

Sir George Grey, 1812-1898

Parliament currently has on display three significant works depicting Sir George Grey.

Grey was perhaps the most significant figure in nineteenth century New Zealand. He was twice Governor of the country at critical times in its history, and a member of Parliament and Premier.

His roles included:

- Governor 1845-53
- Governor 1861-68
- Member of Parliament 1875-95
- Premier 1877-79

In his first appointment as Governor, Grey dealt with the Crown Colony's difficult years of the late 1840s. He then oversaw the drafting of the (UK) Constitution Act 1852, upon which New Zealand's system of representative government was founded. He returned to the post of Governor in 1861 after conflict had erupted with Māori over land. During the troubled years of war that followed, he took a leading role in the vexed arrangements between the British military, the colonial government and the Governor.

After retiring for a time to Kawau Island he re-entered political life in 1875 as a member of Parliament, determined to resist the abolition of the provinces. While unsuccessful regarding the provinces he did become Premier in 1877, advocating electoral and land reform and a more liberal franchise. Although others in the end carried through those reforms Grey remained in Parliament until 1895, constantly reminding his more practically minded fellow politicians of his liberal ideals. He died in 1898.

Regular tours of Parliament are available for those who might wish to see the three works currently on display. In the Galleria in Parliament House is a miniature set of portraits of Grey and his parents, together with a plaster maquette (preliminary model statue) by noted sculptor F. J. Williamson of London. The maquette was made for the full-sized statue of Grey in Auckland. In the members' reading room of the Parliamentary Library hangs an oil portrait of Grey by well-known Wellington artist J.M. Nairn.

These works will remain on display for several months. Information on tour times and contact details can be found on the Tours and educational visits page of Parliament's website.

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New Zealand Parliament



This set of three miniature oils on ivory dates from the 1800s. It depicts Grey as a young boy (centre) and his parents. Grey's father, Lieutenant Colonel George Grey, died in the Peninsular War in Spain in 1812. His mother, Elizabeth, went into premature labour when she heard the news of her husband's death, giving birth to a son, George, on 14 April 1812. Photo: Parliamentary Service Collection.

Information

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