

Sir Augustus William Frederick Spencer Loftus

(4 August 1879 – 9 November 1885)

Geoffrey Bolton

Sir Augustus William Frederick Spencer Loftus (commonly known as Lord Augustus Loftus¹) was born on 4 October 1817, fourth son of the second Marquess of Ely. He came of an Anglo-Irish landed family who through the skilful manipulation of their rotten boroughs in the 18th century Irish House of Commons were promoted to a higher rank in the peerage than they had the means to sustain. To keep up their position members of the family served as courtiers to the Royal family; Jane, wife of the third Marquess, was Queen Victoria's favourite Lady-in-Waiting for 40 years. Privately educated, Augustus was intended for the diplomatic service and won the patronage of King William IV. He was made an Honorary Attaché to the court of Prussia in 1837 and achieved salaried office in 1842. In 1845 he married Emma Maria Greville, an Admiral's daughter. They were to have three sons and two daughters.

Moving happily in Royal Courts

Until 1871 Loftus was posted to a succession of appointments at German and Austrian Courts, rising steadily through the diplomatic ranks until in 1866 he was made GCB and Ambassador at Berlin. Suave, tactful and self-effacing, Loftus moved happily among the aristocracy and royalty of the German Courts in an era when, as he recalled in his memoirs, "Life was easier and the turmoil and cares of life were less".² Unfortunately the punctilious formality of the German Courts rubbed off on him, so that by early middle age he already had a reputation as a "pompous busybody".³ He witnessed the Franco-Prussian War and the unification of the German Empire under Bismarck's leadership in 1870-71, but got on the wrong

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commented that “A man who made a good general might make a bad archbishop; and there is about as much resemblance between a general and an archbishop as there is between an ambassador and a colonial Governor”.⁶¹

Assessment

To a modern observer it might seem that Loftus had not performed badly in the last phase of his public life. He was a careful and efficient go-between for New South Wales and the Colonial Office. His interventions in politics were cautious and correct. He provoked no crises and caused no scandals. But the qualities of reticence and tact that might be seen as desirable in a Governor in the early 21st century were not enough for the late 19th century public. They wanted their Sovereign’s representative to play an active part in community life, patronising charities, opening agricultural shows, entertaining on a generous scale and occasionally provoking public debate without compromising the impartiality expected of the office holder. It was all very well for Queen Victoria herself in her long widowhood to seclude herself in Balmoral or Osborne, as she had family members who could deputise for her, but a colonial Governor had to be constantly on show as a public figure. Such activity was seen as vindicating the Governor’s office, and as fending off republican suggestions that in a self governing community there was no need for the Viceregal role. Loftus had the misfortune to serve his time between two Governors, Robinson and Carrington, who took to the role of public figure with relish, and contrasts were drawn. No doubt his diplomatic experience in autocratic Courts was not the best preparation for public life in a society which considered itself aggressively democratic. His appointment to New South Wales originally may only have come about as the British Government’s way of dealing with an official who was too senior to discard but who was preferably kept at a long distance. But Froude was right when he saw Lord Augustus Loftus as accepting his destiny and loyally conforming to it, so that in the end he performed better than anyone might have predicted.

Notes

- 1 Throughout his life he was known as Lord Augustus Loftus. Although this was only a courtesy title because he was the son of a Marquess and did not entitle him to sit in the House of Lords it was thought to outrank his genuine knighthood.
- 2 *The Diplomatic Reminiscences of Lord Augustus Loftus PC GCB (Reminiscences)*, vol 1, London 1892, p 7.
- 3 Haskins, A, and Powell, J (eds), *The Journal of John Wodehouse, first earl of Kimberley 1862-1902*, Camden 5th series, vol 9, Cambridge, 1997, p 78.
- 4 Crown Princess of Prussia to Queen Victoria, 20.11.1870; Granville to Queen Victoria, 25.11.1870, in Buckle, GE (ed), *The Letters of Queen Victoria, second series, 1862-1878*, London, 1926, vol II, pp 82 , 85.

- 5 Granville to Queen Victoria, 21.4.1871 in Buckle, p 130.
- 6 Sumner, BH, "Lord Augustus Loftus and the Eastern crisis of 1875-1878", in *Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol iv, no 3, 1934, pp 283-95.
- 7 Blake, R, *Disraeli*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1966, pp 405, 590.
- 8 Salisbury to Loftus, 18.1.1879, Letters to Lord Loftus, Mitchell Library A3057, (Loftus Letters). Having spent time on the Victorian goldfields in 1853 Salisbury could speak with authority about the climate.
- 9 *Reminiscences*, vol II, 1894, p 271.
- 10 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5.8.1879, p 5.
- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18.9.1879, p 5.
- 12 Froude, JA, *Oceana*, London, 1886, p 203.
- 13 Loftus to Sir William Manning, 12.4.1884, quoted Graham, NI, "The role of the Governor of New South Wales under responsible government, 1861-1890", PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 1973, p 247.
- 14 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18.2.1880, p 5; Loftus to Kimberley, 29.8.1880, Bodleian Library MSS Eng 4150; Correspondence of Lord Augustus Loftus and Lord Kimberley, 1880-82 (Loftus-Kimberley MSS).
- 15 Graham, p 233, quoting annotations to Loftus to Hicks-Beach, 9.2.1880, CO 201/591.
- 16 Loftus to Kimberley, 13.8.1880, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 17 Graham, p 239; Kimberley to Loftus, 22.6.1880, CO 201/688.
- 18 Parkes, H, *Fifty Years in the Making of Australian History*, London, 1892, vol II, p 243.
- 19 Graham, p 233.
- 20 Graham, p 251.
- 21 Loftus to Kimberley, 3.11.1881, 29.12.1881, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 22 Loftus to Kimberley, 29.12.1881 (private), Loftus-Kimberley MSS. Emphasis in original.
- 23 Martin, AW, *Henry Parkes*, MUP, Melbourne, 1980, p 327.
- 24 Loftus to Kimberley, 13.8.1880, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 25 Loftus to Kimberley, 29.12.1881, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 26 Loftus to Kimberley, 4.11.1880, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Loftus to Kimberley, 11.8.1881, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 30 Loftus to Derby, 21.4.1883, CO 360/13; letter 1883/6667.
- 31 Loftus to Colonial Office, 6.7.1882, CO 360/13, letter 1882/15145.
- 32 Loftus to Hicks-Beach, 15.3.1880, CO 360/13, telegram 1880/3774; Loftus to Kimberley, 7.8.1880, letter 1880/14937.
- 33 Loftus to Hicks-Beach, 23.2.1880, CO 360/13, telegram 1880/2736; Loftus to Kimberley, 7.8.1880, letter 1880/14937; Loftus to Derby, 13.12.1883, letter 1883/21047.
- 34 Loftus to Kimberley, 26.10.1881, CO 360/13; letter 1881/21989.
- 35 Loftus to Kimberley, 30.1.1881, Loftus-Kimberley MSS.
- 36 Martin, pp 315-17.
- 37 Loftus to Kimberley, 7.7.1881, CO 360/13; telegram 1881/12034; Loftus to Kimberley, 10.8.1881, letter 1881/16853.
- 38 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24.11.1882, p 6; Graham, p 242.
- 39 Graham, p 243.
- 40 Graham, NI, "Loftus, Lord Augustus William Frederick Spencer", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 5, MUP, Melbourne, 1974, p 99.
- 41 Ibid.

- 42 Loftus to Kimberley, 11.10.1881, f 43, Loftus-Kimberley correspondence.
- 43 Loftus to Colonial Office, 24.4.1883 and 18.5.1883, CO 360/13 letters 6896 and 11109.
- 44 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29.11.1883, p 5.
- 45 Hutchinson, F, and Myers, F, *The Australian Contingent: a history of the patriotic movement in New South Wales and an account of the despatch of troops to the assistance of the imperial forces in the Sudan*, Sydney, 1885; Wood, WA, "The Sudan contingent of 1885: the anti-war movement", in *Labour History*, November 1962, pp 52-69. The major works on this campaign are Inglis, K, *The Rehearsal*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1971; and Saunders, M, *Britain, Australia and the Sudan Campaign of 1884-85*, UNE, Armidale, 1985.
- 46 United Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, 1885 (c): *Correspondence respecting offers by the colonies of troops for service in the Soudan*, p 4.
- 47 Dalley to Loftus, 20.2.1885, 23.2.1885, 2.3.1885, Loftus Letters, ff 27-44.
- 48 *The Times*, 10.3.1904, p 6 (Loftus's obituary).
- 49 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4.3.1885, p 7.
- 50 Froude, p 201.
- 51 Froude, p 199.
- 52 Froude, p 202.
- 53 Froude, p 199.
- 54 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9.11.1885, p 7.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 *Bulletin*, 12.12.1885, pp 3-4.
- 57 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14.11.1887, p 7; 16.5.1888, p 7; *The Times*, 20.1.1888, p 8.
- 58 Dalley to Dibbs, 12.5.1888, Loftus letters, ff 107-110.
- 59 Rosebery to Barton, 5.5.1900 (NLA 51/1/635).
- 60 *The Times*, 10.3.1904, p 6.
- 61 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9.11.1885, p 7.