

## Frederick John Robinson (1827–28), Viscount Goderich *GOHdrich*

November 1782 – January 1859

*(Posted by: Professor Arthur Burns, Posted on: 12 November 2015 - Categories: No 10 guest historian series, Past prime ministers With adaptations and additions for Bracknell Forest u3a History Group June 2022)*

### *Early Life*

Frederick John Robinson was the younger son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Grantham, and was raised mainly by his mother, the daughter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Hardwicke, after his father died when he was three years old. He was educated at a prep school in Sunbury on Thames, then Harrow and then St John's College, Cambridge, before proceeding to Lincoln's Inn in 1802.



*Frederick John Robinson, Viscount Goderich and 1st Earl of Ripon. Source: Government Art Collection*

'The best young man's speech I ever heard in parliament'

### *Political Career*

Robinson's political career was initially sponsored by his uncle, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Hardwicke, who as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland made him his private secretary in Dublin in 1804 and then secured him a parliamentary seat at Carlow in 1806 (in 1807 he was elected MP for Ripon thanks to another relative). Robinson's speeches attracted particularly favourable notice, one of 1812 being judged by one listener 'the best young man's speech I ever heard in parliament'. By then Robinson had developed an association with Lord Castlereagh whom he served as under-secretary in the War Office from May 1809, and initially refused office under Perceval before joining the Admiralty Board in June 1810.

### **Controversial Corn Laws**

When Castlereagh joined Lord Liverpool's administration in 1812, however, Robinson was promoted to Vice-President of the Board of Trade. It fell to him to introduce the controversial protectionist Corn Laws of 1815, provoking attacks on his home by protestors,

in one of which two people died. For Robinson this measure was probably an unwelcome necessity, and such pragmatism also explains his subsequent and apparently contradictory emergence as a leading architect of 'Liberal Tory' economic policy, first as President of the Board of Trade from 1818 and then Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1823. His role in such measures as the abolition of the Navigation Acts in 1822 (*the practice was introduced of "enumerating" certain colonial products, which could be shipped directly only to England, Ireland, or another English colony. These included sugar (until 1739), indigo, and tobacco; rice and molasses were added during the 18th century. Nonenumerated goods could go in English ships from English colonies directly to foreign ports. From 1664 English colonies could receive European goods only via England*) Other reductions of duties saw taxation fall by £8 million between 1823 and 1826, earning him the soubriquet 'Prosperity Robinson'. The financial crisis of the mid-1820s weakened his credentials as Chancellor however and he resigned in December 1826.

### **Hopes foundered**

As a supporter of both the abolition of slavery and Catholic Emancipation, Robinson – elevated to Viscount Goderich in April 1827 – aligned himself with George Canning, serving as his Colonial Secretary and leader in the Lords. When Canning died, it was to Goderich that George IV turned to in August 1827 to lead the coalition of moderate Tories and Whigs that now constituted his government. Goderich was unable to hold together Canning's fragile coalition of moderate Tories and Whigs.

Goderich harboured hopes of reshaping British politics through a 'liberal' administrative party (with proposals to replace indirect taxes with a property tax, and conciliatory policies for Ireland). However these foundered on his lack of a large personal following, the King's interest in decisions about the shape of the government, and Goderich's own sense of inadequacy due both to his own ill-health and that of his wife Sarah, daughter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Buckinghamshire.

### **A tearful departure**

As early as December the monarch was exploring alternative options, and when news of this leaked to the press the ministry began to fragment. The final denouement came in an interview with the King on 8 January 1828 at which Goderich was humiliatingly asked to arrange his own replacement. The meeting, according to some reports, literally ended in tears, one source of Goderich's less flattering nickname, 'the Blubberer' (lachrymosity was a recurring feature of his career). He resigned after 144 days in office, the shortest in history for any British prime minister who did not die in office.

### **Political endurance**

Goderich suffers from the unenviable distinction of being the only Prime Minister never to face parliament while in office. But his political career survived his dismissal. As a pragmatic, liberal figure, he served in ministries of changing hue as the liberal turn in 19th century British politics worked itself out. In April 1833, as the newly created Earl of Ripon, he joined Lord Grey's ministry as Lord Privy Seal, having already served the Whig premier as Colonial Secretary from 1830. In 1834 he resigned over the government's policies on the Irish Church

and in 1836 joined the Conservative Party . In 1841 he was back as Sir Robert Peel's president of the Board of Trade, and took his final government post as president of the India Board two years later In May 1846, in a fitting finale to his political career as a consistent and reasonably effective champion of economic liberalisation, it was Ripon who moved the abolition of the Corn Laws, a month before his resignation along with the rest of the government.



*Ripon and his wife are buried in the memorial chapel at All Saints' Church, Nocton, Lincoln.*

Apart from his political career Goderich served as president of the Royal Geographical Society from 1830 to 1833, and of the Royal Society of Literature from 1834 to 1845.

Ripon died at Putney Heath, London, in January 1859, aged 76, outliving five of his successor Prime Ministers<sup>1</sup> He was succeeded by his only son, George who became a noted Liberal statesman and cabinet minister and was created Marquess of Ripon. The son was unique in being conceived at No 11 Downing Street, while Robinson was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and being born at No 10, when his father, now Goderich, was Prime Minister.<sup>[37]</sup>

#### **Titles**

1st Viscount Goderich and 1st Earl of Ripon

#### **Nicknames**

'Prosperity Robinson'; 'the Blubberer'; 'Goody Goderich'

#### **Interesting fact**

As Prime Minister he never faced a session of Parliament – a unique distinction.