



*Lady Eliza Lucy Grey  
(Born Spencer)*



# Lady Grey

National Portrait Gallery—Canberra  
Wax medallion (c. 1845)  
by Theresa Walker

*'A perfect devil, ill natured,  
untrustworthy, and given to tantrums*

*Beautiful black hair, still better  
brown eyes, and a very good forehead  
and complexion, but her nose is too long  
and peaky, and her mouth twists about  
in a rather ugly way*

*The son, the only child of the  
marriage, died at the age of five months*

*Returning to England,  
on board the Forte,  
Lady Grey committed an  
indiscretion: 'a foolish little act'  
involving a flirtatious letter  
which she would not surrender.*

*First watch and the Forte turned back  
for Rio Janeiro,  
and put off Lady Grey and her maid.*

*Dumped like Ariadne  
on the foreign shore*

*She had a nervous breakdown*

*They separated for 37 years!*

*Years later she announced  
She's coming back*

*Some say Queen Victoria was at the bottom of it*

*She was a Spencer you know...*

*Eliza Lucy Spencer  
known as Lady Grey*

*By Anthony Abbott*



Lady Grey was named in honour of Eliza, the wife of Cape Governor Sir George Grey. The following fascinating story about her was written by Anthony Abbott. A few details obtained from the National Portrait Gallery of Canberra was added for interest sake.

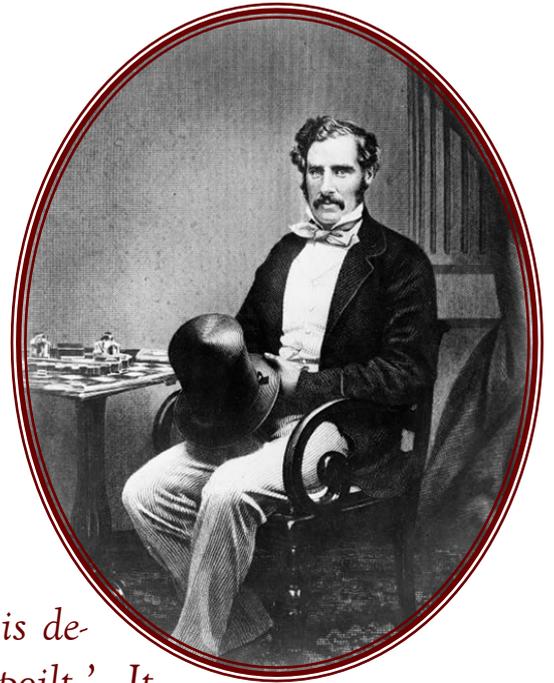
According to documentation sent to him by a Mrs. Julie Lund, of the Strawberry Hill Farm management committee in Australia, Lady Grey was by no means colourless . She caused a lot of trouble. If Helen of Troy had a face that launched a thousand ships, Lady Grey managed the no mean feat of turning a ship around in mid-Atlantic.

George as visiting magistrate to Albany Western Australia met the young Eliza Lucy, the seventh child of Sir Richard and Lady Ann Spencer, at the Strawberry Hill Farm , as we know, the Spencer family home. Sir Richard had served under Lord Nelson and been wounded three or four times, suffering a severe head wound 'that was thought to influence his mood swings and rages and was a possible cause of his death in 1836'.

George and Eliza married at the farm in 1839 after a brief courtship. She was sixteen, he twenty-seven. If Eliza thought that being subjected to the mood swings of her father would be a thing of the past, in George Grey she had chosen a close-at-hand replacement.

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# Sir George Grey



In a cutting sent by Mrs. Lund, Eliza is described as 'beautiful, fascinating, and spoilt.' It seemed a love match of the two-moths-attracted-to-a flame variety.

After the marriage they journeyed to England but would return to South Australia and New Zealand where Sir George undertook stints as Governor. On their way back from England, in 1840, she bore a son. When the baby died in Adelaide, Grey blamed his wife. She was never reconciled to life in Adelaide or New Zealand, where contemporaries described her 'a perfect devil', ill natured, untrustworthy, and given to tantrums.

In 1854 Sir George arrived in the Cape as Governor of the colony. After a nervous breakdown in 1858 Lady Grey returned to England. Grey followed in 1859.

On the return voyage from England in 1860, which seemed somewhat of a round tour as the route took in South America on the way back to Cape Town, the marriage hit stormy waters. The ship was the HMS Forte, flagship of the fleet, captained by no less than the dashing Admiral Henry Keppel.

The Admiral in a spirit of self-sacrifice to the Governor and his Lady gave over his cabin for their use, and moved into the adjoining dressing room, to which, as fate would have it there was an interleading door, but, as propriety would have it, was locked.

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## Admiral Henry Keppel

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Here we have all the elements in place to justify diminished responsibility. Any sea voyage, that is, once sea sickness has been overcome, is understandably stimulating by way of all that rocking about, but as well there was a dashing Admiral of the Fleet in splendid uniform; a moody husband; a beautiful, spoilt and dissatisfied wife; a too long voyage; restricted conditions; adjacent sleeping quarters; a locked door.

The tension broke when Sir George found the careless Eliza sliding a note under the door in question. "You must clear the door dearest and leave me to come when I think it is safe." The infidelity was compounded by her Ladyship signing the note 'Lucy' – the intimate used only among members of her close family. Even more careless she held in her hand a note from the Admiral. "I hope and expect to see my own darling ..."

If this was meant to be a restorative voyage and a rest from the responsibilities of governorship, this was not what the moody Sir George needed. He lost it completely, raged around threatening to either murder his wife or commit suicide. The Admiral seemed to escape as a an object of his violent intentions.

# HM Forte



FREE - A MUSICAL TERM MEANING  
STRONG OR LOUD



We can suppose that biffing the Admiral or pushing him overboard might have been classed as mutiny and not in the interests of Empire.

Sir George's display of emotion must have been convincing for the Admiral now in a fluster decided to turn the ship about and return to Rio, for after all where was her Ladyship now to rest her head? The disgraced Eliza was dumped ashore and sent to a hotel to mull matters over.

The voyage continued to Cape Town. We can imagine the strained atmosphere on board, yet Sir George and the Admiral, once again remembering Empire, Queen and Country, agreed to hush things up. At Cape Town Sir George, avoiding an official welcome, retreated to Admiralty House. The next day he announced that Lady Grey would be returning to England. For the next thirty years he would never again mention her name.

Part of the Empire building ethos involved making use of the hero ideal by pointing suitable candidates in the required direction and letting others follow. Sir George had persuaded himself that he was such a hero and now had to deal with his shattered self-esteem.

Traditionally we are told that every hero has an Achilles heel. The difficulty was that Sir George had not enough heels to accommodate his weak spots. Keeping together his personality in the face of such odds must have been tremendous strain. But he was a man of talent and resource. With a combination of charismatic persona, bluster, smooth talk he would plaster over the cracks but not without paying a price with bouts of deep depression.

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## *"Found in the arms of a young officer"*

Efforts to repress the scandal did not help. Gossip was rife from London to Auckland. "She had been found in the arms of a young officer." "Sir George had found her in bed with the Admiral," etc.,etc.. Eliza retaliated by accusing her husband of 'frequent infidelities' with no supporting evidence however. Sir George flailed around to no effect, sending dispatches to the Colonial Office, the Admiralty and anyone who he thought would help to punish the rumour mongers. Little was done except to transfer Keppel to the Brazil naval station.

The effect of the breakdown of his marriage under such unfortunate circumstances was marked by paranoid and obsessively secretive behaviour, alarming mood swings, and violent reaction to the slightest criticism. While biographers suggest manic depressive illness, in the same breath his use of laudanum is mentioned. While the Victorians were in denial about the effects of laudanum we are less innocent today about drug-based behavior.

Not all manic depressives can be said to behave like Sir George, while to anyone who has come up really close to anyone seriously dedicated to

drugs, Sir George exhibits all the symptoms, including the mesmeric pseudo-heroic aspects driven to the surface as part of the need to survive.

When his marriage broke down and the scandal erupted, the laudanum was near at hand.

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*"Laudanum was  
near at hand..."*



*"His companion and  
hostess was 16 year old  
Annie Matthews"*



*Sir George Grey and Annie Matthews in the drawing room of Mansion House, Kawaii Island*

Unlike cocaine and other stimulants, long-term use of opium derivatives such as morphine, heroin and laudanum are not much good if you want to get it up and keep it up. If this is the case - and this is only a guess - then no wonder the marriage was in trouble. Lady Grey had not done much keeping still and 'thinking of England', which had made her restless. That Sir George never took up with anyone else may be taken as contributory evidence.

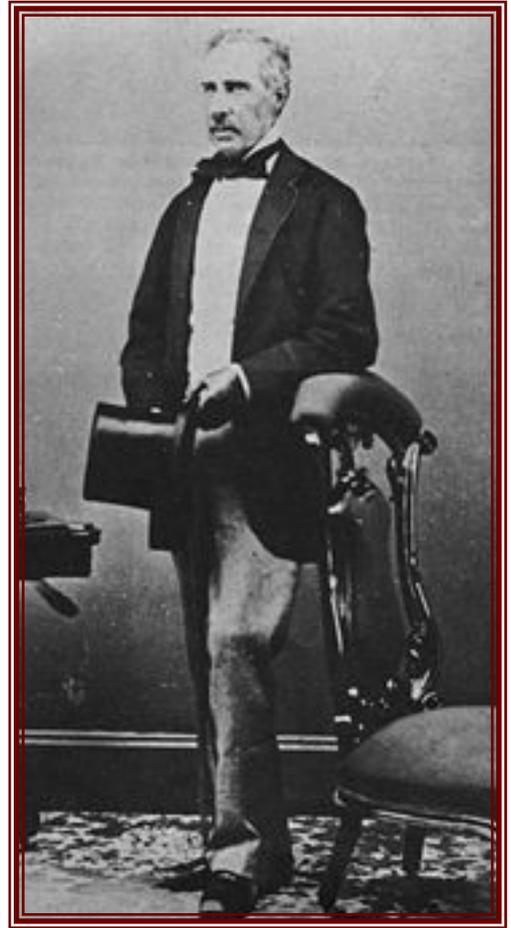
Also when we look at the details of his career it is apparent that he was a master at manipulating people and facts, and handing down flawed directives for others to carry out, but on a practical level he was inept. Even before his marriage, two Australian expeditions were perilously undertaken. He kept exploring places where there was no water without taking any water with him. He was twice sacked as colonial governor, once in South Africa and once in New Zealand, yet kept coming back like a latter-day Jeffrey Archer. As Prime Minister of New Zealand, history records that he led one of the most inept cabinets on record.

Grey had purchased Kawaii in 1862 and spent a brief period of respite on the island. His companion and hostess was sixteen year old Annie Matthews, daughter of Grey's half brother Godfrey. Grey had adopted Annie as his daughter on Godfrey's death in 1861.

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*“Horei Kerei, Aue!  
Ka nui matou aroha  
ki a koe”*

For the next four years Grey enjoyed transforming the island to a gentleman's estate – experimenting with the acclimatization of exotic plants (including walnuts, olives, bananas, camphor and cinnamon) and animals (peacocks, guinea fowl, ducks, quail, geese, zebras, kangaroos, wallabies, antelopes, deer, monkeys). Annie married Seymour Thorne-George Kawai's estate manager.



In 1874, however, political events drew Sir George back into public life. He was elected Superintendent of Auckland province and Member of Parliament for Auckland City West in 1875. Two years later he was made Premier (Prime Minister) of New Zealand, a position he held for two years. Grey remained in government until 1890 as a member of the Opposition.

In 1894 Sir George returned to England where he was invested as a Privy Councilor by the Queen whom he had served devotedly throughout his career.

In 1896, after 37 years, he was briefly reunited with Lady Grey. This only imposed more strain on both parties. Calling her in old age ‘a miserable wreck’, they separated again. He slipped into senility, speeded on by several minor strokes and died within a few weeks of her death in September 1898.

At his death he was honoured with a state burial at St Paul's Cathedral. A poignant message from the Maori people – “Horei Kerei, Aue! Ka nui matou aroha ki a koe” George Grey, alas! Great was our love for thee.”