

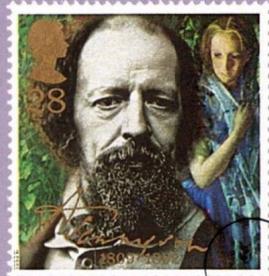
Tennyson

10 March 1992



Four stamps will be issued on 10 March to mark the centenary of the death of Alfred, Lord Tennyson who has been described as “the most representative and the most popular poet of Victorian England”.

The stamps feature portraits of Tennyson, with representations of characters from his poems. The **24p** stamp (inland first class and EEC basic rate) shows Tennyson in c.1888 with illustration of Vivien from the poem “Merlin and Vivien”. The **28p** value (Europe, non-EEC rate) features Tennyson in late middle age with “The Millers Daughter”; the **33p** stamp (worldwide postcard rate) depicts the poet in 1864 with illustration of “The Lady of Shalott”. The final stamp, **39p** (basic airmail letter rate), includes a portrait of Tennyson as a young man, with illustration of his poem “Mariana”.



Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809 at Somersby, Lincolnshire, where his father, the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, was Rector. Alfred was the fourth son, one of 12 children. He was educated at Louth Grammar School (1815–20) and subsequently by his father. His father’s character was somewhat unstable and this no doubt had an influence on Alfred and his elder brothers Frederick (1807–98) and Charles (1808–79) who were also poets. In 1827 was published *Poems*, by *Two Brothers*, although in fact contained poems by all three. In the same year Alfred went to Trinity College, Cambridge; in 1829 he won the Chancellor’s medal for English Verse for his poem “Timbuctoo”. At Cambridge he was a

member, with his close friend Arthur Henry Hallam (1811–33), of the Apostles debating society, but left the university without taking a degree. His father died in 1831 and his grandfather and uncle wanted Alfred to go into the clergy but his mind was set on being a poet. He had, in 1830, published *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* including “Claribel” and “Mariana”; publication cost him £11. *Poems* followed two years later – this volume including “The Lotos Eaters” and the first version of “The Lady of Shalott”. It was not well reviewed.

Arthur Hallam died in 1833, leaving Tennyson grief-stricken. He began the lengthy elegiac poem “In Memoriam, A.H.H.”, which was finally published in 1850. It sold some 60,000 copies. Written in stanzas of four octosyllabic lines rhyming a b b a, it includes the well-

known lines “’Tis better to have loved and lost, Than never to have loved at all.” Hallam’s letters to Tennyson were destroyed by Tennyson’s son; Tennyson’s letters to Hallam were destroyed by Hallam’s father.

By the early 1840s Tennyson’s reputation was growing, particularly in the USA. *Poems*, in two volumes, appeared in 1842 and was praised by Carlyle and Dickens. During the 1840s Tennyson met most of the great names in the literary world, including Browning, Thackeray and Wordsworth. Financially he was made more secure by a government grant of £200 per annum in 1845. In 1850 he married Emily Sellwood; their first child was stillborn the



admired by the Prince Consort, following whose death Queen Victoria said she was often comforted by reading Tennyson's "In Memoriam".

Tennyson is perhaps best-remembered for his connected series of Arthurian poems – *The Idylls of the King*, the first part of which, "The Morte d'Arthur", appeared in 1842. When "Guinevere" and other poems were published in 1859, some 10,000 copies were sold within a week. "The Holy Grail" was published in 1869; the *Idylls* was finally completed in 1885.

As well as poems, Tennyson wrote plays but with less success. Perhaps his best was *Becket*, produced in 1884.

In 1868 he bought a new home – Aldworth near Haselmere in Surrey, where he continued to take long walks as he had done on the Isle of Wight. A road near Haselmere is known as Tennyson's Lane. In 1883 he became the first Baron Tennyson. (The current, 5th, baron, Mark Aubrey Tennyson, succeeded to the title in October 1991.) Alfred, Lord Tennyson died at Aldworth on 6 October 1892, his hand resting on an open volume of Shakespeare. A stained glass window featuring Sir Galahad was installed in Haselmere Church in 1899. Tennyson was buried in Westminster Abbey, near Robert Browning.

Tennyson's poetry is noted for its vein of ultra-sensitiveness and melancholy. Unlike some of his contemporaries, he was more concerned with domestic and national issues such as women's rights and the education of women – writing in "The Princess" (1847), of "sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair". He was not one of the so-called Victorian "sage poets"; his work, reflecting English conscience and prejudices, is still greatly enjoyed by many.

The Designer

The stamps were designed by Irene Von Treskow, her first commission for Royal Mail.

Printing Details

The stamps, printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Limited, are of "almost square" format (35 x 37mm), printed on phosphor coated paper in sheets of 100 with PVA Dextrin gum. Perforation measures 14½ x 14.

Presentation Pack

The pack (No. 226) will cost £1.55. It was designed by Penny Madden with text by Tim Shackleton. Printing was by Raithby, Lawrence & Company Limited of Leicester.

following year. Sons Hallam (later Governor-General of Australia) and Lionel were born in 1852 and 1853. In 1851-3 the Tennysons lived at Twickenham, then moved to Farringford on the Isle of Wight. Initially Tennyson leased the house but in 1855 bought it with the proceeds of *Maud*, a verse novelette. (This poetic monodrama includes the famous line in which the subject is invited to "come into the garden". Some believe the setting for this poem to be Harrington Hall, Lincs near where Tennyson spent his boyhood; the Hall was severely damaged by fire in November 1991.) Visitors to Tennyson at his Farringford home included Charles Kingsley, Edward Lear, Swinburne and Lewis Carroll. Tennyson composed poetry in the attic, which he called the "fumitory", and in the garden. He was a great walker and the Downs leading to the Needles are still referred to as Tennyson Downs on which a memorial cross has been erected, "by the People of Freshwater and other friends in England and America".

In 1850 Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate and produced odes on the death of the Duke of Wellington ("The last great Englishman is low") and for the opening of the International Exhibition at Kensington in 1862. He was much



ROYAL MAIL MINT STAMPS

TENNYSON



First change of the Light Brigade. Mary Evans Picture Library; 1, 2, 5-7 and centre - Tennyson Research Centre Collection; 8 - permission of Lincolnshire County Council; 9 - the Marshall Collection; 4 - Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England; Ladbroke, Westminster Abbey Westminster City Council.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY
WHERE TENNYSON WAS BURIED
IN PORT'S CORNER

Two half-crown of children, and The Lady of Shalott, by John William Waterhouse, 1900. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Mrs Philip W Jackson, 1951.

Fourth stamp, Tennyson as a young man, from a portrait by Samuel Lawrence, c. 1840, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London. Marston, in Prince Consort House, 1848-50. City of Marston, Art Gallery & Museum Collection.

