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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 chartered 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 expedition.

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.

