

William Wyndham Grenville, 1st Baron Grenville

1759-1834

Prime Minister Feb 1806 – March 1807

Grenville was the son of the Whig Prime Minister George Grenville (PM from 1763 to 1765). He was also related to the Pitt family by marriage since William Pitt the Elder had married Grenville's aunt, Hester. The younger Grenville was thus the first cousin of William Pitt the Younger. He married Anne, grand-daughter of Pitt the Elder's brother. They had no children, so he was the first, and the last, Baron Grenville.

Grenville entered Politics in February 1782 as member for Buckingham and soon became a close ally of his cousin Pitt the Younger. In 1789, he served briefly as Speaker of the Commons before he entered the cabinet as Home Secretary. The following year he became Leader of the Lords when he was raised to the peerage as Baron Grenville. In 1791, he succeeded the Duke of Leeds as Foreign Secretary.

Grenville's decade as Foreign Secretary was dramatic with the French Revolutionary Wars. During the war, Grenville was the leader of the faction that focused on fighting on the continent as the key to victory and opposed the faction of Henry Dundas, which favoured war at sea and in the colonies. He left office with Pitt in 1801 over the issue of the King's refusal to assent to any Catholic emancipation.

In his years out of office, Grenville became close to the opposition Whig leader Charles James Fox, and when Pitt returned to office in 1804, Grenville sided with Fox and took no part in Pitt's administration.

After Pitt's death in 1806, Grenville was appointed Prime Minister as head of the “Ministry of all the Talents”, a coalition between Grenville's supporters, the Foxite Whigs, and the supporters of former Prime Minister Henry Addington, with Grenville as 1st Lord of the Treasury and Fox as Foreign Secretary as joint leaders. Grenville's cousin William Windham served as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, and his younger brother, Thomas Grenville, served briefly as First Lord of the Admiralty. However, despite trying to put together a Government of National Unity, a group of Pitt the Younger's followers under George Canning refused to join. Fox was included despite the King's previous hostility towards him.

The Ministry ultimately accomplished little and failed either to bring sought after peace with France or to accomplish Catholic emancipation, the latter attempt resulting in the ministry's dismissal in March 1807. It had one significant achievement, however, in that the Bill to abolish the Atlantic Slave Trade was passed in 1807.

In the years after the fall of the ministry, Grenville continued in opposition by maintaining his alliance with Lord Charles Grey and the Whigs, who were highly critical of the Peninsular War and, along with Grey, refused to join the Government of Lord Liverpool in 1812.

In the postwar years, Grenville gradually moved back closer to the Tories but never again returned to the cabinet. In 1815, he separated from his friend Grey and supported Lord Liverpool's war policy. In 1819, when the Marquess of Lansdowne brought forward his motion for an inquiry into the causes of the distress and discontent in the manufacturing districts, Grenville delivered a speech advocating repressive measures. His political career was ended by a stroke in 1823. He died childless in 1834 and his title became extinct.

