

William Ewart Gladstone 1809 - 1898

William Ewart Gladstone or the 'grand old man' as he came to be known, was a great statesman of his time.



W.E Gladstone as a young man. Source: Shannon, Richard

He was four times the Prime Minister of Great Britain and used his position in parliament to bring about socio-economic reform and set standards of morality in politics. His political career spanned over 60 years and in that time he supported both the conservative and liberal movements prevalent at the time.

William Ewart Gladstone, the fourth son of Sir John Gladstone and Anne MacKenzie Robertson, was born in Liverpool on 29th December, 1809.

His father was a successful merchant who later entered into politics and encouraged his son to do the same.

William was educated at Eton and Christ College, Oxford. At the Oxford Union Debating Society Gladstone developed a reputation as a fine orator.



Catherine Glynn (in 1937 from a painting by Fredrick Richard Say. (detail) Source: McDonogh Keith (Ed) 1999 Mr. Gladstone, a commemorative CD-ROM

Gladstone was elected to Parliament in 1832, as a Tory. He made his mark from the start and held minor office in Peel's government of 1834-35. In July 1839 he married Catherine Glynn and inherited the Glynn family's estate Hawarden, Flintshire, North Wales.

The two maintained a 'rescue' home for prostitutes and Gladstone would, famously, trawl London streets at night, trying to persuade prostitutes to start a new life.

Although he was slowly moving towards liberalism, in 1843 he entered Peel's Conservative cabinet. However, in 1852 he joined Aberdeen's Whig government as Chancellor of the Exchequer, a position he would ultimately hold three times.

His efforts to extend the franchise failed and ended the government in 1866. Two years later, the Liberals were back, with Gladstone in charge. Queen Victoria, who disliked him personally, was forced to ask him to become prime minister.



Source: McDonogh Keith (Ed) 1999 Mr. Gladstone, a commemorative PC CD-ROM Flintshire County

Gladstone began to tackle Ireland's oppressive landlordism and disestablished the Irish Protestant church in 1869. Abroad, he failed to promote disarmament and was caught out by the start of the Franco-German War. A heavy defeat in 1874 led to his retirement.

It was short-lived. Turkish brutality in the Balkans brought Gladstone back to active politics in 1875. His campaign to remove Turkish forces was widely opposed, but a magnificent campaign secured his return to Parliament and a Liberal government in 1880.

For over two years, Gladstone was both prime minister and chancellor. His failure to rescue General Gordon from Khartoum cost him dearly, his popularity only partially recovered by his firm handling of a dispute with Russia. He resigned in 1885 after a budget defeat.

Gladstone formed his third government in 1886, but his Irish Home Rule Bill was rejected by both Parliament and the electorate. He devoted the next six years to convincing the British electorate to grant Home Rule. Campaigning on the issue, the Liberals won the 1892 election and Gladstone was back at the helm.

Another Home Rule Bill was rejected by the Lords in 1893. He found himself increasingly at odds with his cabinet and, in 1894, he retired. Humanitarian to the end, in his last major speech he denounced Turkish atrocities in Armenia.

He died of cancer in 1898 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.



Gladstone rests after tree-felling in Hawarden c. 1880. Source: McDonogh Keith (Ed) 1999 Mr. Gladstone, a commemorative PC CD-ROM Flintshire County Council

Port Curtis Settlement

The transportation of convicts to Australia became an integral part of the British penal system in the late eighteenth century.

Following the establishment of the first convict settlement at Port Jackson (originally at Botany Bay) in 1788, a second settlement was established at Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1803. By the early 1820s the flow of convicts was such that the British government decided to establish another penal colony.



Pencil sketch of Port Curtis by George Barney, 1847. Source: McDonald, Lorna 1988 Gladstone...A City that Waited p.58 Boolarong Publications

In 1823 Surveyor General John Oxley was sent to examine Port Curtis as one of three possible sites for a settlement. He spent sixteen days exploring the area but decided against it in favour of Moreton Bay, where he found a 'large and important river' (the Brisbane River).

The new Moreton Bay colony was established the following year and another convict settlement was set up at Norfolk Island in 1825 (after an earlier settlement had been abandoned).

As local opposition to transportation grew, the British government was forced to cease importing convicts to Sydney and Brisbane. Despite having been dismissed by Oxley twenty years earlier, Port Curtis was once again considered as the site for a convict settlement.

The idea was taken up by William Ewart Gladstone, who was appointed British colonial secretary in 1845.

Gladstone, a devout churchman with a strong humanitarian streak, was interested in prison reform and decided that the Port Curtis settlement should be populated by a mixture of new arrivals from England and 'expired' convicts from Van Diemen's Land.

In 1846 Gladstone made his intentions known to the newly-appointed governor of New South Wales, Sir Charles Fitzroy.

On arriving in Australia, Fitzroy discovered that there was widespread opposition to the idea of reviving transportation in any form. Despite this, Gladstone decided to proceed with his plan and appointed Lieutenant Colonel George Barney, formerly head of the Royal Engineers at Port Jackson in Sydney, as the administrative head of the new colony.

In the end, however, it all came to nothing because a change in the British government led to the abandonment of the colony before a single convict arrived to join Colonel Barney's advance party in the newly proclaimed colony of North Australia on the shores of Port Curtis.

William Ewart Gladstone was succeeded by Earl Grey as colonial secretary in London and the colonists were ordered to return to Sydney in April 1847. The majority were glad to leave, though Barney elected to stay on and explore the countryside while the *Lord Auckland* was repaired.

He eventually returned to Sydney in July, where he was severely criticised for his role in the venture which cost the British government over £15,000. Despite the decision to abandon the Colony of North Australia, Colonel Barney remained convinced that Port Curtis was an ideal place for a settlement and advised Governor Fitzroy to act quickly to prevent the surrounding countryside and the nearby harbour from being seized by land-hungry squatters.

Fitzroy took his advice and had the harbour surveyed but it was nearly six years before a final decision was made. By then a number of squatters had moved into the area, driving their flocks of sheep and cattle north from the Brisbane Valley.

In 1853 Governor Fitzroy announced that a town by the name of 'Gladstone' was to be established at Port Curtis, after W.E. Gladstone whose idealism had sent Colonel Barney to the shores of Port Curtis.



Francis MacCabe's first map of the town of Gladstone. Source: Archives Office New South Wales

The Arrival of Gladstone

The marble statue of William Ewart Gladstone was first recorded in Centennial Park, Sydney in 1895.

The reserve, created by Governor Macquarie in 1887 was to be a grand park for the people to celebrate the colony's centenary and featured more than 31 statues.



The statue of William Ewart Gladstone in the Tondoon Botanic Gardens

In 1946 the Gladstone statue was recorded as having been damaged with a broken nose, toe and chipped in several places. It was removed from Centennial Park during the 1970's and placed in store for restoration.



The Duchess of Kent and Mayor Col Brown soon after the unveiling of the William Ewart Gladstone statue.

The origins of the statue prior to its arrival in Centennial Park and name of the sculptor is unknown, however it is thought that it may have been commissioned in the 1890's.

What is known about the sculptor however, is that a mistake was made during the statues manufacture. While out shooting in the winter of 1840, William Ewart Gladstone badly injured the first finger on his left hand and had it removed. The sculptor depicted him with his hand in his pocket to hide the imperfection, however a mistake was made and Gladstone's right hand was hid instead.

In 1986 a Gladstone music teacher, Gary Matherson discovered the statue during a visit and reported the find to the then Gladstone Mayor, Col Brown. After lengthy negotiations, the statue was transferred to Gladstone and erected at the Gladstone Tondoon Botanic Gardens and unveiled on 27 February 1992 by Her Royal Highness, Duchess of Kent.

The Duchess of Kent was the first member of the Royal family to visit Gladstone and the occasion was called a 'red letter day' by then Mayor of Gladstone Town Council, Col Brown. The unveiling and four hour visit to Gladstone was part of the Duchess's 9 day tour which included visits to other regional centres throughout Queensland.

Early restoration attempts carried out on the statue prior to acquisition had left the marble surface porous and pitted making it difficult to stabilise the stone's condition.

After more than a century exposed to the elements of an urban environment, it became necessary to move the statue into the climate controlled conditions of the Gallery/Museum to enable the statue to be enjoyed for many years to come.

The 1.5 tonne statue was relocated from the Tondoon Botanic Gardens in 2003 to its current location and installed in the purpose built glass bridge at the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum.

Mr Gladstone's statue now enjoys views out to Goondoon Street and is an integral part of the City Heart streetscape. State of the art lighting makes it possible for the statue to be viewed by passers by at any time of day and night.



Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum façade lights up at night with local artist Margaret Worthington's installation 151.16S 23.50E and the statue of William Ewart Gladstone.



The statue of William Ewart Gladstone was carefully air lifted into position at the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum

The Gladstone Collection

The Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum houses the city's collection of William Ewart Gladstone memorabilia.

Generous donations have allowed the city to present a small but significant collection of William Ewart Gladstone memorabilia containing a number of interesting items including William Ewart's personal 'Gladstone bag', donated by his great grandson, Peter Gladstone on the occasion of the city's bicentenary.

No-one knows for sure why the Gladstone bag, popular throughout the 1800's was named after William Ewart. Typically made of leather with a hinged compartment the bag was a predecessor to the briefcase for businessmen, whilst also versatile as a travelling bag.



The Gladstone bag in the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum collection

Many other famous and infamous people have been associated with owning a Gladstone bag including Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper, however the name Gladstone bag still continues to be used to this day to describe the particular style.

Other William Ewart Gladstone items in the city's collection include commemorative wall plates, mugs and a plaster bust still in its original newspaper wrapping dated 1896. Items are displayed in the reception area of the Gallery/Museum and changed regularly.

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1809 - 1898

A brief history of the city of Gladstone's namesake

ADMISSION FREE

GLADSTONE REGIONAL art gallery museum

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Gladstone QLD 4680
Ph: 07 4976 6766 Fax: 07 4972 9097

Mon-Sat 10am-5pm