



## Giuseppe Garibaldi on the Isle of Wight

*Charles Seely* (1803-1887) was a strong supporter of the unification of Italy. In 1864 he invited *Giuseppe Garibaldi* (1807 - 1882) to England. It was thought Garibaldi would be mobbed by adoring crowds in London so *Seely* took him to stay at his Isle of Wight home, *Brook House*.

*Garibaldi* arrived at Cowes on Monday, 4 April 1864. An estimated crowd of 2000 welcomed him to streets decorated with flags and banners. The shipbuilders *J.S. White* gave their workers the afternoon off. The crowds escorted *Garibaldi* all of the 15 miles to *Brook House*.

The *Isle of Wight Observer* of 9 April 1864 reported "*Cowes claims the honour of being the first spot in the Isle of Wight trod by the greatest man who ever set foot on our soil.*"

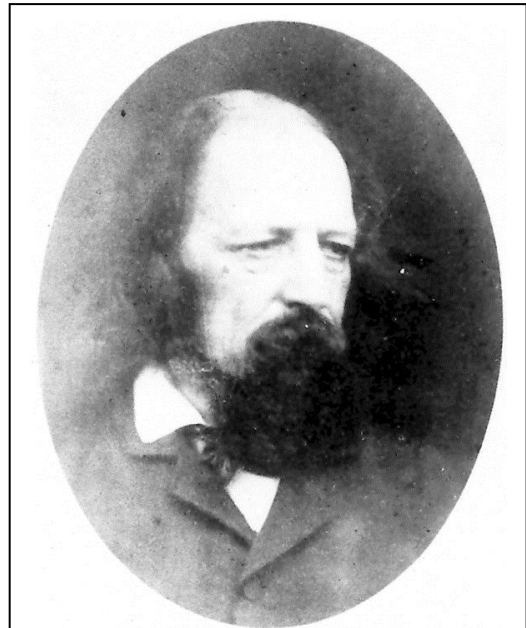


While at *Brook House*, *Garibaldi* planted an oak tree (now felled) in the garden; the family called it the '*Tree of Liberty*'.

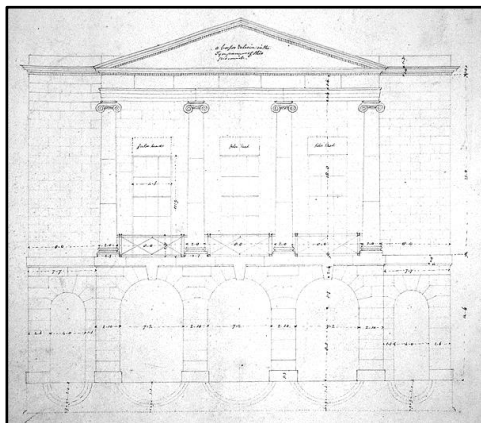
He planted a Wellingtonia tree at *Farringford*, the home of the poet *Alfred Tennyson*. *Tennyson's* wife, *Emily*, recorded that she heard "...the sounds of welcome as *Garibaldi* passed thro' the village to *Farringford*. People on foot and on horseback and in carriages had waited at our gate for two hours for him".

*Tennyson* took *Garibaldi* to his study and advised him not to discuss politics in England. They recited poetry to each other, *Garibaldi* repeating Italian verses of which *Tennyson* understood not a word.

While at *Farringford* *Garibaldi* was accosted by a woman on her knees. This was the photographer *Julia Margaret Cameron* (1815-1879) who wanted him to sit for a photograph. Holding her black, chemical stained hands up to him, he thought she was a well-dressed beggar. She is reputed to have said "*this is not dirt but art!*"



Alfred, Lord Tennyson by Julia Margaret Cameron - from the Nellie Mundy Album.



Front elevation of the Guildhall, Newport. From the original designs by John Nash - 1814.

Giuseppe Garibaldi was a guest at the Guildhall in 1864.

On Thursday 7 April *Garibaldi's* carriages passed through the town of Newport. The streets were decorated with flags and streamers and a banner with "*Viva Garibaldi*" spanned the High Street. To the cheers of thousands he arrived at the *Guildhall* and was greeted by the mayor, *Mr. W.B. Mew*. He then took his place on a purpose built platform where he expressed his gratitude for the warm welcome.

The following Monday, 11 April, *Garibaldi* left *Brook House* and travelled to London.

Arriving in London he was greeted by crowds estimated at half a million. The crowds were so immense it took him six hours to travel three miles through the streets.

*Garibaldi* was hero-worshipped by the masses; his host's servants made money selling hairs from his comb and tiny bottles of his used bathwater. Staffordshire Potteries made figurines of him by the thousand. There were *Garibaldi* silk scarves, sweets known as "*Garibaldi Balls*" and perfumes named after him. A new football club, *Nottingham Forest*, adopted *Garibaldi*-red as its shirt colour and *Peck Frean* created the *Garibaldi biscuit* (allegedly based on raisin bread with which he had fed his troops).

He met many important people of the day, including the Prime Minister *Lord Palmerston* and the novelist, *Sir Walter Scott*. He also met with the *Prince of Wales*. The prince's mother, *Queen Victoria*, was not pleased with her son; seeing *Garibaldi* as a revolutionary, when he left London she declared "*Garibaldi - thank God - he's gone!*"

The reaction *Garibaldi* provoked among workers and trade unions worried the Queen. She instructed *Palmerston* to write to *Seely* urging *Garibaldi* to leave the country. He returned to the Isle of Wight for a few days and then left for home.