

Victor Albert George Child-Villiers, Earl of Jersey

(15 January 1891 – 2 March 1893)

Geoffrey Bolton

Another aristocratic Governor

Lord Carrington's success and popularity seemed to vindicate the policy of sending rising members of the House of Lords to serve as Governors of one of the major self governing British colonies before resuming their careers at Westminster.¹ The appointment of Lord Hopetoun to Victoria and Lord Onslow to New Zealand, both in 1889, confirmed this trend, and it was seen as important to consolidate the good impression that Carrington had made in New South Wales. Some months before his term ended Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's experienced Private Secretary, told him that "the general opinion was that you had done so well that it would be very hard to find anyone who could replace you".²

Lord Knutsford, Secretary of State for Colonies, took soundings among his Cabinet colleagues. The first name considered was the Marquess of Lothian, who was about to retire as Secretary of State for Scotland. Lothian declined, but the prospect of New South Wales must have appealed to his son and heir Lord Ancram, as he later agreed to go to Sydney as ADC to the new Governor. This was the 45 year old Earl of Jersey, who held the minor office of Paymaster General and spokesman for the Home Office in the House of Lords. In this role, Knutsford told Carrington:

He ... has done his work well. There are no two more popular persons in Society than Lord and Lady Jersey, and if speaking by a Lady at Hospital openings, etc, is wanted, she is really one of the best speakers I have met.³

Victor Albert George Child-Villiers, seventh Earl of Jersey was born on 20 March 1845. He belonged to a family which had come a long way on charm. The first prominent Villiers was a handsome young man who won the favour of King James I, who made him in 1623 the first English Duke

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Conservatives recovered office in 1895 the formidable Joseph Chamberlain indicated that he was interested in taking the Colonial Office, and as Chamberlain was the Leader in the House of Commons for the Liberal Unionists who were allying themselves with the Conservatives there was no chance that Jersey would be preferred. Although he was appointed GCB in 1900 he never again received a Ministerial appointment. Instead he occupied himself with Freemasonry, serving as Provincial Grand Master of Oxfordshire and Senior Grand Warden of England.

Jersey retained his connections with Australia. Like Carrington, he was a serviceable friend to the delegation who came to London in 1900 when the Commonwealth of Australia Bill was passing through the British Parliament. In 1903 the NSW Government asked him to act as Agent-General, a role for which he was especially fitted because of his experience as senior partner in Child's Bank. He held the position for two years, giving the See and Carruthers Governments useful advice during their negotiations with the London loan market, and in 1905 revisited Australia. Probably as a result of his service as acting Agent-General his name was among those actively considered for appointment as Australia's first High Commissioner in London. Before the position was filled he was invalided by a stroke in 1909. He lived another six years, dying at the age of 70 at his home, Osterley Park in Middlesex, on 31 May 1915. Jersey was survived by his wife, two sons and three daughters.

Lady Jersey outlived him for another 30 years. She made a mark in public life as founding President of the Victoria League, serving from 1901 to 1914. She continued to write verse, also producing travel articles and children's plays. She was a strong and vocal opponent of the campaign to grant women the vote. In 1922 she published her reminiscences, and in 1927 was appointed DBE. If we accept Penny Russell's argument that Lady Jersey's "aristocratic elitism, her assumption of a position of queenly authority and her desire to shape the moral future of the colony ... lent a tone of freedom and definitive authority to her presence in New South Wales"³⁴ and thus set a precedent of public agency that might be followed by feminists with different agendas, we may well conclude that she, rather than Lord Jersey, was the inhabitant of Government House who left the more lasting impact.

Notes

- 1 On this topic, see Cannadine, D, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, Penguin, New York, 1990, pp 588-602.
- 2 Ponsonby to Carrington, 27.5.1890, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 3 Knutsford to Carrington, 23.7.1890, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 4 Jersey, M, *Fifty One Years of Victorian Life*, John Murray, London, 1922, p 48.
- 5 Russell, P, "A woman of the future? Feminism and conservatism in New South Wales", in *Women's History Review*, vol 13, 1, 2004, pp 69-90 (quotation from p 72).

- 6 Cunneen, C, "Sir Victor Albert George Child-Villiers, 7th Earl of Jersey", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 9, MUP, Melbourne, pp 484-5.
- 7 Parkes to Carrington, 18.1.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 8 Jersey to Queen Victoria (telegram), 3.3.1891 in Buckle (ed), GE, *The Letters of Queen Victoria, third series, 1879-1900*, London, 1930, vol 2, p 16.
- 9 Russell, p 72.
- 10 *The Bulletin*, 7.3.1891, p 4.
- 11 *The Bulletin*, 21.3.1891, p 1.
- 12 Parkes to Carrington, 24.3.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 13 Martin, AW, *Henry Parkes: a Biography*, MUP, Melbourne, 1980, pp 2-3, 324; Russell, p 82; Gullett to Carrington, 20.7.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 14 Gullett to Carrington, 10.4.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 15 Laidley Mort to Carrington, 25.4.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 16 Lady Jersey to Queen Victoria, 4.5.1891 in Buckle, pp 36-7.
- 17 Jersey to Carrington, 31.5.1891, Lincolnshire MSS.
- 18 Jersey to Parkes, 1.7.1891, Parkes MSS, quoted by Martin, p 406.
- 19 Jersey to Ripon, 20.11.1892, British Library (BL) MSS 43560, ff 6-9.
- 20 Same to same, 17.12.1892, BL Add MSS 43560, ff 10-13.
- 21 Russell, p 70.
- 22 Russell, p 83.
- 23 Russell, pp 83-4.
- 24 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17.6.1892, p 5.
- 25 Jersey to Ripon, 6.10.1892, BL Add MSS 43560, ff 1-5.
- 26 Same to same, 20.11.1892, BL Add MSS 43560, ff 6-9. The "sad personal loss" presumably refers to Lord Ancram's death.
- 27 Ripon to Jersey, 28.12.1892, BL Add MSS 43560, ff 14-17.
- 28 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4.3.1893, p 5.
- 29 Cunneen, p 485.
- 30 Jersey to Ripon, 17.12.1892, BL Add MSS 43560, ff 10-11.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Jersey to Ripon, 10.3.1893, BL Add MSS 43560, f 24.
- 33 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2.3.1893, p 5.
- 34 Russell, p 85.