































congregation were in deep mourning “as if deploring the loss of a near relation.”<sup>58</sup> The notion of a familial relationship between the public and the princess was reiterated in *The Times*, which discussed public concern for the princess’s widower, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld: stating: “The old inquire about him as about a son, the young as about a brother.”<sup>59</sup> These remarks highlight the sense of close personal relationships that modern celebrity culture was able to foster: in this time of tragedy, the British public did not see Charlotte and her husband as distant political figures, but rather as relatives or loved ones.

Quite apart from her significance to the political future of Britain, Charlotte appeared to engender something of a cult of worship in the British public sphere, which hinged on her acts of kindness and Christian morality. A few weeks after Charlotte’s death, *The Morning Post*, for example, printed a long article about a young gardener at the princess’s home, Claremont. The gardener was profoundly affected by the princess’s death, as, despite being his employer, the princess had often “entered into familiar conversation with the boy” and praised his hard work. This anecdote served to illustrate Princess Charlotte’s charisma and her lack of hauteur around the “common people,” an attribute that would have appealed to many of the paper’s readers.<sup>60</sup> In a later article, *The Morning Post* again highlighted the princess’s empathy for those less fortunate, in relating her appeals to her father to remit the death sentence for a young man after a clergyman appealed to her for assistance in the matter.<sup>61</sup>

The shock occasioned by Princess Charlotte’s sudden death was reiterated in the British press for months after her passing. In December 1817, *The Hull Packet* compared the impact of Charlotte’s death to that of a sovereign’s but argued that her death did not encourage the political criticism that was commonplace after the death of a monarch. The paper also argued that the sudden death of someone so young and important caused people to demand answers and full details of the event, which the paper endeavoured to provide in the article by including minute details of the princess’s death and that of her stillborn son across several pages.<sup>62</sup> Popular desire to receive all of the information surrounding Charlotte’s death led to accusations of callousness being levelled against her relatives, none of whom were present at her home when she gave birth. The British press dissected the events of the princess’s demise repeatedly, thus heightening the public’s awareness of and interest in the tragedy.

Visual representations of the tragedy were also a significant part of the public grieving process: portrait engravings of Princess Charlotte, many adapted from earlier paintings, flooded the print shops in Britain.<sup>63</sup> Others were created specifically for the act of mourning, such as *Britannia’s Hope, Her Love and Now Her Grief*, which captured not only the spirit of public mourning, but also the emblem of hope that the princess had represented in Britain as a future sovereign by envisioning the figure of Britannia weeping at the princess’s grave.<sup>64</sup> *Apotheosis of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales* showed a stylised view of the princess at the moment of her death, ascending to Heaven in the company of angels whilst the figure of Britannia wept at her

---

<sup>58</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 November 1817.

<sup>59</sup> *The Times*, 19 November 1817.

<sup>60</sup> *The Morning Post*, 6 December 1817.

<sup>61</sup> *The Morning Post*, 13 December 1817.

<sup>62</sup> *The Hull Packet*, 16 December 1817.

<sup>63</sup> For example, William Say after George Dawe, *Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Saxe Coburg etc.* 1817. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 1902,1011.4111.

<sup>64</sup> John Kennerley after William Marshall Craig, *Britannia’s Hope, Her Love and Now Her Grief*, 1817. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 1868,0808.1524.

sarcophagus.<sup>65</sup> The print's use of religious motifs seems to demonstrate the blurring of "sacral celebrity" with "modern" celebrity. Much like the newspaper articles which reported on every detail surrounding Princess Charlotte's death, these prints aided the public in visualising the tragedy and allowed them to feel as if they too had been present in the royal bedchamber when it occurred.



Figure 3. Fry & Wright, after Edward Francisco Burney, after R.P. Read, *Apotheosis of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales*, 1818, paper, 484 x 580 mm. National Portrait Gallery of the UK, NPG D33524. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

In addition to printed images, commemorative mourning medallions were created for public sale: most displayed Princess Charlotte's profile on one side, with funerary monuments, mourners, or significant dates in the princess's life on the reverse.<sup>66</sup> Just one month after Charlotte's death, *The Morning Post* reported that a biographical memoir of the princess's life was forthcoming, while in January 1818 there appeared an advertisement for a memorial folio entitled *The Augustiad* which would contain portraits, sketches, and facsimiles of the tributes paid to "the lamented Hope of England" by the press and public.<sup>67</sup> In December 1817, *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* wrote of a monument to be erected in Westminster Abbey and the creation of a

<sup>65</sup> Fry & Wright, after Edward Francisco Burney, after R.P. Read, *Apotheosis of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales*, 1818. National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG D33524.

<sup>66</sup> Bronze medal by Edward Avern, 1817. London, British Museum, Department of Coins and Medals, 1958,1112.4.

<sup>67</sup> *The Morning Post*, 22 December 1817. *The Morning Post*, 15 January 1818.



subscription among the public for a commemorative building for “The Nation’s Favourite and the Nation’s Friend.”<sup>68</sup> The public reaction to the princess’s death was thus recorded and shaped by a variety of media, from newspaper articles, to medallions, prints, biographical memoirs, and even monuments. Significantly, public interest in the princess’s death continued for many years. In 1826 a commemorative print of Princess Charlotte’s death was released, while prints of the princess’s monument in St George’s Chapel, Windsor were newly published and sold to the public as late as 1831.<sup>69</sup>

The tragic death of Princess Charlotte underlines the extent to which celebrity culture had created an emotional connection between the British public and the royal family in the early nineteenth century. This connection was strengthened by the media, as newspapers and printmakers continued to stoke public emotion for the princess in the months and years after her death. The creation of commemorative prints, medallions, and monuments demonstrates how celebrity culture and mourning functioned together at this time of national tragedy: these items were tangible objects that could endure as tokens of public grief for many years. Significantly, most of the articles, prints, and medallions presumed that grief for Charlotte was a nationwide phenomenon, shared by all: reports of sermons and closure of businesses across Britain on the day of her funeral reiterated the idea that this tragedy was one that would affect all Britons. Princess Charlotte was not mourned simply because she had been second in line to the throne, but because she had been held in such affection and esteem by thousands of people who had never met her, but who felt a strong emotional connection to her as a result of “modern” celebrity culture.

## Conclusion

This article has explored three case studies that highlight the relationship between royalty and celebrity in the period 1770 to 1820. The examples analysed here are part of a much wider media obsession with the lives, loves, and tragedies of the British royal family in the Georgian era, an obsession that demonstrated the merging of traditional “sacral celebrity” attached to the monarchy and a “modern” celebrity that required the public revelation of royal private lives. The article has endeavoured to highlight not only the central role played by the media in formulating a royal celebrity culture, but also the ways in which this celebrity culture could impact on the status of the royal family itself.

The exposition of the romantic affairs of princes such as the Duke of Cumberland and the Prince of Wales underline the risk that this modern celebrity culture could pose to the moral and Protestant image of monarchy that was espoused by George III. Although the sources examined in this section were overwhelmingly reluctant to directly name the people involved, it is evident that gossip about these affairs was spread far and wide by newspapers, pamphlets, and satirical prints. These sources held up the scandals of royal princes for the entertainment and condemnation of the British public, who were able to apprise themselves of extremely personal and private details of these romantic affairs in a manner that transgressed the boundaries between the public and private faces of royalty. In contrast to these romantic scandals, the cases of George III’s madness and the death of Princess Charlotte both emphasise how “modern” celebrity culture could enhance the royal image, by forging emotional connections between royal individuals and

---

<sup>68</sup> *The Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 6 December 1817.

<sup>69</sup> Cosmo Armstrong after Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Sacred to the Memory of her Late Lamented Royal Highness Princess Charlotte of Wales & of Saxe-Cobourg Saalfeld*, 1826. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, 1878,0713.1932.

the British public. The persistent media coverage of George III during the Regency period is ample evidence of an enduring public interest in the king's wellbeing that went beyond the political and into the personal. The outpouring of grief at the death of Princess Charlotte in 1817 was a combination of political and personal concern: as second in line to the throne, Charlotte had been held up as "the hope" of Britain, and media responses to her death constantly referred to the loss as a patriotic tragedy. However, many responses to Charlotte's early death were highly emotional, and there is evidence of widespread mourning for the princess across Britain. In this instance, "modern" celebrity culture could facilitate a shared experience of mourning between the people and the monarchy.

The case studies examined demonstrate that the development of a "modern" celebrity culture had a significant impact on the way that the British royal family was perceived by the public at the intersection between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The proliferation of media culture and its increasing ability to navigate libel laws facilitated the gradual movement from "sacral celebrity" to a "modern" celebrity culture surrounding the royal family. This movement had a powerful effect on the royal family's image in the period, as traditional notions of deference and respect for the monarchy were challenged by the invasive and personal nature of "modern" celebrity culture.