

The House was a family home, the pinnacle of local high society, and a home for visiting royalty

‘A nice homely place’

Upstairs privacy

The nineteenth century Victorian era placed a higher value on family life than any previous generation. The family home was cherished for providing privacy, comfort, and a refuge from the public world. To create a sanctuary, physically separated from the downstairs public reception rooms, the private apartments for the governor and his family were all housed upstairs. The privacy won by this division was so successful that little information exists about these rooms.

A House divided

The layout of the seven upper rooms maintained the male/female division within the House. The Governor’s bedroom and dressing room were on the eastern, male side of the House while the bedrooms for the children and the governor’s wife were on the western, family side. Tiffin’s original design also included a Day and a Night Nursery, to accommodate Sir George Bowen’s young and expanding family.

Women’s domain

Transforming a house into a family home was a wife’s duty. As mistress of the house she oversaw its day-to-day management and the care of the children. Styling the interior decoration of the home was an additional and important duty. Each governor’s wife undertook some form of redecoration soon after their arrival. A horrified Lady Lamington arrived in April 1896 to discover that *‘they had done up all the rooms too fearfully’*. By May she had redecorated, declaring that finally, *‘in every way this is such a nice House’*.



LADY BOWEN AND HER CHILDREN 1865 (Above)
During the 19th century women gave birth to their children at home. Lady Bowen gave birth to two of her children in Government House. Agnes (front left) was born 26 July 1862 and George (on Lady Bowen’s lap) was born 9 April 1864. Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland

THE MUSGRAVE BOYS, 1886
(Right) From left: Herbert (10), Dudley (13) and Arthur (12) lived at Government House for two and half years of their father’s governorship. In April 1886 the boys returned to England to be educated.

Image courtesy of Duke University





FAMILY PETS (Above) Lord and Lady Lamington collected a large number and variety of pets during their stay at Government House. Here they are playing with their pet sulphur-crested cockatoos.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland



LADY LAMINGTON AND DAUGHTER (Above) Born on 12 February 1898 baby Grisell was Lady Lamington's second child and the last to be born in the House.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland

GOVERNMENT HOUSE INTERIOR, 1907 (Below) The Drawing Room looking through archways to the main staircase. After dinner, ladies would 'withdraw' to the Drawing Room, thus the name.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland



Social life with the Government House set

Social duties

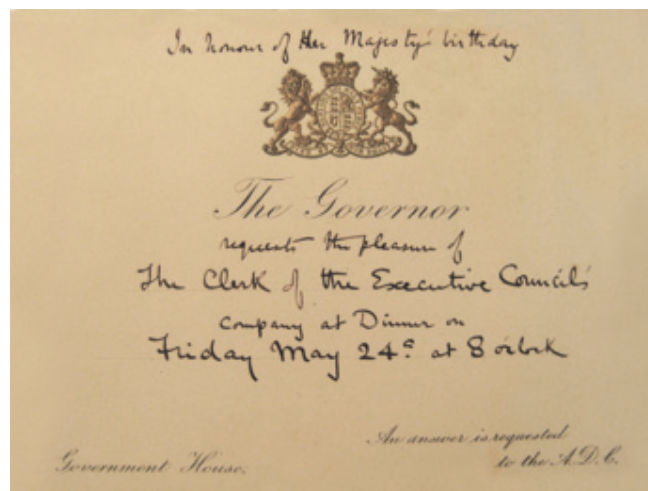
Government House was the scene of many brilliant balls, receptions, dinners and garden parties, and these events were the most prestigious in the Colony. Entertaining was an important official duty of the governor, and his residence was the focus of social life in Brisbane.

How a governor 'dispensed hospitalities' often determined his popularity. Governor Kennedy was 'not popular' because as Henry Littleton explained in 1879 he gave *'no dinners or parties of any sort which is always a high misdemeanour in the eyes of Colonial Society'*. The most popular vice-regal couple were the Lamingtons who entertained lavishly.

Social event of the year

'The chief social event of the year' was the Birthday Ball held in May to celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday. In 1862, four hundred guests attended the first Birthday Ball held in the House.

Initially, the House was an excellent venue for vice-regal functions. The 'three principal rooms' on the ground floor were 'used for dancing'; the private drawing room served as 'a card and conversation room', light refreshments were served in the vestibule and the covered courtyard became the supper room.



A MEASURE OF SOCIAL STANDING (Above) An invitation to a social event at Government House was a much coveted prize. This invitation was to Albert Drury, the Clerk of the Executive Council. Drury valued his invitations so highly that he kept each one and pasted them into albums.

Drury Cutting Books, State Library of Queensland

SOCIAL DEBUT (Below) A Cotillion at Government House, circa 1881. A cotillion was a ball where young ladies were presented (debuted) in society. Only the very latest and finest fashions were worn and each debutante's dress was described in newspaper the following day.



The annual ball and supper given by his Excellency the Governor ... was of a description hitherto unapproached in this colony.

The brilliancy of the lights, the gay and tasteful costumes of the ladies, and the sprinkling of uniforms ... presented a very pleasing coup d'oeil (look-over) ...

The music which was excellent and gave great satisfaction to the dancers, who 'chased the flying hours with glowing feet,' until about four o'clock this morning.

The Courier, 18 June 1862



A GARDEN PARTY (Above) Sergeant Hart, Orderly/Guard and Coachman Clarke stand ready for the arrival of guests for a Garden party held on Kidney lawn in May 1908.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland

Space limitations

As guest lists grew, the size of the House and the absence in particular of a ballroom made the hosting of these large-scale events increasingly difficult. In 1878, the 'addition of a spacious ballroom' was proposed but not progressed. Governor Musgrave tried to overcome the problem by shifting the 1884 ball to the Exhibition Building. From 1888 it was repeatedly argued that the

situation required 'a new Governor's residence erected elsewhere'.

In 1899 the Lamingtons hosted 1200 guests at 'the largest Vice-Regal Ball witnessed in Brisbane'. To accommodate all these guests required extensive alterations and the construction of marquees and annexes. It was such a nice house, Lady Lamington declared, '*except for entertaining*'.

ENTERTAINING (Below) Lady Chelmsford (centre with parasol) with guests at a reception at Government House, circa 1906.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland



Distinguished House guests

Visiting Dignitaries

Numerous dignitaries stayed at Government House as guests of the governor, including members of the British and Austrian Royal families, several colonial governors and politicians, and famous artists and singers.

Royalty comes to Brisbane

The most distinguished visitors were Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York who stayed for four days in May 1901.

The Royal Tour was planned as the main event of the 1901 festivities to celebrate the federation of the Australian colonies into the new nation – the Commonwealth of Australia. The death of Queen Victoria in January initially caused concern that the tour would be cancelled. Though shortened the tour went ahead.

Government House was too small to accommodate the royal couple and their entourage of twenty four so most of the household including the Lamington children were moved out into rooms in Parliament House. This disruption was appreciated by the Duchess. She wrote in a letter to her aunt that *'Governor Lord Lamington and his wife have made us most comfortable in this nice house'*.

OFFICIAL ARRIVAL The Duke and Duchess first arrived privately at Government House at 9am on 20 May. The official proceedings commenced at 2.45pm. Three State Carriages from Government House proceeded slowly through the decorated and crowded streets and finally 'passed into the quiet of the Government House grounds' at 3.30pm.

Image courtesy of The Royal Collection © 2008 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



THE ROYAL COUPLE AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE (Above)

The significance of the royal visit was heightened on the death of Queen Victoria. The Duke had become the Prince of Wales and the tour became the first visit to Australia by a future King. In 1910 he was crowned King George V.



Exhilaration and nerves

Royalty and Empire were still of great significance to Australians in 1901. Accounts of the visit describe the exhilaration and demonstration of loyalty of the 100,000 people who turned out in Brisbane to greet 'our future King and Queen'.

For the servants at Government House, the sense of awe at coming face to face with royalty was too much. Lady Lamington later recalled that as the arrival of the Duke and Duchess drew near 'every servant seemed to get nervous and disappeared and I found myself left quite alone to receive the Duke and Duchess at the door'.

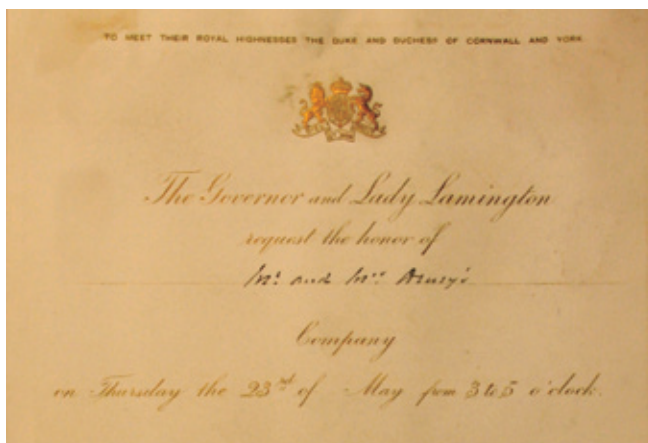
Long remembered by all

The 1901 Royal visit stands as the pinnacle event in the House's history. The Duke was 'loud in his praises' at the tremendous effort entailed in hosting them and in the programme of social engagements. The Duke wrote to Lord Lamington, *'I assure you our visit to Queensland will long be remembered by us.'*

INVITATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

(Below) The reception on 23 May was the largest social event ever held at the House. 15,000 people were introduced one by one to the Duke and Duchess from 3 to 5pm.

Images courtesy of Drury Cutting Books, State Library of Queensland



REVISITING THE HOUSE (Above) In 1881 a young Duke of York (white suit on right) and his brother, Prince Albert Victor (left) stayed in the House as guests of Governor Kennedy (seated second from left). The Duke wrote in his diary on 20 May 1901 'I have got the same room I had when I was here with dear Eddy 20 years ago'.

Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland



THE OFFICIAL PARTY (Above) The Royal guests and staff gather with the Lamington family outside the Dining Room verandah for an official photograph. Image courtesy of The Royal Collection © 2008 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

