts of sculpted marble not always registered. In contrast dark silks and fabrics were specifically identified by early photographers as contributing to the success of a photographic portrait. In 1855 clergyman and novelist Edward Bradley, writing under the pen name Cuthbert Bede, reported John Jabez Edwin Mayall’s advice as follows:

> Ladies are informed that dark silks and satins are best for dresses; shot silk, checked, striped or figured materials are good, provided they not be too light. The colours to be avoided are white, light blue and pink. The only dark material unsuited is black velvet.[7]

One of the photographic sittings to utilize Theed’s bust as a compositional device successfully is a series of photographs which was taken to commemorate the wedding of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) to Princess Alexandra of Denmark at St George’s Chapel, Windsor, on 10 March 1863. This occasion was the first royal wedding held at St George’s, due to Victoria’s continued seclusion. The Queen did not take part in the wedding ceremony, instead observing the proceedings from a private box above the chapel. The wedding garnered much excitement among the British public and offered a temporary respite from preoccupation with Victoria’s mourning. Subsequently, public interest in the social circles that the Prince and Princess of Wales established at Marlborough House and Sandringham allowed some further temporary distraction.

Mayall’s group portrait, taken a month after the wedding, shows Theed’s bust of Prince Albert at the centre of the image (*Fig. 1*). Additionally, Princess Alexandra holds a framed photograph of him which she tilts towards the viewer. This use of a photograph

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[5] Various photographers, *Windsor and Frogmore 1861–1862*, leather bound photograph album, Royal Collection, RCIN 2103973.

[6] These family mourning photographs remain in the Royal Collection and can be viewed online at ‘Mourning Portraits’ <https://albert.rct.uk/memorial-works/mourning-portraits> [accessed 28 November 2021].

[7] Quoted in John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 182.

within the photograph poignantly honours Albert's life and implies his approval of Princess Alexandra's inclusion into the royal family.

Fig. 1: John Jabez Edwin Mayall, *Group Portrait with a Bust of Prince Albert*, April 1863, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

By representing an absent person within an image of the living, Queen Victoria was utilizing a visual language that would have been very familiar in Western culture.[8] One of Victoria's private negatives documents a painting in this tradition, indicating her clear knowledge of the long-established traditions of such iconography. This negative in the Royal Collection dating from *c.* 1851–70 depicts a painting of an unidentified woman in mourning dress. Shown prominently in the background is the bust of a male figure, thereby emphasizing familial relations of importance.

The incorporation of death into family portraiture, as manifested by the regular inclusion of Theed's bust of Prince Albert, introduced a visual composition which was echoed in many paintings throughout Victoria's later reign. Arguably, one of the most

[8] Queen Victoria's direct agency in commissioning such photographs is evidenced by bills and receipts that survive in the Royal Archives. See, for example, Windsor, Royal Archives, Bill, with receipt, issued by William Bambridge for photography and printing photographs, 31 March–25 April 1862, RA PPTO/PP/QV/PP2/60/3477. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

successful paintings depicting the Queen in mourning was Albert Graefle's portrait of her.[9] Graefle was a close associate of Franz Xaver Winterhalter, a painter especially favoured by the royal family. In this painting Victoria is shown in mourning dress. On the table next to her is a box of Foreign Office papers and a bust of Albert by Theed, implying Albert's continued influence on Victoria's political vision. When the Queen was sitting for this portrait, she wrote in her journal that Graefle was 'such a clever painter & paints so fresh and cleanly. His likenesses are also very good.'[10] This painting was clearly admired by Victoria, as a surviving negative in the Royal Collection shows it prominently on display in her private apartments.[11] Importantly, Graefle's portrait marks a shift in representation. Victoria wears the clothing and Mary Stuart shaped widow's cap associated with a young widow. However, she is no longer solely looking in devotion at Albert's bust but looks ahead to the future, while still reinforcing the visual narrative of their inseparable union. It is significant that it was not completed until 1864, three years after Albert's death, and that portrait commissions during the intervening years were abandoned.[12] This suggests the complexity of the challenge in reconstructing a new visual identity for the Queen which, while satisfying personal and family needs, could also serve a national imperative. The indexicality of the photography the Queen commissioned and its established place in the material culture of mourning gave the photographs an emotional force that proved hard for portrait painters to achieve. Graefle's painting, which seeks to combine the iconography of state portraiture in its inclusion of the Queen's ermine-trimmed robes arranged over the chair on which she sits, presents a less convincing message about either the Queen's private or her public body.

Queen Victoria's appreciation of the power of photography in capturing and commemorating family histories drove the collecting and commissioning of family photographs throughout the later decades of her reign. Her most prolific series of albums are forty-four family photograph albums titled *Portraits of Royal Children* produced between 1848 and 1899. These combined private and commercially distributed portraits and are a testament to Victoria's desire to use photography to record and promote the continued stability of her dynasty as part of a European dynastic network. This is especially evident in a group photograph by Eduard Uhlenhuth of Queen Victoria and descendants, taken in Albert's hometown of Coburg on 21 April 1894 (*Fig. 2*). This photograph shows the Queen still wearing mourning for her husband, surrounded by

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9 Albert Graefle, *Queen Victoria*, 1864, oil on canvas, Royal Collection, RCIN 403884.

10 Windsor, Royal Archives, *Queen Victoria's Journal* (*QVJ*), RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1864, 15 February 1864. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The journal can be accessed online at <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org>.

11 Unknown photographer, *Interior View of Queen Victoria's Apartment*, glass plate negative, Royal Collection, RCIN 2084880.

12 Sir Joseph Noël Paton, *In Memoriam*, 1863–64, oil on canvas, Royal Collection, RCIN 405162.

descendants from across Europe, assembled for the wedding of Princess Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (the daughter of Victoria's son, Alfred) and the Grand Duke of Hesse (the son of Victoria's daughter, Alice). The photograph represents Victoria's position as the 'grandmother' of Europe at the moment before family alliances began to collapse and Europe eventually erupted into war in 1914. Victoria recorded the event in her journal for 21 April 1894: 'the whole of our large family party were photographed by English, as well as German photographers. Many groups were taken, & some of me with Vicky & my 3 sons, & William.'[13] Victoria's assured use of photography to safeguard family memory extended to ordering the documentation of her own collection. From the late 1880s to 1891, she commissioned photographers Hughes and Mullins to create a catalogue of her private negatives and photographs, which spanned over two thousand negatives.[14]

Fig. 2: Eduard Uhlenhuth, *Queen Victoria and Her Descendants, Coburg*, 21 April 1894, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

[13] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1894, 21 April 1894. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

[14] Hughes and Mullins was the business partnership of photographers Cornelius Jabez Hughes (1819–1884) and Gustav William Henry Mullins (1854–1921). The surviving glass plate negatives remain in the Royal Collection, RCIN 2079258–2079425, 2082362, 2082365–2082758, 2082930–2083319, 2083561–2084477, 2084661–2084963, 2119164, 2506821, 2507998–2508068.

‘Kind sister widows’: mourning photography and public empathy

Queen Victoria was present at very few public events immediately after Prince Albert’s death. Most of these were connected to the unveiling of memorial statues to the prince, such as in Aberdeen in October 1863 and Coburg in August 1865. In February 1866 the Queen opened Parliament in person, an event which the press welcomed as a day that would live in the memories of all those who were fortunate to be present. However, in the years of Victoria’s seclusion, she was heavily criticized by the popular press. This is illustrated by Sir John Tenniel’s cartoon ‘Queen Hermione’, published in *Punch* (23 September 1865). In this reimagined scene from Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, v. 3, Britannia as Paulina unveils a statue of Victoria frozen in time and pleads ‘’Tis Time! Descend; Be Stone No More!’. *The Times* echoed such sentiment, stating that it was ‘impossible for a recluse to occupy the British Throne without a gradual weakening of that authority which the Sovereign has been accustomed to exert’.[15]

Queen Victoria did not officially return to public ceremonial duties until 1872 and during this time she was confronted by a complex personal and political dilemma. As a woman, she had to adhere to the nineteenth century’s strict societal codes surrounding mourning behaviour, while never compromising the authority of the monarchy. For eleven years after 1861, Victoria privately worked with her ministers to conduct state affairs while withdrawing from public life. This absence contributed to a new wave of republican and anti-monarchical sentiment, and in response to this long period of personal and political crisis, the Queen employed the private strategies used for representing mourning in photography to recast her image in the public realm. The public display of private grief, like the regulation of personal mourning by social convention, in connecting both the private and public, was something that Victoria could exploit.

During the 1850s the circulation of family photographs had been strictly in the private sphere of life within the royal family and their immediate circle. The first public showing of a photograph of the Queen occurred in May 1858. Leonida Caldesi’s 1857 group portrait of the royal family at Osborne House was exhibited in the London Photographic Society’s fifth annual exhibition.[16] This informal image was never originally intended for public consumption. While visitors to the exhibition would have been limited, the portrait received positive attention in the press for ‘displaying most vividly the domestic character’ (Plunkett, p. 143). A print after this photograph was subsequently issued by print-seller Dominic Colnaghi in June 1859, indicating a

[15] Editorial, *The Times*, 15 December 1864, p. 8.

[16] Leonida Caldesi, *The Royal Family at Osborne, 27 May 1857*, salted paper print, Royal Collection, RCIN 2906244 <https://www.rct.uk/collection/2906244/the-royal-family-at-osborne> [accessed 28 November 2021].

growing public demand for single images which represented the Queen's public and private selves as monarch, wife, and mother.

Victoria's interest in the circulation of her image was solidified in 1860 when she authorized photographer John Jabez Edwin Mayall to produce and publish a set of *carte-de-visite* format portraits of herself and the royal family. The resulting *Royal Family Album* was an enormous commercial success. After only a few days on sale, wholesalers had ordered 60,000 sets.[17] The publication of Mayall's *Royal Family Album* exemplified how the first celebrity *cartes* became part of popular culture and solidified the commercial potential of photography. The Queen's interest in the circulation of her image was further demonstrated by her successful resistance to several proposed taxes on photographs.[18]

Writers such as Martha Langford and many others have discussed the equalizing properties of the *carte de visite*.[19] The affordability of this type of commissioned portraiture meant that it gradually became a common experience across social hierarchies. Additionally, the uniformity of pose, props, and backdrops within the conventions of nineteenth-century studio portraiture also allowed for a perceived fluidity across social positions. Mayall's series commissioned for the Queen was produced in standard materials, to standard size, and was affordable, allowing it to be collected, especially as postal networks expanded, and displayed on common terms. The appeal of Mayall's photographs lay in their portrayal of the Queen not as a sovereign, but as a mother and wife, promoting a matriarchal image that was relatable to her publics.

Queen Victoria sustained this concern for her photographic image and its circulation when approving the distribution of selected *carte-de-visite* photographs after Albert's death, including a series by William Bambridge and Ghémar Frères. This form of circulation allowed Victoria's likeness to be immediately present, despite her physical absence from public life. The public reception of such *cartes* was occasionally mixed, with the *London Review*, for example, finding them to be uncomfortably intimate (Plunkett, p. 180). Yet the speed in the creation, production, and dissemination of *cartes de visite* made it possible for Victoria to reposition herself publicly for a nation in mourning. Between 1860 and 1862 three to four million copies of *cartes* of Victoria were

[17] Plunkett, pp. 147–48. For further discussion of Queen Victoria's engagement with the photographic medium in the interest of self-promotion and image making, see Adrienne Munich, *Queen Victoria's Secrets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837–1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[18] Margaret Homans, '"To the Queen's Private Apartments": Royal Family Portraiture and the Construction of Victoria's Sovereign Obedience', *Victorian Studies*, 37 (1993), 1–41 (p. 28).

[19] Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 132.

claimed to have been sold, demonstrating a breadth of public impact that could not be achieved by real-life encounters with her person.

Visual and historical anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards has regularly emphasized the sensual and tactile experience of photographs, as objects to be handled, framed, caressed, and even wept over, amid a range of physical gestures.[20] These physical interactions with a photographic object regularly appear in mourning photographs as important compositional devices. Such depictions of touch gained added poignancy when considering that portrayals of the Queen's touch had to perform as a substitute for her physical presence. A recurring theme in depictions of Victoria's mourning is an emphasis on the photograph as a conduit between the deceased and living cross-generational sitters — linking past, present, and future together. Of special interest to this fundamental theme is a portrait of Victoria and Princess Beatrice taken in October 1862 by Louis Joseph Ghémar, which emblematizes the significance of touch and the ways in which photography is embedded in a wider culture of mourning and memory (*Fig. 3*). Copies of this portrait were distributed commercially as *cartes de visite* and would have been collected and assembled into personal albums belonging to members of the public.[21] In this portrait Beatrice sits on her mother's lap and holds what we can assume is a small photograph of Prince Albert. This image was later distributed widely as an engraving, including on the front cover of the *Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times* on 14 March 1863, in *Harper's Weekly* on 11 April 1863, and in periodicals in Germany.

Photographic historian Patrizia Di Bello has previously discussed how a specific engraving after Ghémar's photograph of Victoria and Princess Beatrice shows the Queen as exemplary of widowhood and motherhood, and also of feminine ways of looking.[22] Di Bello has written widely on women's creation of photograph albums during the nineteenth century and how the tactility of photography was central to constructed notions of refined femininity (p. 10). In Ghémar's portrait the Queen looks down at the photograph itself with a devoted gaze. In the engraving published in periodicals, the folds of Beatrice's dress are emphasized much more than in the original photograph, indicating the strength of Victoria's hold and the magnitude of the comfort she is seeking from the closeness of her children. At the time of this photograph, the Queen

[20] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), 221–34.

[21] Personal albums of the Victorian period frequently combined portraits of relatives and friends with portraits of local and national celebrities. See, for example, Louis Joseph Ghémar, *Queen Victoria and Princess Beatrice*, October 1862, albumen print, National Portrait Gallery, Ax9755, within an album compiled by the family of Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873).

[22] Patrizia Di Bello, 'Vision and Touch, Photography and Women's Popular Culture in the Nineteenth Century', in *Visual Delights — Two: Exhibition and Reception*, ed. by Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple (Trowbridge: Flick Books, 2003), pp. 3–16 (p. 10).

Fig. 3: Louis Joseph Ghémar, *Queen Victoria and Princess Beatrice*, October 1862, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

was forty-three and approaching the start of middle age. However, this photograph and its subsequent reproduction particularly emphasizes her maternal qualities. The widespread dissemination of this portrait is emblematic of Victoria's aims to use the reproductive qualities of photography to publicly share her private mourning for the benefit of her people (Di Bello, p. 10).

The collective acts of looking in family mourning portraits incorporating Albert's likeness invite the viewer to reflect upon the social and political dynasties represented within such photographs. The invitation to collectively remember also reaffirms Victoria's own place and identity. In all the photographs of this type during the mid- to

late nineteenth century, we see the photograph gradually replacing the historic relic in the relationship between the body and material object.[23]

In the nineteenth century mourning objects took many forms. However, the most common form was jewellery, often set with a lock of human hair. Mourning jewellery and its inclusion within publicly distributed photographs became another potent vehicle for Victoria to reinforce her matriarchal image. By carefully accessorizing against the blank canvas of her 'widow's weeds', she could communicate subtle political messages and invite an emotional connection with her audiences. This is evident in the photographs approved for popular circulation.

Onyx, jet, and black enamel were frequently used as materials in mourning jewellery. The inclusion of hair served as a lasting link to a physical presence that was lost, but also spoke to the hope that somehow a loved one might still exist in another realm (Lutz, p. 128). Victoria sent cuttings of Albert's hair to Garrard's, the royal jewellers, where at least eight pieces were made for herself and her children (Lutz, p. 132). The practice of carrying a small portrait of a loved one predates photography, as by the late eighteenth century small portrait paintings were often incorporated into jewellery belonging to the aristocracy.[24] However, the increasing affordability of photography allowed the middle classes to adopt this tradition with the widespread introduction of photo-jewellery. As Geoffrey Batchen observes, a photograph incorporated into a piece of worn jewellery becomes reanimated and set in motion, sharing the movements of the wearer and their clothing, as the Queen would have appreciated herself owning jewellery incorporating photographs of her mother, her husband, her children, and other family relations (p. 35).

During Victoria and Albert's life together the commissioning and exchange of jewellery was an important part of the intimacy of their marriage. Following his death, the nature of jewel gifts changed, with children and grandchildren often given decorative objects which featured Albert's photograph. Photographs of Victoria from later important family occasions often employed jewellery featuring Albert's likeness. Indeed, these photographs demonstrate how in later life Victoria's image retained mourning at its core. One of the most fascinating photographs to illustrate this, through Victoria's use of jewellery to emphasize her legacy as queen, wife, widow, and mother, is Gunn & Stuart's official portrait, taken by royal command at Buckingham Palace

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[23] Roland Barthes, quoted in Deborah Lutz, 'The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 127–42 (p. 135).

[24] Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), p. 34. See also, RCIN 422250, Bracelet, 1861, designed by Prince Albert with photograph of Victoria, Duchess of Kent; RCIN 45502, Locket, 1861 with photograph by Camille Silvy of Prince Albert; RCIN 65720, Locket, *c.* 1889, with photograph of Augusta, Duchess of Cambridge possibly by Walery. Christmas gift of Queen Victoria to Princess Victoria Mary of Teck.

in the sixtieth year of her reign (*Fig. 4*). This photograph was distributed in multiple formats including a picture postcard. Here, the Queen wears a miniature of Prince Albert by Magdalena Dalton (née Ross), which is set as a bracelet. The faded condition of the miniature today shows that it was worn constantly by the Queen from her marriage up to her own death.[25] Here, Victoria's arm positions Albert's likeness outwards towards the future in the same line of sight as her own vision. Also seen in this photograph is a bracelet made many years earlier between 1840 and 1857, which included enamelled heart-shaped lockets containing baby hair from each of her nine children.[26] This bracelet was one of several personal jewels Victoria later instructed to be placed in the Albert Room at Windsor Castle after her own death in 1901. The inclusion of such deeply personal items amid the symbols of her reign are very deliberate emblems which summon the totality of her life and resist any limiting views of her widowhood.

Fig. 4: Gunn & Stuart, *Queen Victoria*, 1897, gelatin silver photographic print on card, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

[25] Magdalena Dalton, *Brooch with a Miniature of Prince Albert*, 1840, Royal Collection, RCIN 4826. For the online catalogue description, see <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/victoria-albert-art-love/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/brooch-with-a-miniature-of-prince-albert-1819-1861> [accessed 28 November 2021].

[26] Charlotte Gere, 'Love and Art: Queen Victoria's Personal Jewellery' <https://www.rct.uk/sites/default/files/V%20and%20A%20Art%20and%20Love%20%28Gere%29.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2021].

Towards the end of her reign, Queen Victoria's reuse of particularly favoured photographs for state occasions reflects a monarch who understood the many potentials of the photographic medium. A photograph by W. & D. Downey was used as one of the official portraits for her Diamond Jubilee in 1897 (*Fig. 5*). It was actually taken four years earlier in July 1893 on the occasion of the wedding of the future King George V and Queen Mary. At this event Victoria wore the Honiton lace flounce from her own wedding ensemble for the last time — it had adorned dresses worn on selected important occasions earlier, including the christenings of seven of her children.[27] The repeated reference to her marriage in this late official photograph of 1897 allows

Fig. 5: W. & D. Downey, *Queen Victoria: Diamond Jubilee Portrait*, July 1893, carbon print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

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[27] When Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in 1840, she commissioned Honiton lace for her wedding ensemble, reviving a fading lace industry in Honiton, Devon. See <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/royal-weddings/queen-victorias-wedding-dress> [accessed 28 November 2021]. Queen Victoria wore her wedding lace for the christenings of the Princess Royal (1841), Princess Alice (1843), Prince Alfred (1844), Princess Louisa (1848), Prince Arthur (1850), Prince Leopold (1853), and Princess Beatrice (1857).

the personal life of the widow and the public life of Queen and empress, with their respective and possibly conflicting duties, to be synthesized. The composition of the photograph echoes the composition of traditional painted state portraits. The glow of light is concentrated on the Queen herself as she looks out into the distance, suggesting a continuing reflection on the past. The reuse of such portraits for new purposes shows that, towards the end of her reign, Victoria had perhaps become reliant on particular poses and approaches to portraiture that to her appeared universal.[28]

Importantly, the Queen chose to remove copyright in this portrait by Downey, so that there would be no restriction on those who may wish to reproduce the photograph. Parliament had introduced legal copyright protection for photographs in 1862. The removal of copyright in this image, arguably against the commercial interests of Downey's studio, is evidence of the Queen's agency in the construction of her public image (Lyden, p. 142). Consequently, this photograph became especially associated with her reign. Versions of this image appeared in periodicals, newspapers, merchandise, and souvenirs across the British Empire.

The public distribution of approved photographs of Queen Victoria after 1861 shows how the collecting and exchange of photography encouraged bonds of public empathy. However, this was achieved not only by images of Victoria herself, but also in the circulation of photography and its use in mourning more generally. These intersections between public connection and photography are exemplified by a national disaster which occurred just six weeks after Albert's death. On 16 January 1862 a series of tragic events occurred at the New Hartley Colliery, near Newcastle upon Tyne. When part of the pumping mechanism fell into the pit shaft, over two hundred miners were trapped. National attention was captured by this disaster, and for the Queen the agony suffered by the wives and families of the trapped miners was painfully resonant. On 22 January she sent a telegram stating, 'The Queen is most anxious to hear that there are hopes of saving the poor people in the colliery, for whom her heart bleeds.'[29]

Queen Victoria acquired a series of four photographs documenting the aftermath of this event, taken by photographers W. & D. Downey (*Fig. 6*).[30] The photographic prints were marked to indicate specific locations and objects, which were explained in an accompanying note from the photographer. Each of these objects was supplied with black borders around the edges, in accordance with collective Victorian mourning custom and ensuring that the depopulated image served as one of great loss of life.

[28] Anne M. Lyden, *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014), p 142.

[29] Queen Victoria quoted in 'The Hartley Pit Disaster, January 1862', in Frances Dimond and Roger Taylor, *Crown and Camera: The Royal Family and Photography, 1842–1910* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 63.

[30] W. & D. Downey, *Hartley Colliery after the Accident*, 30 January 1862, albumen prints and manuscript, Royal Collection, RCIN 2935022.a-b, 2935023, and 2935024.

Fig. 6: W. & D. Downey, *Hartley Colliery after the Accident*, 30 January 1862, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

Victoria followed events connected with the disaster closely, as the acquisition of this series of photographs shows. She was quick to subscribe to a relief fund to support the dead men's families. Public appreciation for the depth of her feelings was reported by the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey: 'The Queen's expression of sympathy with the poor sufferers in this terrible calamity at Hartley Colliery has been very sensibly felt throughout the District, and most gratefully appreciated.'[31] Newspapers quoted from the Queen's letter of condolence, including the *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser*, which reported that the letter was read at a religious meeting held at the pit heaps at Hartley. This article added that Charles Carr, owner of the pit, would take the earliest opportunity to visit the houses of each widow to read it to them. In his reply to the Queen, Carr commented, 'The fact that the Queen in her own deep distress should have remembered them in their sorrow will be the most soothing comfort which can reach them from any earthly source.'[32] Imagined depictions of the letter being read to the widows appeared in visual culture and stayed in the public consciousness. For example, photographs after Henry Hetherington Emmerson's painting *Reading the Queen's Letter*

[31] Royal Archives, Sir George Grey to Sir Charles Phipps, 27 January 1862, RA B20/4a, quoted in Dimond and Taylor, p. 63.

[32] *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser*, 31 January 1862, p. 7.

(1862) were still being advertised for sale in newspapers in 1864.[33] Engravings of this scene subsequently appeared in *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria* (*c.* 1901).[34]

On 18 December 1862, the day that Prince Albert's remains were transferred to their final resting place at the Royal Mausoleum, Frogmore, Queen Victoria received a visit from the Duchess of Atholl. The duchess presented Victoria with a beautifully bound Lausanne Bible which had been given to and subscribed for by many widows. In her diary Victoria recalls, 'The very poorest have joined, 80 of the Hartley Colliery Widows.'[35] In her personal letter of thanks, she expressed her gratitude to 'her kind sister widows' and the nation in general.[36] This raw expression of sisterhood in shared grief, enacted through the circulation and exchange of objects including photographic images, arguably helped appease public criticism during her retreat from public life.

'God bless our Queen, not Queen alone, but mother, friend, and Queen in one': mourning, photography, and empire

The synthesizing of the public and private, of personal grief and public authority, is also central to the global significance of Victoria's photographs. The message they embodied of the universal experience of widowhood, and the importance of protecting and promoting the legacy of the dead, would usefully underpin monarchical ambition to consolidate social and political relations within the empire and beyond. Photographic images of the Queen were shared across the British Empire through the exchange and collecting of small-format photographs and through widespread reproduction in the illustrated press.

Queen Victoria's mourning provided an important point of emotional connection with other international royal houses. This can especially be seen in the kinship she felt with Queen Emma of Hawaii, consort to King Kamehameha IV, which is commemorated in an album within Victoria's series of 'Royal Portraits' albums. In 1858 Queen Emma had given birth to a son, Prince Albert Edward Kamehameha, to whom Victoria was godmother (the boy's English names were given in honour of Prince Albert). Tragically, Queen Emma's son died in 1862 aged just four years old. A year later, King Kamehameha also died and his brother succeeded to the throne. After the death of her son, Queen Emma called herself Kaleleokalani ('The flight of the heavenly chief') and after the

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[33] Such an advertisement appeared in the *Hexham Courant*, 31 August 1864.

[34] Alamy Images, *Letter of Sympathy from Queen Victoria, Read by Clergy to Widows, Hartley Colliery Disaster, 1862*, K505CY <https://www.alamy.com> [accessed 28 November 2021].

[35] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1862, 18 December 1862. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

[36] Walter Walsh, *The Religious Life and Influence of Queen Victoria* (London: Swan Sonnenschein; New York: Dutton, 1902; repr. Literary Licensing LLC, 2014), p. 116.

death of her husband, this was superseded by the plural name Kaleleonālani ('The flight of the heavenly chiefs'). With these names Queen Emma arguably hoped to personally embody the two deceased chieftains. In many ways this sentiment was echoed by Victoria's own earlier belief that her life would act as a continuation of Albert's spirit. Writing to her uncle Leopold, less than a week after Albert's death, she had expressed her desire to honour Albert's wishes as if he were still alive:

> If I must live on (and I will do nothing to make me worse than I am), it is henceforth for our poor fatherless children — for my unhappy country, which has lost all in losing him — and in only doing what I know and feel he would wish, for he is near me — his spirit will guide and inspire me![37]

A draft letter in the Royal Archives from Victoria to Queen Emma, dated 16 June 1864, expresses Victoria's sympathy and shares words of comfort and advice:

> Time does not heal the really stricken heart! The only consolation I have found in a sorrow which seems only to increase is in living on in spirit with the beloved ones whom God took in love to a better happier World & in the certainty of an everlasting Union hereafter! [...] Till then we can but bear & submit & strive to fit ourselves for that blessed future by following the example of our beloved ones.[38]

As we have seen, the photographic image was a principal means by which Victoria materialized this wish to keep Albert's spirit alive and to present her widowhood as a means of encouraging empathetic bonds. This extends to her relationship with Queen Emma, who in 1865 visited England in the hope of restoring her health and raising support for the Anglican church in Hawaii. She was received by Victoria at Windsor Castle on 9 September 1865, when Victoria noted approvingly in her journal that Queen Emma was wearing 'just the same widow's weeds, as I wear'.[39] This sisterhood of shared experience is reflected in a portrait taken to mark this occasion, which remains in volume 50 of Victoria's series of 'Royal Portraits' albums. In this photograph Emma wears familiar Western-style mourning dress and veil. She returned to Windsor to stay for a night with Victoria in November 1865 shortly before travelling to Hyères in southern France. On that occasion Victoria wrote in her journal that Queen Emma 'was

[37] Royal Archives, Letters from Queen Victoria to King Leopold I of the Belgians, 12 July–24 December 1861, RA VIC/MAIN/Y/107/28. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

[38] Royal Archives, Draft letter from Queen Victoria to Queen Emma of the Sandwich Islands, 16 June 1864, RA VIC/MAIN/Q/10/7. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

[39] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1865, 9 September 1865. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

amiable, clever, & nice, in all she said'.[40] Emma's own notes recall a number of presents she received prior to her departure for France. These included a gold and onyx bracelet from Victoria incorporating her portrait and a lock of her hair. Princess Helena gave Emma various photographs including one of herself and Prince Albert.[41] Again, the photograph is central to the culture of mourning, embedded in physical and emotional exchanges to, in this instance, consolidate international political relations.

Beyond personal connections consolidating the global network of royal houses, photography played a significant role in the public image of the widow Victoria as empress. Photographic historian Anne Lyden attributes a new imposing stature to Victoria's photographic portraits of the 1870s and 1880s. Lyden argues that the Queen's adoption of the title 'Empress of India' in 1876 was a landmark moment which introduced a shift in tone towards more regal photographic portraits (p. 141). An official photographic portrait of Victoria as Empress of India was taken by W. & D. Downey in January 1876 (*Fig.* 7). As with many other examples of photographic portraiture throughout Victoria's reign, this photograph represents the complex mixture of her identities.[42] Her mourning dress is very familiar, but its juxtaposition against the ivory backdrop of the Travancore Throne marks a new peak in imperial publicity. This throne had been presented to Victoria in 1850 by the Maharaja of Travancore. It was the centrepiece of the Indian section of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The heavily carved ivory incorporated Indian motifs such as elephants and conch shells alongside European motifs including heraldic lions, dragons, and unicorns. Prince Albert sat on the throne at the closing ceremony of the Great Exhibition. It was photographed by Hugh Owen for the *Report of the Juries*, the photographically illustrated four-volume publication detailing the exhibits. Its dissemination through photography and associated printed media established the throne as a strong symbol of South Indian craftsmanship and design and implied the strength of the bond between the Queen and her Indian subjects. Victoria's decision to incorporate the throne into this photograph depicting her new role as Empress of India deliberately invokes this narrative. Additionally, the presence of the throne invokes the memory of her husband and the legacy of one of his greatest achievements as now represented by her person (Dias, p. 176). The photograph serves not only to connect Victoria and India, but it does so by invoking Albert and mourning — the memory and commemoration of Albert is intrinsic and fundamental to the construction of her image as empress.

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[40] *QVJ*, RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1865, 27–28 November 1865. With the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

[41] Rhoda E. A. Hackler, '"My Dear Friend": Letters of Queen Victoria and Queen Emma', *Hawaiian Journal of History*, 22 (1988), 101–30 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/5014471.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2021] (p. 112).

[42] Rosie Dias, 'Agents of Affect: Queen Victoria's Indian Gifts', in *British Women and Cultural Practices of Empire, 1770–1940*, ed. by Rosie Dias and Kate Smith (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), pp. 167–92 (p. 176).

Fig. 7: W. & D. Downey, *Queen Victoria as Empress of India*, January 1876, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022.

Conclusion

The photographic image of Queen Victoria operates in a wider field of mourning and memory and must be considered alongside memorial statuary, mourning jewellery, the gathering of materials to commemorate the dead, and the tactility of mourning rituals, all of which occupied the Queen following the death of Prince Albert in 1861. The photograph, however, is both an object in this culture and also able to incorporate and represent other objects and connections: hence its significance for mourning in general and for Victoria in particular. Her ambitions aligned with monumental technological progress in photography, which saw a transition from the single private object to a form of image making which was endlessly reproducible across newspapers, illustrated periodicals, and the media of the age. The overlapping of Albert's death with a then unparalleled boom in commercial photography and its associated media enabled royal grief to become a collective public experience in previously unimagined ways.

The mobilization of the Queen's photographic image from 1861 made her mourning accessible to her subjects in Britain, throughout the empire, and beyond, as well as cementing the personal relationships that shore up royal authority in theory and practice. Moving between public and private, the photograph suggests affective connections between the Queen and her subjects, a suggestion that has political efficacy and was exploited by Victoria. This synthesis of the private and the public, emotion and power, as represented in and through photography, serves as an underpinning for later images of Victoria as widow — her mourning (or the memory of mourning) becomes an implicit feature of her image in later life.