

# George Grey (1812 – 1898)

George Grey, the only son of Lieutenant-Colonel George Grey and his wife Elizabeth, née Vignoles of County Westmeath, Ireland, was born on 14 April 1812 at Lisbon, Portugal, a week after his father was killed during an attack on Napoleon's soldiers at Badajoz, Spain. His mother remarried, and in 1820 George was sent to boarding school at Guildford, in England. He ran away, and after private tuition, entered the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. In 1830 he joined the 83rd Regiment in Ireland. Disliking military life, and appalled by the poverty of the Irish people, he led two expeditions in Western Australia in 1837–39 to seek land suitable for settlement, but little of geographical significance was discovered. His interest in the Aboriginal people was kindled, however, leading to future publications on the language, culture and assimilation of indigenous people. In August 1839,



## ***Brachyglottis greyi***

*Brachyglottis* is a genus of about 30 species of trees, shrubs, lianes and herbs, with daisy flowers in white and yellow, found in Australia and New Zealand. A low-growing shrub of up to 2 metres, *Brachyglottis greyi* has attractive oblong greyish-green, slightly shiny leaves, with white felted undersides. The branchlets and young leaves are densely covered in soft white hairs, and in summer bright yellow daisies are borne on bright green, glabrous stalks and bracts. *Brachyglottis greyi* is found on coastal, lowland and montane cliffs in eastern and southern Wairarapa, but is rather rare and local.

while still in Australia, Grey was appointed resident magistrate at King George Sound. Three months later he married Eliza Lucy Spencer, the daughter of his predecessor, Sir Richard Spencer. Their infant son, born in 1841, lived only five months. The couple became estranged and later separated.

In 1840, at the age of 28, Grey was appointed governor of the almost bankrupt new colony of South Australia, and was thrust into the field of public administration. He went on to become governor of New Zealand (1845–53), Cape Colony (1854–61) and New Zealand for a second time (1861–68), but his tenures were difficult and fraught with strife, bickering, discontent and intrigue. His management of Māori affairs gained him mana among Māori, but his harsh and autocratic economic measures alienated missionaries and settlers. Although he was knighted in 1848, his inconsistencies and defiance of orders led to his dismissal in 1868. He retired to Kawau Island, but in 1874 re-emerged in New Zealand politics as superintendent of Auckland province, nearly twenty years as a member of parliament, and premier from 1877 to 1879. Unable to get support for his often-radical causes, he became isolated and difficult, and resigned.

He lavished his frustrated energy, talents and fortune on the development of his island estate, where he was a welcoming and generous host. Mansion House, as it is known today, was extended and filled with rare books, artefacts and hand-crafted kauri furniture. An enthusiastic naturalist and horticulturist, Grey corresponded with overseas specialists, introduced rare and exotic trees, plants and animals for his garden and acclimatisation experiments, and sent numerous flora and fauna specimens to the British Museum, Kew Gardens and elsewhere.

In 1894 he returned to London, and a formal but uneasy reconciliation was made with his wife. Sir George Grey died on 19 September 1898, and was buried in St Paul's Cathedral. Two New Zealand towns, a river and a shrub, *Brachyglottis greyi*, are named after him.