

While writing the history of the German Order *pour le mérite*, it soon became obvious to me that the members of the English Order of Merit were equally to be considered as 'The Chosen Few'. This was particularly so, as already in 1844, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert suggested to the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, that an "Order to be given for Merit", and that it might be established. No doubt, Prince Albert must have been aware of the new Civil Class of the *Pour le mérite* founded two years earlier. I am grateful to Sir Edward Ford, the Secretary and Registrar of the Order of Merit, for this, and further private communications.

The suggestion was considered again in 1846, but rejected by Lord John Russell, then Prime Minister, as 'not expedient'. In 1873, Lord Stanhope moved an address in the House of Lords, praying Her Majesty to institute an 'Order of Merit', but it was rejected by the Earl of Granville, then the Foreign Secretary. In 1887 when Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee as Queen, she raised the subject again and Lord Salisbury, then Prime Minister, even drew up the statutes of an Order of Merit, but in view of the then difficult position of the Government, it had to be postponed 'until a new Sovereign was on the throne'.

Finally, Edward VII (1841-1910) founded the Order of Merit in 1902, soon after his accession. Among the first members were three distinguished soldiers, two Admirals and three eminent scientists: the Lords Rayleigh, Kelvin and Lister. The Order is limited to 24 English, and a number of honorary foreign members of which there were none when I wrote the article in 1983 and published it in September. On its foundation the order had two classes, military and civil, but with the death of Earl Mountbatten in 1979, the last Member of the Military Class of the Order of Merit, this class disappeared.

Replacement of a vacancy in the Order is by the personal and unfettered gift of the English Sovereign. Since the end of the Military Class, eligibility to the Order is limited to "such persons, being subjects of Our Crown, as may have rendered exceptionally meritorious service towards the advancement of Art, Literature, Science and Learning". By 1983 only three women had been given this award, Florence Nightingale, Dorothy Hodgkin and Veronica Wedgwood out of a total of 135 Members of the Order.

In Appendix (I) to my article, I listed chronologically 196 scientists by discipline, who were Members of the Order *pour le mérite*. In Appendix (II) I listed the 41 scientific Members of the Order of Merit, chronologically by date of bestowal. As the Presidents of the Royal Society are usually awarded the Order of Merit, I sent them reprints of this article on receipt of the Order and they were always received with gratitude.