SIR GEORGE GREY PC, KCB. (1812 - 1898)

Sir George Grey, explorer, colonial administrator, governor and politician, was born at Lisbon, Portugal on 14 April 1812.

It has also been suggested that he was born at Lisburn, some 20 kms south-west of Belfast in Northern Ireland.

His father, Lieutenant-Colonel Grey, who served under Bro. the Duke of Wellington, was killed at the battle of Badajoz just a week before George was born.

Grey, who had run away from boarding school, was educated by Revd. Richard Whately who imparted to his young pupil some of his idealistic liberal views.

George followed his father's profession and entered the Royal Military College, Sandhurst in 1826.

In January 1830, he went to Ireland where he joined the 83rd regiment of foot as an ensign.

In 1833 he was promoted to Lieutenant but he did not adapt well to military life .

He developed a great sympathy for the plight of the Irish peasants and, after reading about the journeys of Captain Charles Sturt in Australia, he became interested in colonisation as a means of resolving their problems.

In 1836 he left Ireland and offered his services to the Colonial Office in London to lead an expedition to North-Western Australia to find a suitable site for a proposed settlement.

The proposal received support from the Royal Geographical Society and Grey sailed with Lieutenant Lushington and seven men in HMS Beagle on 5 July 1837.

On reaching Capetown, Grey hired an additional five men and charted the schooner Lynher which he loaded with livestock.

In December 1837, Grey's party arrived at Hanover Bay near Collier Bay which is some 300 kms north-east of Broome and 2100 kms from Perth.

Their sea journey is commemorated by the Lynher Reef and Beagle Bank offshore from Collier Bay.

The huge tides on that part of the coast have a rise and fall of over 30 metres and Grey nearly drowned at the start of the expidition.

On 29 January 1838, the inexperienced Grey and his men started inland only to be confronted with flooded country and hostile aborigines who speared Grey who, although critically ill, continued the journey for another two months before returning to the coast where they were met by their ships and taken to Mauritius to recuperate.

During this journey, Grey discovered a remarkable series of aboriginal cave paintings
and named the Glenelg River, Stephen Range and Mount Lyell.

In September 1838, Grey went to Perth and in the following February, he and ten of
his men were landed at Bernier Island off Shark Bay, some 50 kms offshore from the
mouth of the Gascoyne River and the present town of Carnarvon.

The Island was waterless and during heavy seas, the party attempted to cross to the
mainland but one of the boats and most of the provisions were spoilt and the expedit-
ion to explore the north-west was abandoned.

Grey then decided to return the 900 kms to Perth by whale boat but the boats were
wrecked and the party, with no food and water, were forced to march the last 500 kms.

Grey, and all but one of his men, arrived on 21 April 1839, having discovered the
Gascoyne and Murchison Rivers. It was the last of his exploration journeys.

Grey was promoted to Captain and in August 1839, he was appointed resident magistrate
at Albany. On 2 November he married Eliza Lucy, the daughter of Sir Richard Spencer
who had been the previous magistrate.

After just four months in office, he published 'Vocabulary of the Dialects Spoken by
the Aboriginal Races of South-Western Australia'.

He advocated that compulsory assimilation with the British way of life was the only
means of saving the aboriginals from extinction.

In 1840, on his return to England, Grey spent three weeks in Adelaide as a guest of
Governor Gawler.

In London in 1841, he published the two **volumes** of his 'Journal of Two Expeditions
of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia during the years 1837, 38 and 39'.

In October 1840 he resigned from the army and accepted the governorship of South
Australia. He arrived in Adelaide on 10 May 1841 where his five-month old son was
to die a month later.

South Australia had severe economic problems and the new Governor pursued a policy
of cost reductions which caused angry demonstrations. Grey gave the impression that
he was ignoring the press and public protests but, at the same time, he took risks
to protect property owners and other sections of the community.

He ignored a suggestion that destitute persons be sent to New South Wales and he
defied orders by drawing large sums from the British Treasury for the relief of the
poor. He gave two-fifths of his salary to private charity and was threatened by the
Colonial Office with personal liability for 50,000 pounds of the South Australian
debt.

By 1844 the financial crisis was over and Grey almost balanced the colony's budget.
He also had difficulty with the aboriginal population and despite his liberalism,
he did little to encourage self-government.

He was appointed Governor of New Zealand but temporarily retained the title of
Governor of South Australia to avoid litigation over an old Government debt.

He arrived in New Zealand in November 1845 where he gained the respect of the Maori chiefs even though he had suppressed their uprising at the Bay of Islands.

He ruled as an autocrat and, once again, did little to encourage self-government.

He was knighted in 1848 but was not popular with the people even though he ignored directives over land policies and relieved colonial debts as he had previously done in South Australia.

He was recalled to London in 1853 and in June 1854, he was appointed Governor of Cape Colony and High Commissioner of South Africa.

His ideas on how to assimilate black South Africans with the British quickly brought him into conflict with local government, the colonists and the native Africans as well as the War Office, Treasury and the Colonial Office in London.

He again disregarded orders, which he once said were merely suggestions to be set aside at his discretion, and was recalled to London in 1859. His recall was cancelled and he returned to South Africa the following year when he and his wife quarrelled and separated.

Grey left Capetown in August 1861 and in October was sworn in as Governor of New Zealand for the second time in the hope that his influence with the Maoris would restore peace.

When war broke out in 1863, Grey became depressed and abandoned his benevolent actions. He argued with his advisors, took personal command of the colonial troops and once again ignored orders from London which resulted in his recall in 1868.

The following year he tried unsuccessfully to enter the British Parliament.

Grey loved New Zealand.

In an interview in London he said "You respect the Queen. In New Zealand the people, who have never seen her, worship her!"

In 1870 Grey returned to New Zealand and retirement at Kawau some 50 kms north of Auckland.

His retirement was short lived as he was elected to the New Zealand House of Representatives in 1874 where he remained for the next twenty years. He served as Prime Minister from 1877 to 1879 but his ideas were too radical and impractical and he had difficulty in gaining party support.

In spite of quarrelling with just about everyone in authority, Grey contributed a great deal to socialist thought in New Zealand. He fostered trade unions and decried the aristocracy.

When the Australasian Confederation was suggested, Grey did not want New Zealand to join as he believed that Australia could only be developed by 'coloured' labour and he wanted New Zealand to be pure and undefiled for the 'un-born millions of the mother country'.

In 1891 he attended the Australian Federal Convention and toured the large eastern cities and towns speaking on democracy and social equality.

Curiously, in its chagrin and resentful militancy, the Labour movement chose
Sir George Grey, sometime Governor of South Australia and of New Zealand, as
its hero. He was a nineteenth-century liberal if ever there was one. John
FitzGerald writes as an eye witness of the impact of this old and steadfast
man:

> The Commanding figure of Sir George Grey loomed up in this Convention
> (the Federal Convention of 1891). His bold and advanced Democracy, though
> it was coldly received in the Convention, was hailed as a Labor evangel
> outside. ..\..... I shall never forget the scene in the Town Hall, Sydney,
> early in 1891, when Grey addressed an immense audience, which filled the
> hall and galleries and spread away into the remotest corridors and out
> into the adjacent streets. He was over eighty years of age then, and very
> feeble, so that his voice could not be heard further than a few yards from
> the platform, but not a soul of that great audience stirred, not a man
> left; they stood watching with rapt attention the frail figure and the
> white bearded face, knowing as they did that Grey was advocating the
> foundation principle of Australian Democracy - that principle which made
> the fortune of the Labor Party afterwards - manhood suffrage, knowing
> that the great aristocrat and pro-consul was the friend of Democracy.
> During the election, which followed soon after, the name of Grey was
> constantly invoked, and received always with enthusiastic cheers; while
> at that meeting this phrase - "They say that we are leaderless, but we
> shall never want a leader while Grey lives" - evoked a storm of applause.

In 1894 he returned to London where he became a Privy Councillor. He was reconciled with his wife and, shortly afterwards, he died in London on 19 September 1898. He was buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

Sir George Grey was an enthusiastic naturalist and a keen student of native languages and customs. He published 'Polynesian Mythology' in 1855 and 'Proverbial Sayings of the Ancestors of the New Zealand Race' in 1858. He was also a book collector and gave valuable libraries to Cape Town and Auckland.

He was an advocate of education and developed schools and colleges and, as a devout Anglican, he helped form the New Zealand church constitution.

It was proposed to erect a statue of him in Auckland but Grey's response was that he would prefer the endowment of a university scholarship. There is a statue of him in a niche on the Gresham Street facade of the Lands Department Building in Sydney and New Zealand issued a 10 cent stamp bearing his portrait in 1979.

Sir George Grey was a man of many parts and it was even suggested that he once had a remote chance of becoming King of Greece.

He certainly made an outstanding contribution to the four colonies with which he was involved during a long and sometimes turbulent career.

Many of his proposals which caused controversy were ahead of their time and have become widely accepted today.

A favourite story concerning Grey was published in 'The Bulletin' in Sydney on 28 December 1895. The story, in the colourful language of the period, runs; 'Some years ago when George Grey was living in Wellington, New Zealand, his musical ear was very much offended at the discordant notes of an untuned piano in an adjoining house. There were six daughters in the establishment and as they were all "pursuing their musical studies", the ill-used instrument wailed forth its wrongs from morning to night. At last, Grey, in desperation, laid in wait for the gaunt she-parent of the six girls, and with great unctuousness presented her with a handfull of tickets to a concert to be held that afternoon, at the exhibition. "Your little ones are so fond of music" sighed the great pro-consul.

That afternoon, Grey and a parliamentary colleague watched the dame and her brood safely off the premises, and very soon after the two statesmen and a piano-tuner were in the drawing room next door tuning the piano as if the fate of the ministry depended on getting it in order.

The musical family never noticed the difference.'

George Grey became a mason in Irish Constitution Lodge No. 83 held within the 83rd regiment in which he served.

The regiment held warrant No.339, Irish Constitution from November 1759 to July 1764. The record in the Grand Lodge of Ireland was: 'as the above regiment was broak (sic), Bro. McVicker by order of the lodge returned the warrant to the Grand Lodge 23rd July 1764'.

The regiment later enjoyed better times and held Irish warrant No.435 from 1808 until 1817 when it was exchanged for warrant No.83 which had been surrendered and which had the attraction of being the same number as the regiment.

The final register of regimental members is dated 1846.

As a result of the practice of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in re-issuing warrants, No.83 is now held by Newry Lodge in Down County; No.339 by Ruby Lodge in Dublin and No.435 by Rosetta Lodge, also at Down County.

Grey wrote in his 'Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia During the Years 1837,38 and 39' that he met a party of aboriginals in the Perth district, and after entering into friendly relations, an old woman recognised him as a "ghost" of a deceased son. Thereupon two men, one an old man, the father, and a younger one, the brother of the deceased: "came up and embraced me in the following manner - they threw their arms around my waist, placed their right knees against my right knee, their breasts against my breast, holding me in this positic for several minutes."

Shortly after his arrival in South Australia, Governor George Grey joined the South Australian Lodge of Friendship No.613, English Constitution in August 1841.

The lodge was re-numbered 423 by the United Grand Lodge of England in 1863 and it became The Friendship Lodge No. 1 on the register of the Grand Lodge of South Australia in 1884.

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