

BRUCE, HENRY AUSTIN (1815 - 1895), 1st baron Aberdare

Name: Henry Austin Bruce
Date of birth: 1815
Date of death: 1895
Spouse: Nora Bruce (née Napier)
Child: Charles Granville Bruce
Child: William Napier Bruce
Parent: Sarah Pryce (née Austin)
Parent: John Bruce Pryce
Gender: Male
Occupation: 1st baron Aberdare
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Royalty and Society
Author: James Frederick Rees

Born at Duffryn, Aberdare, 16 April 1815, the second son of John Bruce Pryce by his first wife, Sarah, daughter of the Rev. Hugh Williams Austin, rector of S. Peter's, Barbadoes. (The family name was originally Knight, John Bruce Pryce being the son of John Knight of Llanblethian and Margaret, daughter of William Bruce of Cowbridge.) Bruce received his early education at S. Omer, but at the age of 12 returned to Wales and was sent to Swansea grammar school. He was called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn in 1837. After practising for a few years he left England owing to his state of health and spent two years in Italy. On his return he was appointed stipendiary magistrate for Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare. In 1852, on the death of **Sir John Guest**, he was returned unopposed as Liberal member for Merthyr Tydfil. Three years later he became one of the Dowlais trustees and was able to exercise considerable influence on the development of the local iron-works. After ten years as a private member of the House of Commons, he was appointed Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and held the office from November 1862 to April 1864. In that year he became vice-president of the Committee of Council on Education and was admitted a Privy Councillor; he was also appointed a Charity Commissioner for England and Wales in the same year. His interests in education had been shown by the speech on Welsh education which he had made on 5 May 1862, and by his introduction of a deputation on that subject to the president and vice-president of the Privy Council. The advance of education in fact became the chief preoccupation of his later life.

Bruce was defeated at Merthyr Tydfil in the general election of 1868 but was found a seat in Renfrewshire in January 1869. He was invited by W. E. Gladstone to join the Cabinet as Home Secretary. In the reorganization of his Cabinet in 1873 Gladstone transferred Bruce to the Lord Presidency of the Council, and he was raised to the peerage. This proved to be the end of his political career, for the Gladstone administration was defeated in 1874 and lord Aberdare (as he now was) was free to devote himself to his special interests. These were in general social and educational questions.

In 1876 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was also president of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Royal Historical Society. It was as president of the Geographical Society that he was asked to accept the governorship of the Royal Niger Company. From 1886 to his death he devoted careful attention to the operations of the company in its extensive African territory.

In 1880 lord Aberdare was appointed chairman of the Departmental Committee on Intermediate and Higher Education in Wales and Monmouthshire, whose report formed the basis for the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, and it also stimulated the movement for the provision of university education in Wales. When the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire was founded in 1883, lord Aberdare was elected its first president. In his inaugural address he expressed the opinion that the framework of Welsh education would not be complete until there was a university of Wales. He lived to see this hope realized and to be chosen as first chancellor of the University. He died a fortnight later, that is, 25 February 1895.

Lord Aberdare was twice married. The second son of his second marriage, **William Napier Bruce**, is separately noticed.

Lord Aberdare knew Welsh, and translated some of the poems of **Taliesin ab Iolo** and of **Owen Gruffydd** into English.

Author

Sir James Frederick Rees, (1883 - 1967)

Sources

Letters of the Rt. Hon. Henry Austin Bruce, G.C.B., Lord Aberdare of Duffryn. With biographical introductions and notes(Oxford 1902)

Cymru Fu, 18 January 1890, ii, 115

Y Cymmrodor, 1878

Further Reading

T. Morgan, *Enwogion Cymreig 1700-1900* (1907), pp.34-35

Wikipedia Article: [Henry Bruce, 1st Baron Aberdare](#)

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