

## Earl of Rosebery (Archibald Philip Primrose) 1847 – 1929



Earl Rosebery is perhaps the least well known of the Liberal Prime Ministers, having the misfortune to serve in the office for only a short period.

The Earl of Rosebery was born in London on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1847, into a Scottish aristocratic family, he attended Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he developed an interest in both politics and horseracing. Rosebery stated his ambitions were to marry an heiress, own a horse that would win the Derby and be Prime Minister, these he achieved. Rosebery married Hannah, the only child and heiress of Baron Meyer de Rothschild, they had two sons and two daughters., Rosebery won several of the five English Classic Races. His most famous horses were Ladas who won the 1894 Derby , Sir Visto who did it again in 1895 (Rosebery was Prime Minister on both occasions) and Cicero in 1905.

In 1868 whilst at Oxford he succeeded to his Grandfather's title as 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Rosebery and took up his seat in the House of Lords. A year later he bought his first racehorse, Ladas, which was against University rules. He was offered a choice by the university authorities between selling the horse or abandoning his studies, he chose the racehorse. He never took his degree.

Rosebery had a long parliamentary career as a Liberal politician and on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1871 his maiden speech seconded the Address to Her Majesty following the opening of Parliament. The following year Gladstone offered him a government post but Rosebery refused. From its inception Rosebery was President of the East and North of Scotland Liberal Association and in this capacity he organised the invitation for Gladstone to become the candidate for Midlothian. Gladstone then convinced Rosebery to take up the post of Under Secretary of the Home Office with special responsibility for Scotland and two years in later 1883

unconvinced that Gladstone was interested in Scottish affairs, he resigned. He then travelled the world promoting his imperialist ideas. 'The British Empire is a Commonwealth of Nations'.

During his tour Rosebery made a major contribution to the Liberal Party's imperial policy. He held strong beliefs about Britain's overseas possessions, promoting the idea of the Empire as a federation of Nations. At Adelaide on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1884 he announced 'There is no need for any nation however great leaving the Empire, because the Empire is a Commonwealth of Nations' which was the first time this phrase was used. When at a time of crisis for the party, the Queen vetoed Granville for the Foreign Office and in 1885 Rosebery joined Gladstone's Cabinet as Commissioner of the Board of Works and Lord Privy Seal. A year later he became Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's third administration. Queen Victoria, an admirer, described it as the "only really good appointment" in the whole government. In the interim he was elected as one of the City's representatives to the first London County Council in 1889 and was chosen as its inaugural Chairman. He was elected as member for East Finsbury in 1892 and continued in the role of Chairman until he again became Foreign Secretary.

The death of his wife Hannah in 1890 kept him out of politics for some time but he was eventually persuaded by Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales to return and in 1892 he became Foreign Secretary again in Gladstone's last administration.

When Gladstone resigned in March 1894 Rosebery accepted the post of Prime Minister although he did so reluctantly, regarding it as a dangerously poisoned chalice. He would have preferred to spend his time on horseracing and literature Rosebery did not enjoy the success in office of his Liberal predecessor Gladstone. He never sat in the House of Commons and like others in that situation found it difficult to lead a government from the Lords. In 1899 he said "There are two supreme pleasures in life. One is ideal the other real. The ideal is when a man receives the seals of office from his Sovereign and the real pleasure comes when he hands them back".

It was a short-lived administration. He had inherited a divided Cabinet and found himself at odds with both Liberal MPs and his cabinet especially with Harcourt the Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader in the Commons, whose rudeness and temper exasperated more than just Rosebery. He also faced an obstructive Tory dominated House of Lords and was heavily attacked in the Commons for opposing Irish Home Rule. His imperialist designs in foreign policy such as expansion of the Fleet, were defeated by disagreements within the Liberal Party whilst the House of Lords stopped the Liberal domestic legislation. His government lasted only 15 months falling in June 1896 over a vote of censure on military supplies.

In the following year he resigned as Liberal leader in the interests of party unity.

In his recollections, Rosebery wrote, "I cannot forget 1895. To lie awake night after night, wide awake, hopeless of sleep, tormented of nerves and to realise all that was going on, at which I was present, so to speak, like a disembodied spirit, to watch one's own corpse, as it were day after day, is an experience which no sane man would repeat".

He became the leader of the Liberal imperialist division of the party but retired from politics altogether in 1905 when Henry Campbell-Bannerman was chosen as Liberal Prime Minister. In his later years he turned to writing political biographies.

As well as his interest in horses Rosebery became the first president of the London Scottish Rugby Football Club in 1878 and also became an early patron of the Scottish Football Association and in 1882 he donated a trophy, the Rosebery Charity Cup to be competed for by clubs under the jurisdiction of the East Scotland Football Association. This competition lasted over 60 years and raised thousands of pounds for charities in the Edinburgh area.

In November 1918 he suffered a stroke which left him partially disabled, He died at his home Durdans, Epsom on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1929. He requested to hear the Eaton Boating Song before he passed away. He was survived by three of his four children and was buried in the small church at Dalmeny. His youngest daughter Lady Margaret, (Lady Crewe) who became one of the first seven women appointed as magistrates in 1919 following the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919.

His estate was probated at £1,500,122.3s.6d. (equivalent to £97,016,000 in 2021) and he was thus the richest prime minister ever, followed by Salisbury, then Palmerston.

Throughout his life, it was rumoured that Rosebery was homosexual or bisexual. He was a notorious misogynist and liked to surround himself with younger men.