

# Maharaja Duleep Singh (1838-1893)

## Recalling Tragedy of the Sikh Kingdom

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With a keen desire to visit Elvedon Estate, near Thetford town, where the last remains of the last sovereign of the Sikh kingdom, Maharaja Duleep Singh lies buried, we started from London with Gurdeep Singh Sandhu, chief editor of *The Punjab Times*, London, at the wheel. Harbhajan Singh Bains, the renowned Punjabi poet of Seattle was with us. We covered the distance of about 100 miles to the north in a refreshing mood. The greenery around the highway was exceptionally captivating. As we moved through the Elvedon Estate the natural beauty of clusters of trees cast a soul-soothing spell on us. Once this chunk of serene splendor belonged to Maharaja Duleep Singh, which he had to sell to the Earl of Iveagh. After seeing the signboard of Elvedon Estate on our left, we parked our car in the not-so-nicely paved courtyard. There are some structures which seem to be rarely used. On the right hand side across the road is the gate of the Elvedon Estate Churchyard, which contains several graves including the graves of Maharaja Duleep Singh and Maharanee Bamba and their son Prince Albert. The graves have about 5 feet high stones having epitaphs on them. The following is the epitaph of Maharaja Duleep Singh:

**“IN MEMORY OF DULEEP SINGH C.C.S.I. MAHARAJA OF LAHORE  
BORN IN THE PUNJAB - 4TH SEPTEMBER 1838  
DIED IN PARIS - 22ND OCTOBER 1893. AGED 55.”**

**The British dethroned Maharaja Duleep Singh when they deceitfully annexed Punjab in 1849.**

The child Maharaja Duleep Singh was shrewdly converted to Christianity and was taken to England in 1854. He was given the vast Elvedon Estate, near Thetford in Suffolk, so that he does not look back to his kingdom. But Duleep Singh became determined to embrace Sikhism and started for Punjab. On the way he was stopped at the port of Aden. Finding no other way out, Maharaja Duleep Singh accepted Amrit (*Khande Di Pahul*) from Five Piaras on May 25, 1886 at Aden. Duleep Singh faced untold hardships during his last days. He died in Grand Hotel, Paris on October 22, 1893. His body was brought from Paris to Elvedon where it lies buried quite far from the maddening crowd.

The Sikh community celebrated the centenary of Maharaja Duleep Singh on October 22, 1993 and a plaque was erected here in the memory of Maharaja Duleep Singh. The plaque fixed on the wall of abandoned church contains the following inscription:

**“This plaque was given by the Sikhs of United Kingdom in memory of Maharaja Duleep Singh Ji, in the presence of The Rt. Revd. John Dennis Bishop of St. Edmundsbury & Ipswich, on Friday 22nd October, 1993.**

**Erected by Maharaja Duleep Singh Trust as part of the Centenary.  
Bringing history and culture together”**

The lonely palace of the Maharaja is a few hundred yards away from the churchyard amid cluster of trees. We could see no activity around the isolated palace or in its lush green surroundings. From here we moved on to Thetford, where the Sikh community installed the statue of Maharaja Duleep Singh on July 29, 1999 in collaboration with the Thetford Borough Council. The statue, about 15 feet high, is in a small beautiful part by the side of a gracefully flowing stream. On the left side of the seven feet high pedestal of the statue is written a brief history of the Maharaja in Punjabi and on the right side it is written in English along with the Sikh symbol of Khanda on the front side. Many main stream people can be seen there enjoying the splendor of the turbaned Sikh Maharaja riding a horse, taking

photographs in its background.

The "Ancient House" that was bought by Prince Fredrick, the 2nd son of Maharaja' Duleep Singh in 1921 for opening a museum is also in Thetford. Fredrick gave this house to the City Council, along with some memorable articles of his father. Fredrick being an M.A. in History was interested in archaeology. Prominent Sikh artist, Jarnail Singh also gave some of his historical paintings about the splendor of the Sikh kingdom to the "Ancient House Museum" when he paid a visit to this place in 1992. This soft spoken and publicity shy artist was also present at the multi-cultural ceremony of the Statue installation in 1999 and was honoured for promoting Sikh history and Punjabi culture through his paintings.

Despite all these celebrations and centenary celebrations of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the historic monument lies quite desolate and deserted. Not many people know or visit this important landmark of Sikh history.

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