

Sir Robert William Duff

(29 May 1893 – 15 March 1895)

Martha Rutledge

Naval officer and landowner

Robert William Duff was descended from a long line of Duffs of Fetteresso with estates mainly in Banffshire. His father assumed the surname Abercromby on inheriting his mother's estates including Glasshaugh. Robert William was born on 8 May 1835 in London,¹ only son of Arthur Duff Abercromby of Glasshaugh, Banffshire, Scotland, and his wife Elizabeth, née Innes. He was educated at a school at Blackheath, London.² A grandson of Rear Admiral Robert Duff of Fetteresso, in 1848 he joined the Royal Navy. Commissioned Sub-Lieutenant in May 1854 and promoted to Lieutenant on 5 January 1856, he served in HMS *Atalanta*, based at Devonport. From December he was based at Queenstown, in the screw steam flagship HMS *Hogue*, and by March 1858 in the *Nile*. In December that year he was serving on the Mediterranean Station in the *Doris*.³ He continued to draw full pay until he retired with the rank of Commander on 1 April 1870,⁴ although he held no further sea-going posts. On 21 February 1871 Duff married Louisa, daughter of Sir William Scott, sixth Baronet, at St Paul's Church, Wilton Place, London.⁵

Following the death on 30 December 1861⁶ of his uncle, Robert Duff, Abercromby succeeded to his extensive property, including Fetteresso Castle, Kincardineshire, and changed his name to Duff. A man of wealth and position, he owned three other estates, Glasshaugh, Coulter and Auchenderren, in Banffshire,⁷ and was Deputy-Lieutenant and a Justice of the Peace for Banffshire, Aberdeenshire and Kincardineshire. He was a keen sportsman and a good shot, but long before the repeal of the game laws that banned the use of guns on tenanted land, he allowed his tenants to kill rabbits. Duff was a member of Brooks's, the Devonshire, the National Liberal, the Army and Navy and the Turf clubs.

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.

- 4 Royal Navy list, July 1870.
- 5 *The Book of the Duffs*.
- 6 *The Book of the Duffs*.
- 7 *Town and Country Journal*, 23.3.1893, p 22.
- 8 It was not unusual for serving Naval officers to sit in the House of Commons, viz, Admiral Lord Cochrane and Admiral Lord Charles Beresford.
- 9 *British Australasian*, 16.3.1895, p 428.
- 10 *British Australasian*, 16.3.1895, p 428.
- 11 Viscount Sherbrooke from 1880.
- 12 *Sydney Mail*, 4.3.1893, p 447.
- 13 The Marquess of Ripon was Secretary of State for the Colonies in WE Gladstone's 4th Cabinet (August 1892-March 1894) and in Lord Roseberry's (March 1894-June 1895).
- 14 Gladstone to Lord Ripon, 17.2.1893, Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 101.
- 15 Ripon to Duff, 16.2.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 31.
- 16 Ripon to Duff, 16.2.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 31.
- 17 Duff to Ripon, 26.3.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 33.
- 18 Duff to Ripon, 26.3.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 34.
- 19 Ripon to Duff, 16.2.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 32.
- 20 Ripon to Duff, 16.2.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 32.
- 21 Duff to Ripon, 11.12.1893, CO 201/614, f 286.
- 22 Duff to Ripon, 11.12.1893, CO 201/614, f 288.
- 23 Duff to Ripon, 21.1.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 28. "Sir George Dibbs [sic] action in forcing a prorogation under circumstances when I could not refuse it was straining the Constitution, and I am therefore not at all sorry that parliament has entered a most emphatic protest against his conduct".
- 24 Duff to Ripon, 11.12.1893, CO 201/614, f 291.
- 25 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11.12.1893, p 5.
- 26 Ripon to Duff, 16.2.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 32.
- 27 Duff to Ripon, 26.3.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 35.
- 28 Duff to Ripon, 11.12.1893, CO 201/614, f 274.
- 29 Duff to Ripon, 11.12.1893, CO 201/614, f 276.
- 30 Duff to Colonial Office, 18.7.1894, CO 201/615, f 171.
- 31 Duff to Dibbs, 27.7.1894, Dibbs Papers.
- 32 Dibbs to Duff, 28.7.1894, Dibbs Papers; Duff to Colonial Office, 30.7.1894, CO 201/615, f 196.
- 33 Duff to Ripon, 30.7.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 44.
- 34 Duff to Colonial Office, 4.9.1893, CO 201/614, f 246. Letter to Robert Meade.
- 35 Duff to Colonial Office, 4.9.1893, CO 201/614, f 247. *Daily Telegraph*, 2.9.1893.
- 36 Duff to Colonial Office, 4.9.1893, CO 201/614, f 245. CO comment.
- 37 Mackerras, CB, "Dibbs versus Duff: The Sad Story of a Colonial Governor", in *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society (JRAHS)*, vol 56, pt 4, 1970, p 296. He was 6ft 4ins tall and weighed 18 stone.
- 38 Mackerras, p 300.
- 39 Mansfield, B, "Sir George Richard Dibbs", in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 4, MUP, Melbourne, 1972, p 66.
- 40 Duff to Ripon, 22.7.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 40.
- 41 Duff to Ripon, 22.7.1894, Marquess of Ripon Papers, vol 41, p 41.
- 42 Duff to Colonial Office, 13.8.1894, CO 201/615, f 251.
- 43 *British Australasian*, 16.3.1895, p 429.

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- 44 JB Carpenter claimed £25,000 – £10,000 for himself, 5000 for the crew and £10,000 for Burns, Philp.
- 45 Carpenter to Sir George Dibbs, 4.8.1893, CO 201/614, f 459.
- 46 Duff to Colonial Office, 19.11.1894, CO 201/615, f 317.
- 47 Duff to Sir Robert Meade, 27.8.1894, CO 201/615, f 259.
- 48 Duff to Sir Robert Meade, 27.8.1894, CO 201/615, f 259.
- 49 Duff to Sir Robert Meade, 27.8.1894, CO 201/615, f 260.
- 50 Duff to Colonial Office, 13.9.1894, CO 201/615, f 279.
- 51 Duff to Colonial Office, 30.4.1894, CO 201/615, f 95.
- 52 Fiaschi is remembered by the life-sized bronze replica of the famous Florentine *Porcellino* in Macquarie Street, outside Sydney Hospital.
- 53 *British Australasian*, 25.4.1895, p 593.
- 54 *British Australasian*, 25.4.1895, p 593.
- 55 “In the Name of the Great Architect of the Universe”.
- 56 Darley to Colonial Office, 18.3.1895, CO 201/617, f 84-5.
- 57 Darley to Colonial Office, 18.3.1895, CO 201/617, f 84-5.