

John de Vere Loder, Baron Wakehurst

(8 April 1937 – 8 January 1946)

Chris Cunneen

“We really were the end of an era” wrote Lady Wakehurst in 1989¹ and indeed they were. Her husband, in office during the whole of World War II, was the last of the British Governors of New South Wales.²

Birth, education and war service

John Loder had been born on 5 February 1895 in London, son of Gerald Walter Erskine Loder,³ a wealthy barrister, railway magnate and Conservative Member of the House of Commons. Gerald Loder’s lifelong passion was horticulture. In 1904 he purchased the Elizabethan and Jacobean mansion, Wakehurst House, at Ardingly in Sussex, where he could indulge his interest in gardening. Wakehurst Place became famous for its rhododendrons and rare shrubs and trees and Gerald became president of the Royal Horticultural and Royal Arboricultural societies. When raised to the peerage in 1934, he became First Baron Wakehurst of Ardingly.

John’s mother, though lacking wealth of her own, had a long aristocratic lineage. She was Lady Louise de Vere Beauclerk, daughter of the tenth Duke of St Albans and was close to Queen Victoria, who allowed young John to be christened in the Chapel Royal at St James’s Palace. An only son with four sisters, he was educated at Eton College, where he excelled at history and languages, especially French and German, and enjoyed acting. Although his autocratic, bad tempered father and eccentric, overprotective mother did not allow him to participate in team sports, he enjoyed cricket and tennis and was a good golfer, eventually attaining a handicap of eight.

Young Loder holidayed in Germany for four months in 1913. Back at Eton in 1914, he intended to go to Trinity College, Cambridge, but World

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was that of mental health. In 1959 she founded the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health, with headquarters in Belfast in Beacon House.

On their return to England in November 1964 Wakehurst was a trustee of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and a Governor of the Royal Ballet. He was also active in the English Speaking Union, and regularly visited the United States.

Wakehurst died on 30 October 1970 at his home at Chelsea, London. Lady Wakehurst, appointed DBE in 1964, was involved in British charitable organisations and continued to be active in the field of mental health, being president of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship until 1984. In addition, from 1958 to 1978 she was vice-president of the Royal College of Nursing. Survived by their daughter and three sons, she died on 19 August 1994.

Active, popular and careful to avoid any evidence of partisanship in local politics, but firmly standing for the central symbolic authority of Britain, Lord Wakehurst was a notable example of a British Governor. Lady Wakehurst was an outstanding Viceregal consort. It was not through any failure in their performance of their roles that the Australian Labor Party had long before decided that an Australian should represent the Crown in New South Wales.

Notes

- 1 *In a Lifetime Full: reflections on a public and a private life*, by Peggy Wakehurst as told to Lois Graessle [Milldale, England, c 1989], p 106.
- 2 Gordon Samuels was born in the United Kingdom but had long been resident in New South Wales when appointed Governor.
- 3 For Wakehurst's biographical details, see Cunneen, C, "Wakehurst, second Baron", *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, vol 16, MUP, Melbourne, 2002, p 462; Wakehurst, P, *In a Lifetime Full*, and Lord Wakehurst's unpublished memoirs, ML MSS 1788, Mitchell Library, Sydney (hereafter ML). For Gerald Loder, see *The Times*, 4.6.1934, p 15, and 1.5.1936, p 18. The source of the family wealth was Giles Loder, Gerald's grandfather, who died in 1871 leaving some £2.5 million from Baltic trade with Russia: *The Times*, 8.6.1888, p 5.
- 4 For Lady Wakehurst's biographical details, see her autobiography, *In a Lifetime Full*. Her mother-in-law's attitude to "trade" is referred to on p 48.
- 5 Letters to his father, 1.2.1924, [p 3], and 3.3.1924. Lord Wakehurst Papers, House of Lords Record Office, AJCP Microfilm M1122 (ML).
- 6 *Labor Daily*, 8.1.937, p 1. For his account of the appointment, see Wakehurst's 1937 diary, p 1, Wakehurst papers, ML 6347/1 (ML). For MacDonald (1901-81), see Lyon, P, "MacDonald, Malcolm", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, OUP, Oxford, online edition. For Stevens (1889-1973), see Ward, JM, "Stevens, Sir Bertram Sydney Barnsdale", *ADB*, vol 12, 1990, pp 74-7.
- 7 *Daily Telegraph*, 9.4.1937, p 11.
- 8 For the election, see Hogan, M, and Clune, D, *The People's Choice*, vol 2, Parliament of NSW, Sydney, 2001, pp 139-66.
- 9 Wakehurst to MacDonald, 2.3.1938, in folder "Correspondence with Secretary of State for the Dominions", ML MSS 1788 Add ons 534 and 541 (ML). For McKell, see Cunneen, C, *William John McKell*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000.

- 10 For Spooner, see Lloyd, CJ, "Spooner, Eric Sydney" *ADB*, vol 12, 1990, pp 37-8. Wakehurst described Spooner in a letter to the Dominions Office, 18.10.1938, Wakehurst papers, ML MSS 1788 Add ons 534 and 541.
- 11 Wakehurst recounted the events of 3 and 4 August in confidential despatches to the Dominions Secretary dated 4 and 5 August 1939, Wakehurst papers, ML MSS 1788 Add ons 534 and 541. He later gave a brief public account of these events in a letter to *The Times*, 16.5.1969, p 13. For Mair (1889-1969), see Ewer, P, and Spearritt, P, "Mair, Alexander", *ADB*, vol 10, 1986, pp 385-6; for Jordan (1881-1949), see Bennett, JM, "Jordan, Sir Frederick Richard", *ADB*, vol 9, 1983, pp 522-3.
- 12 *Daily News*, 7.8.1939, p 1. The comment about bad advice perhaps referred to the Lieutenant-Governor's approval of the Governor's action, as McKell's later poor opinion of Jordan might indicate.
- 13 Wakehurst memoirs, ch 17, p 20 (reverse), MLMSS 1788, Add on 1043, and diary entry 11.1.1938, MS 6347/1 (ML). His companions were Jack Medley, headmaster of Tudor House, Bill Owen and Bert Dickson, Sydney businessmen.
- 14 Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Government House Sydney Conservation and Management Plan, vol 1, June 1997, pp 197 and 199.
- 15 *History of the Women's Australian National Services 1940-1946*, Sydney, 1947.
- 16 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13.8.1940, p 4.
- 17 Ralph, RC, and others, *Hillview – country home of the Governors of New South Wales*, Berrima District Historical Society, 1986. For Medley and Kater, see Serle, G, "Medley, Sir John Dudley Gibbs", *ADB*, vol 15, 2000, pp 344-6; and Rutledge, M, "Kater, Sir Norman William", *ADB*, vol 9, 1983, pp 534-5.
- 18 See reports in the press, for example, *Argus*, 5.9.1942 and 7.9.1942. A file of papers and correspondence dealing with the Governor's interest in this conference and his subsequent less public promotion of inter-denominational unity is in Wakehurst Papers, MLMSS 1788 Add-ons 534 and 541. For Batty (1879-1961), see Cable KJ, "Batty, Francis de Witt", *ADB*, vol 7, 1979, pp 210-12.
- 19 For a report of the speech and Calwell's attack, see *Sun* (Sydney) and other newspapers, 16.9.1942 and 23.9.1942. For Calwell (1896-1973), see Freudenberg, G, "Calwell, Arthur Augustus", *ADB*, vol 13, 1993, pp 341-5.
- 20 *Our Second Chance*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1944; and *Preparation for Peace*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1945.
- 21 For Baring (1903-73) see article by Clayton, A, *ODNB*, online edition. Attle (1883-1967) headed the Dominions Office from 1942 to 1943; see article by Whiting, RC, *ODNB*, online edition.
- 22 Wakehurst made this comment in a draft of a letter to "Bobbity" (Dominions Secretary Lord Cranborne), dated 16.12.1944, but endorsed "NOT SENT": in folder "Correspondence with Secretary of State for the Dominions", Wakehurst Papers, MLMSS 1788 Add-ons 534 & 541 (ML). For Cranborne (1893-1972), fifth Marquess of Salisbury, see article by Goldsworthy, D, *ODNB*, online edition
- 23 Telegrams Cranborne to Wakehurst, 5.4.1945, and Wakehurst to Cranborne, 13.4.1945, copies in Wakehurst Papers, MLMSS 1788 Add-ons 534 and 541 (ML). Major-General Sir John Noble Kennedy (1893-1970) was Governor of Southern Rhodesia in 1946-53; see obituary, *The Times*, 17.6.1970, p 12.
- 24 Wakehurst reported McKell's opinion of Jordan in a letter to Cranborne, dated 6.12.1943: copy in Wakehurst Papers, ML MSS 1788, Add-Ons 534 & 541 (ML).
- 25 An account of this tour is in Wakehurst Papers, *Ibid*.
- 26 Wakehurst's unpublished memoirs, ch 15, p 8. This chapter is not included in the copy at the Mitchell Library, Sydney, but part of it can be found in the copy at Government House, Sydney; I am grateful for the help of Robert Griffin and Ann Toy, of the Historic Houses Trust. I am also grateful for the helpful comments of the current Lord Wakehurst (letter 12.11.2009).