
1867: Australia's first royal visit
by Prince Alfred, 2nd son of Queen Victoria



PRINCE ALFRED, DUKE OF EDINBURGH and SAXE-COBURG
Fourth child and second son of Queen Victoria Date: 1844 - 1900

HMS *Galatea* pictured c.1868.



HMS GALATEA was a steam powered Ariadne class 26-gun, sixth-rate, wooden screw frigate in the Royal Navy with a displacement of 4,686 tons. She was launched in 1859 and broken up 1883.

Picture from Wikipedia c1868

In 1866, after a refit, she went on a world cruise, under the command of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh.

It was this trip that saw the Prince on a visit to Bendigo.

Tragedy

Huge crowds tried to see and follow the Prince, sometimes causing problems. Despite these unfortunate events the public was not dissuaded from trying to see the Prince and enormous gatherings continued to follow him. In Geelong, where another free banquet had been organised, larger than planned for crowds again gathered and the organising committee fled.

In Bendigo, a huge firework display was planned. The focus of the spectacle was a model of the ship *Galatea*. Tragically, three boys climbed into the model and set off the fireworks. They were trapped inside and burned to death.

Australia's first political assassination attempt.

On 21 January 1868, having visited Tasmania, Alfred arrived in Sydney where he spent a month before travelling to Queensland for a week. When the Prince arrived back in Sydney in early March his staff requested a less demanding social

schedule. The royal tour organising committees agreed, but one event the Prince had agreed to attend was a picnic to raise funds to build a sailors' home.

The picnic was scheduled for 12 March at Clontarf on Sydney's north shore. Yet again, larger than expected crowds arrived early at the scene. The Prince sailed up from Sydney Harbour in his steam launch and landed in time for lunch.

After the meal he was escorted by one of the patrons of the event, Sir William Manning, on a walk. A man approached them from the crowd, pulled a double-barrelled pistol from his jacket and shot the Prince in the back at close range.

Alfred fell to the ground calling, 'Good God, I am shot ... My back is broken'. The assailant was immediately tackled by a Mr Thorne, who wrestled the weapon from him as he tried to fire a second round.

Assassin hanged

The shot had been heard around the picnic ground and the crowd panicked. The Prince was surrounded by a cordon of men, and after a medical examination confirmed the injury was not life threatening he was escorted back to his launch.

The would-be assassin was Henry James O'Farrell, a Catholic Irishman. Australia's ongoing fear of Irish nationalism, which had become focused on the Catholic community and the separatist Fenian movement, meant that the predominantly Protestant crowd almost lynched O'Farrell on the spot.

Over the next few months there was an outpouring of anti-Catholic sentiment. 'Indignation meetings' were held around the country and the newspapers were full of articles attacking the Irish. This sectarian animosity which until then had been somewhat underground now became very public.

The Prince made a full recovery and O'Farrell was convicted of attempted murder, even though he exhibited signs of mental instability. The Prince asked that clemency be shown to his assailant but the request was ignored. Alfred sailed for England on 4 April and O'Farrell was hanged in Darlinghurst Gaol on 21 April 1868.

Source: National Museum of Australia

http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/first-royal-visit



Medal - Royal Visit of Prince Alfred to Australia, Victoria, Australia, 1867

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