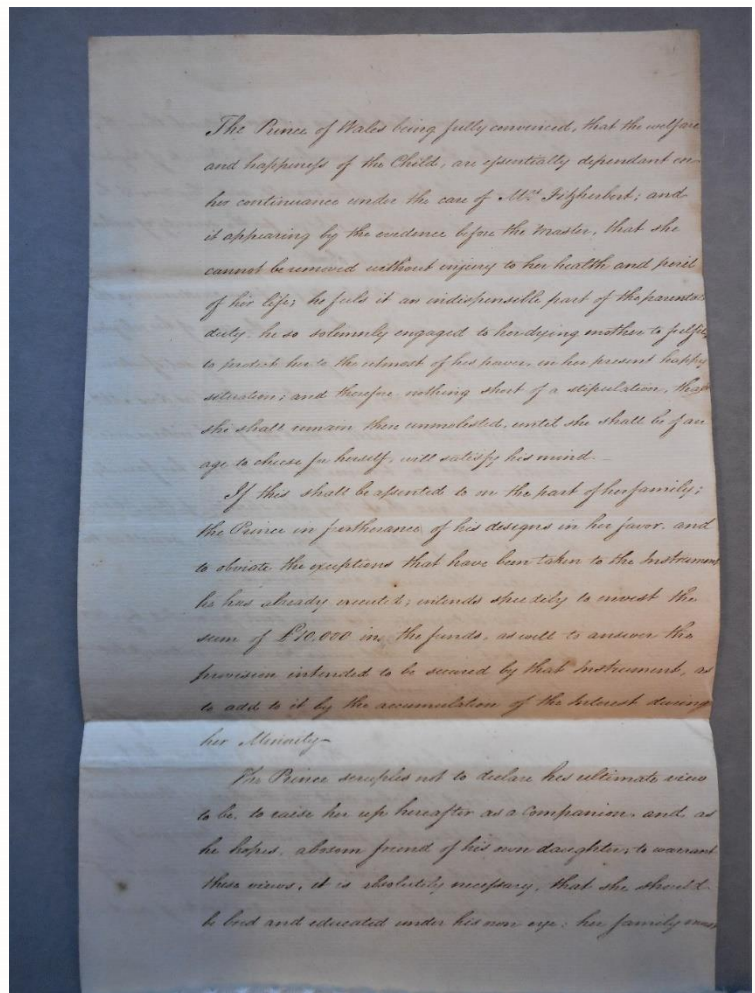


**Proposals by the Prince of Wales regarding Minnie Seymour's guardianship**

**CR713/8**

The Document of the Month for June is one of three proposals by George, Prince of Wales, addressing the matter of Mary Seymour's guardianship. In the proposal, the Prince of Wales (later King George IV) is petitioning for Mary, also called Minnie, to be kept under the care of Mrs Fitzherbert. Minnie's father, Lord Hugh Seymour, was a naval commander, but died at sea in 1801 following an attack of yellow fever, and his wife, Lady Anna Horatia, passed away in the same year, leaving Minnie and her siblings without both of their natural parents.<sup>1</sup> After their deaths, therefore, Minnie's legal guardianship was in question and became part of a legal dispute.

It is believed that the proposal was written c. 1802, at which time the trustees of Lord Hugh's estate would have been taking charge of his affairs. The proposal may not have been used in the formal legal proceedings, but it does appear to demonstrate Prince George's convictions on the matter. As set out in this document, his view was that Minnie Seymour's wellbeing would only be guaranteed if she was cared for by Mrs Fitzherbert, a woman with whom he had a complex relationship, having attempted to engage in an unlawful marriage with her in



Warwickshire County Record Office, CR713/8

<sup>1</sup> Information gathered from Seymour [formerly Seymour Conway], Lord Hugh, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*  
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25175?rskey=LnUHdi&result=1> [accessed 11/05/2022].

1785.<sup>2</sup> It is notable that the Prince had such strong views on Minnie's guardianship, and moreover, that he pledged to invest £10,000 for her to inherit upon coming of age. A full transcript of the proposal has been provided separately.

### **The Seymour family's royal connections**

King Henry VII's marriage to Jane Seymour has lent a long legacy of royal connections to the Seymour family name, but George IV's relationship with the family is perhaps less well known. Across the Seymour family's history, the heads of the house have taken a number of different titles, but in 1793, the Marquessate of Hertford was granted to the family. It was in this era that the Seymours became associated with George, who was the Prince of Wales at the time.

The first Marquess, Lord Francis Seymour-Conway, had risen in status through multiple royal appointments to positions including lord chamberlain and lord lieutenant of Warwickshire.<sup>3</sup> While Lord Hugh Seymour did not inherit the Marquessate, he developed a friendship with Prince George which likely contributed to his appointment in roles in the Prince of Wales's household, such as keeper of the privy purse and lord of the bedchamber. However, the latter of these roles was to be short-lived; with the prospect of a post on the Admiralty board, Lord Hugh also sought to remain in the royal household but was turned out of the position.<sup>4</sup>

### **The case of Minnie Seymour's guardianship**

Despite Lord Hugh's departure from the Prince of Wales's household, George's involvement with the Seymours continued, and upon the death of Lord Hugh and Lady Horatia Seymour, the Prince still exerted influence in the family's affairs. The proposal he made regarding Minnie Seymour's guardianship suggests that his involvement was motivated by 'the parental duty, he so solemnly engaged to her dying mother to fulfil'.<sup>5</sup> However, it was likely also driven by his connection with Mrs Fitzherbert, who continued to pursue her wish to adopt Minnie, having cared for her

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<sup>2</sup> Information gathered from Fitzherbert [née Smythe; other married name Weld], Maria Anne, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-9603?rskey=fhahm5&result=2> [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>3</sup> Information gathered from Conway, Francis Seymour-, first marquess of Hertford, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6121#odnb-9780198614128-e-6121> [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>4</sup> Information gathered from Seymour Conway (afterwards SEYMOUR), Hon. Hugh (1759-1801), *The History of Parliament* [https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/seymour-conway%28afterwards-seymour%29-hon-hugh-1759-1801#footnote2\\_7rqsomm](https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/seymour-conway%28afterwards-seymour%29-hon-hugh-1759-1801#footnote2_7rqsomm) [accessed 11/05/2022].

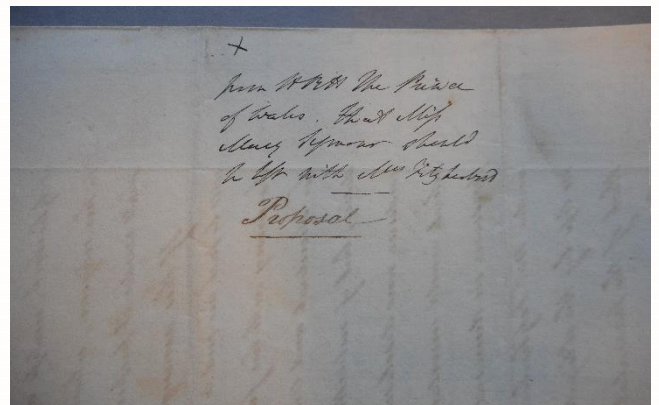
<sup>5</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, CR713/8.

since her infancy.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the proposal also highlights the religious education Minnie would receive under Mrs Fitzherbert's guardianship, averting the issue of Fitzherbert's Catholicism by stressing that it was of importance to the Prince, who would later become the head of the Church of England, that Minnie be brought up in the Anglican faith.

In 1806, an appeal in the House of Lords decided that the Marquess and Marchioness of Hertford, Minnie's aunt and uncle, were to be appointed her guardians.<sup>7</sup> The decision did not, however, prevent Mrs Fitzherbert from playing a maternal role in Minnie's life, and after her death, Minnie was a beneficiary of her will.<sup>8</sup>

### The Seymours of Ragley Hall

At the time of Prince George's guardianship proposal, Ragley Hall in Warwickshire was the family seat of the Seymours. Originally designed by architect and scientist Robert Hooke, the house was built between 1680-3, and subsequently underwent alterations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> The hall remains in the hands of the Seymours to this day, and a reminder of George IV's relationship with the family also endures in the form of the Prince Regent bedroom, named after Ragley Hall's frequent royal visitor.<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>6</sup> Information gathered from Fitzherbert [née Smythe; other married name Weld], Maria Anne, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-9603?rskey=fhahm5&result=2> [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>7</sup> Information gathered from Journals of the House of Lords (1805), United Kingdom, H.M. Stationery Office, p. 698

[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Journals\\_of\\_the\\_House\\_of\\_Lords/xRpDAAAACAAJ?hl=en&bpv=0](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Journals_of_the_House_of_Lords/xRpDAAAACAAJ?hl=en&bpv=0) [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>8</sup> Information gathered from The National Archives, Discovery, 'Will of Maria Fitzherbert 25 March 1836', PROB 1/86 <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C198104> [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>9</sup> Information gathered from Historic England Research Records, Ragley Hall [https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results\\_Single.aspx?uid=328507&resourceID=19191](https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=328507&resourceID=19191) [accessed 11/05/2022].

<sup>10</sup> Information gathered from 'The forgotten day a Prince met his subjects on a crumbling bridge', Shakespeare Birthplace Trust <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/forgotten-day-prince-met-his-subjects-crumbling-bridge/> [accessed 11/05/2022].