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LADY LAMINGTON AND THE YEAR OF LEFT-HAND GLOVES

MAUREEN R. LILLIE


The wives of Queensland governors have filled important roles as official hostesses, patrons of the arts and of charitable and educational institutions, particularly those serving women and children. Their work, however, has been overshadowed by that of their husbands and these women may seem colourless and remote figures. A typescript of material taken from the ‘diary’ of Lady Lamington, wife of Lord Lamington, Governor of Queensland between 1896 and 1901, was presented to the John Oxley Library, Brisbane, in 1999 by her granddaughters. These reminiscences provide insights into the role of Lady Lamington as consort of Queensland’s last colonial governor. The Lamingtons’ years of office were significant, with the entry of Queensland into the Commonwealth and the preoccupations of war, drought and outbreaks of bubonic plague. In 1901, the Federation celebrations were followed by the death of the British monarch and later, a royal visit, for which the Lamingtons acted as hosts. Lady Lamington was young, observant and interested in people and her view of the events of this time, set against the more public accounts, helps to shed light on the woman, her position and the events she witnessed.

It could be said that for Lady Lamington, wife of the Governor of Queensland, the Federation year began in 1900. In April that year, she and her husband returned to Brisbane for the last part of their term of office following six months leave in England. While Lady Lamington’s ill health had prompted the break, she returned in good health and spirits, looking forward to seeing friends and taking up her duties again. The following fourteen months were significant both for Queensland and for Lady Lamington personally. During this time she saw the completion of a public project of great interest to her, farewelled troops bound for war in South Africa, joined in celebrations for the inauguration of the Commonwealth, took part in public mourning following the death of Queen Victoria and was hostess to a royal visit. She also said good-bye to a place that had become her home.

Mary Houghton Hozier, known informally as May, was the youngest daughter of Sir William Hozier, Baronet, of Mauldslie Castle, Lanarkshire, Scotland. On 13 June 1895, at the age of twenty-six, she married Charles Wallace Alexander Napier Cochrane Baillie, the 2nd Baron Lamington, in London. She came to Queensland when her husband took up his appointment as Governor in April 1896. In the early stages of pregnancy and suffering from seasickness, she found the voyage to Australia an ordeal. Her first official portrait, taken in Townsville, shows a pale-faced young woman holding a bouquet rather rigidly in front of her, possibly to conceal the fact that her best dress had become too tight. It was not an easy introduction to Queensland. Moreover, Brisbane’s Government House, though situated conveniently close to Parliament at Gardens Point, had furnishings that seemed old-fashioned to her. As governors’ wives must work with what they inherit, she threw herself into the challenge of making an official residence into a home.

The years of her husband’s first posting as a colonial governor appear to have been memorable for Lady Lamington, for she wrote a short memoir of this time for her family and friends. She described the journey to Queensland and the people, places and events that she found of particular interest. It is warmly written and provides insights into the role of a governor’s wife and the events she witnessed. Although that role was not so well defined as that of a governor, it was (and still is) important. She was the official hostess of the colony and worked with many charitable organisations in an era when the care of the sick and disadvantaged members of society was largely undertaken by such bodies. The patronage of the governor’s wife gave these organisations some official status as well as contacts otherwise denied them. At first, May Lamington was diffident about presiding over meetings and carrying out public duties, but came to enjoy the work and was involved in numerous projects not merely as a patron, but as an active participant. Lady Lamington, young and
enthusiastic, regretted in later years that she had not been older and more experienced at this time, so that she might have accomplished more. She travelled with her husband to destinations considered fairly remote, such as Longreach and Mount Morgan, and developed a love for the Australian bush. In fact, she accomplished much during her time in Queensland, especially in the field of nursing.

In 1900, when the Lamingtons returned to Queensland, people were preoccupied with the Boer War. This was not surprising, as local volunteers had already embarked for South Africa in support of the Empire. In May that year the Governor and his wife attended ‘The Absent Minded Beggar’, a military play, at which the 4th Contingent of volunteers, about to sail for South Africa, were present. The troops enthusiastically cheered the war scenes and also the Lamingtons when they arrived. A few days later, a garden party reception was held for the soldiers, nurses, and their families at Government House. Although the officers were presented to Lord and Lady Lamington, she insisted on shaking hands with every soldier regardless of rank, a ‘mark of kindness’ that was much appreciated. She was keenly aware of the bravery of the volunteers and was grateful that her husband’s position prevented him from volunteering himself. In June 1900, when eventual victory seemed certain, Brisbane celebrated with a procession and a Venetian fete in the Botanical Gardens. Stalls for charitable associations were set up and lighted boats, including the government steam yacht the Lucinda with the Lamingtons aboard, floated nearby on the river. Later in April 1901, Lady Lamington farewelled Queensland’s 6th Contingent bound for South Africa, in the absence of the Governor who was in Rockhampton, and felt able to make a cheerful speech.

Lady Lamington’s official duties were not confined to military occasions. In May 1900, she opened the new cookery school at the Brisbane Technical College. This was a pleasant task as she was a pupil of the college as well as patron. Following the formal proceedings, she enjoyed a practical demonstration by Amy Schauer, Instructress in Cookery at the college and Queensland’s authority in all matters culinary. May Lamington also took classes in wood carving, a fashionable hobby for women, and studied and passed the college’s examination for first aid and home nursing, an achievement of which she was proud. Her interest in nursing was to culminate in the establishment of a women’s hospital, her major contribution to Queensland.

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Lady Lamington had been interested in founding a hospital for women’s diseases for some time. During visits to the more remote parts of Queensland she developed great sympathy for the women she encountered. Recognising that ‘women who have lived lonely lives in the vast isolation of the Bush shrink from the publicity attendant on the crowded wards of the General Hospital’, she saw the need for such a hospital devoted exclusively to women’s diseases. In August 1900, she called a public meeting to form a committee to raise funds and set the project going. While many people supported the idea, there was considerable debate about the need for such a hospital. Some suggested that women could be treated just as easily at the Brisbane
General Hospital and that money raised would be better spent on a hospital for ‘incurables’. Letters to the editor expressing both support and opposition for the project filled the columns of the *Brisbane Courier*.

The first major fund-raising effort of Lady Lamington’s committee was a lavish Poster Ball, which became the social event of the year. Ball guests acted as human ‘posters’ for the businesses that sponsored them by providing a costume and a donation to the hospital fund. People who wished to see the costumes were admitted to a gallery supper for a small fee and the newspapers gave the event good coverage. There were many interesting costumes, including that of a lady representing the Brisbane Newspaper Company, who wore a dress of white satin printed with news and photographs. Lady Lamington came simply dressed as one of the hospital’s nurses (Fig. 1). A photograph of this ‘costume’ featured prominently in the popular weekly, the *Queenslander*, and was later hung over the sitting room fireplace in the new hospital. The ball was followed by a huge and successful fete held at ‘Merthyr’, the home of Sir Samuel and Lady Griffith.

Lady Lamington had the pleasure on 31 October 1900 of formally opening the Lady Lamington Hospital for the Diseases of Women, which was located in two cottages in Leichhardt Street, Brisbane, near St Paul’s Church. Much was made of the fact that the place was homely and cheerful as well as being efficiently laid out. On the first day, the five or so beds were full and a waiting list already existed. By 1905 the cottages were replaced by a large new hospital. Lady Lamington’s interest in health and nursing continued and she supported the building of a home for nurses at the Brisbane General Hospital, later known as the Lady Lamington Nurses’ Home (Fig. 2).

Some of Lady Lamington’s duties for 1900 were more frivolous. During the social ‘Season’, in the cooler months of the year, she hosted a wide variety of functions at Government House. These ranged from ‘at-homes’ (informal tea parties), dinners, garden parties, levées and receptions to a masked ball held on 25 July. Hostess Lady Lamington came in the guise of ‘Federation’ in a costume symbolising the coming union of the Australian colonies. Her cream satin and net gown was overlaid with an elaborate assemblage of ribbons with mottos and colours representing the various colonies, while on the bodice was a shield inscribed ‘One people, One destiny, One flag’. She also wore a six-pointed crown inscribed...
'Federation' and carried a flag composed of the colonies' colours and the Union Jack.\textsuperscript{19} This costume was hidden until midnight when the guests removed their hooded cloaks and masks and revealed their identities. As the Vice-Regal couple might have compromised their anonymity by receiving guests, they played a small prank on the company. Lord Lamington changed places with his secretary, while Sylvia Darley, a house guest, pretended to be Lady Lamington.\textsuperscript{20} For practical reasons, Lady Lamington's cloak had a 'secret' mark so that her staff could recognise her, though it was difficult for her to keep a straight face when a dancing partner accused her of acting as if she owned the place!\textsuperscript{21}

The 1900 'Season' was busy. Apart from the regular round of gatherings at Government House, Lady Lamington attended many other functions. These were mainly in support of philanthropic causes and ranged from giving prizes at the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Association to naming a new fire engine. At the end of September, Lord Lamington left for a six-week tour of the north where he was deeply shocked by the devastation caused by years of drought.\textsuperscript{22} While he was away, his wife continued her pubic duties, taking a short break in Sydney and Melbourne with her cousin, but returning to Brisbane in time for the next meeting of the hospital committee in late October. She found Brisbane's summers exhausting and, once the weather began to get hot, looked for a suitable house to lease for the summer. In 1900, she chose 'Harlaxton' in Toowoomba. It was cooler on the Downs and sufficiently close to Brisbane for Lord Lamington to travel down by train for meetings. The Lamingtons travelled to the capital for the celebrations for the inauguration of the Commonwealth on the first day of the New Year.\textsuperscript{23}

On 1 January 1901, Sydney was the focus of the nation's celebrations. As the new Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, represented the Crown and as there were uncertainties about precedence and legal position, the colonial governors did not attend. Celebrations were held in Brisbane on the day, but many of the state's leading citizens were attending the Sydney celebrations and the local events were generally overshadowed by the royal visit later in the year. After attending a special service at St John's Pro-Cathedral, the vice-regal party went in procession with soldiers and community groups through the city to the Treasury Building. The Governor read the Queen's Proclamation from the balcony and Lady Lamington was presented with three posies in red, white and blue by three girls in matching costumes representing the federated nation, the Commonwealth and the State of Queensland. Because at Federation each colony ceased to exist as an independent entity, the post of colonial governor also ceased to exist. Lord Lamington therefore had to be sworn in again as Governor of the State of Queensland. Justice Power administered the oath in the hall of Government House before a small group of official witnesses.\textsuperscript{24} In the afternoon a military display was held in the Domain and in the evening the Lamingtons returned to Toowoomba.\textsuperscript{25}

The year 1901, besides signalling the birth of the Commonwealth, marked the end an era with the passing of the longest-serving and much loved British monarch, Queen Victoria. Lady Lamington had noted when visiting Windsor the previous year that the Queen was 'very much changed and not so bright as of old'.\textsuperscript{26} Soon after the Federation celebrations concluded, news came that she was ill. She died late on 22 January and news reached Queensland by cable the following day. Lord Lamington came down immediately from Toowoomba on the mail train. There was confusion as to what should be done, as the Queen's reign had been so long that no one was sure of the protocol following the death of a monarch. London was cabled for instructions,\textsuperscript{27} and the Governor then proclaimed the ascension of King Edward VII in the company of 'suitable gentlemen': the Lieutenant Governor, the Premier, the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the Assembly.\textsuperscript{28}

Lord Lamington agreed to remain in Queensland after the expiration of his term, in order to act as host for the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary) on their forthcoming tour of Australia after opening the first Federal Parliament. Following the Queen's death, which plunged the British Empire into official mourning, it was thought that the royal tour might be cancelled and the Lamingtons parted with most of their domestic staff. However, the King announced that he was 'unwilling to allow the private sorrow of his family to interfere with a public undertaking of such Imperial significance as the inauguration of the Australian Commonwealth'.\textsuperscript{29} Lord and Lady Lamington travelled to Melbourne to attend the opening of Parliament and associated festivities (Fig. 3). Wherever she went, Lady Lamington drew admiration for her elegant attire and bearing, seen as being very much in the style of the Duchess. On 9 May at the opening of Parliament, her outfit,
of a black satin skirt, high-collared velvet coat and jetted toque, was reportedly ‘one of the most effective’ worn on the occasion and was featured in the press. Lady Lamington was fortunate in that black, the colour prescribed for official mourning, suited her particularly well. She was less lucky with her jewellery, for she was so jostled in the crowd that her heirloom diamond brooch broke and she had to carry the pieces. When she returned to Brisbane, she spent several evenings discussing arrangements with Lady O’Connell, whose husband had been Lieutenant Governor during the previous royal visit to Queensland.

The logistics of playing host to the royal party were considerable. During the visit of the Duke and Duchess, Government House was the royal residence and arrangements had to be made to provide for security as well as comfort. Though conveniently placed, the house was not large and some rearranging had to be done. The official party consisted of Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke’s secretaries Sir Arthur Bigge and Sir Donald Wallace, Lady Lygon, the Duchess’s lady-in-waiting and friend of Lady Lamington’s, and their servants. There was also an artist recording events, and several officials. In order to accommodate all the visitors, the Lamingtons slept in their children’s room and the children, their nurse and members of the Government House staff moved into Parliament House. During the tour, Queensland was on display and everyone hoped to create a favourable impression.

Although the state of mourning made festive events, such as balls, inappropriate, an astounding number of activities were fitted into the few days
available to entertain and inform the royal guests. The City of Brisbane provided a Municipal Concert at the Exhibition Hall, and several major public events were staged in the Domain. Government House hosted receptions and dinners, which meant that arrangements had to be to be made for food, decorations and music of the highest standard possible. Lady Lamington’s responsibilities as hostess began with arranging for morning tea to be served on the train that brought her guests and were not over until they returned to New South Wales. It was her job to ensure that all ran smoothly. Her attention to detail extended to being ‘dragged about the town’ in the back of a carriage to give the drivers and postillions practice with corners and so that the horses would be accustomed to the noise of bands and salutes.

There were problems with arrangements, however. The Duke and Duchess were to have sailed to Brisbane on the royal yacht, Ophir, and the ceremonial welcome was planned around a sea arrival. By May 1901, Brisbane had been declared a plague-affected port, so the visitors had to travel from Sydney by train. As Queensland railway lines had a different gauge from those in New South Wales, they had to change trains at the border. Lord Lamington travelled down to welcome them and to accompany them on the journey to Brisbane. Although the royal train had been refurbished, the bunks were very narrow and the Duchess fell out of hers. She and Lady Lamington later found to their amusement, that falling out of bunks was a problem they had in common. To maintain an appearance of arriving by sea, the royal party quietly detrained at Milton station, instead of travelling on to the main terminus at Roma Street. Astute locals drew their own conclusions from the number of mounted policemen patrolling streets near the station and a small crowd gathered to greet the royals who were soon whisked away in carriages (Fig. 4). Lady Lamington waited to receive them at Government House (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, the dignity of the occasion was somewhat marred when the nervous new servants made themselves scarce and she had to open the door herself for her royal guests. This and the cloak and dagger manner of arrival amused the Duchess, who had a keen sense of the ridiculous.

Then followed the ‘official’ arrival by steamer, ostensibly from Moreton Bay. As Government House was further upriver than the landing stage at Petrie Bight, the Lucinda went beyond the Domain on the pretext of negotiating a narrow section, then disappeared round Kangaroo Point and steamed up towards the wharf as if coming from the Bay. Keen observers may have wondered at the sight of a man in Rear-Admiral’s uniform, strongly resembling the Duke, on deck.
on the way up, but if so, no comment was made. The royal visitors were then officially welcomed and there was a procession through the city. The main decorative features in Brisbane were several large and elaborate arches spanning the streets, as there had been in Melbourne. The visitors were pleased to see that Aboriginal people were involved in the welcome, as they had been absent in Melbourne, although the manner of the participation surprised them. An arch featuring two gunyahs and sixty Aboriginal warriors was thought interesting and picturesque until one of the skilfully modelled figures moved, and the stunned visitors realised that the decorations were actually live people.

It had been hoped that the royal couple could fit in a day of private sightseeing, but official activities took up all the time available. These ranged from a display of singing and dancing by thousands of school children in the Domain to a military review at Fort Lytton where the Duke’s secretary, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, noted that ‘the Queenslanders are very proud of their little army and not without reason’. The Duchess and Lady Lamington were less impressed by military prowess than Sir Donald and both women were concerned for their husbands lest the crowds caused their horses to panic. One event held to entertain the visitors was an evening corroboree, lit by limelight, held on the lawn in front of Government House. Aboriginal women half concealed in the bushes surrounding the lawn chanted and beat time for the dancers. The royal party were intrigued but found the event difficult to understand without any commentary or explanation. The performance was stopped because of the cold and refreshments were given to the performers on the request of the Duchess. The audience were then treated to the spectacle of people in possum cloaks and ochre being served by footmen dressed in 18th-century clothing. Tour artist Sydney P. Hall captured the picture for posterity.

On 22 May 1901, following the laying of the foundation stone of St John’s Cathedral and a visit to the National Association Exhibition, there were fireworks in the Domain. The next day was occupied by a series of receptions, including a morning levee where the Duke shook hands with over 500 people, and an afternoon garden party at Government House. Lady Lamington observed that the endless hand shaking that was part of her
duties had caused one left-hand glove to outlast four right ones and, by the end of this 'Season', she must have had a drawer full of them.44 After dinner a Municipal Concert was held at the Exhibition Building. The royal party departed for the south again on 24 May. The train journey was made in daylight so that they could see the countryside. Although Lady Lamington was disappointed that she had not been able to arrange a private trip to the country for her guests, a surprise had been arranged for them. After Toowoomba, the train stopped at Cambooya so that the royal party could get a glimpse of life in the country. They were treated to refreshments of billy tea and damper and a demonstration of cattle drafting, in which the Governor and several members of the suite participated.45

When the royal tour was over, the Lamingtons prepared for their departure and began a series of farewell parties that made May Lamington feel low at parting with friends. In the years since she had arrived in Queensland, she had given birth to two children and progressed from being a shy bride to a highly capable hostess with a royal visit to her credit. She was given a gold dressing-table set by the women of Brisbane as a departing gift. She, however, considered that the best gift of all was the lease she had to sign for the block of land for the Queensland Government subsidised women's hospital.46 On 20 June 1901, the Lamingtons left for England. The day was cold and they drove to the railway station. Lingering, they shook hands with the coachman and patted the horses. From somewhere in the crowd a voice called, 'God bless you, Lady Lamington'.47 In later years she recalled that her time in Queensland had been 'the happiest years of my life for which I thank them now and ever'.48

ENDNOTES
1. Diary written by Lady Lamington, presented to the Queensland Government by her granddaughters Mrs Felicity Scrimgeour and Mrs Bridget Leigh, 16 February 1999, John Oxley Library, Brisbane, p. 134.
3. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 73.
7. Brisbane Courier, 10 May 1900.
8. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 147.
10. The Week, 4 April 1901.
15. Some costumes are illustrated in the Queenslander, 27 September 1900.
16. Brisbane Courier, 1 November 1900; Flashes Weekly, 8 November 1900.
23. Brisbane Courier, 2 January 1901.
24. Brisbane Courier, 2 January 1901.
25. These events are covered in detail in the Brisbane Courier of 2 January 1901 and in the Week.
26. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 139.
27. Brisbane Courier, 21 January 1901.
30. The Age, Melbourne, 10 May 1901; Argus, 10 May 1901.
33. Ibid, p. 185.
34. Ibid, p.182.
35. Ibid, p. 185.
36. The Week, 24 May 1901.
41. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 192.
42. Ibid, p. 173.
43. This drawing is in Wallace, The Web of Empire, p. 174.
44. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 78.
46. Diary of Lady Lamington, p. 197.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.