



George Houstoun Reid (1845-1918)

Member for East Sydney (New South Wales) 1901-1909

George Reid was born in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, Scotland, and arrived in Melbourne, Victoria with his family in 1852. At 13 he went to work as a clerk in Sydney and in 1864 entered the New South Wales public service. By 1878 he was secretary of the Attorney-General's Department. Admitted to the Bar in 1879, he became a successful barrister, and was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1898. He was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly for East Sydney in 1880. A strong advocate of free trade, he supported governments led by Henry Parkes for a number of years, while declining to serve as a minister; he was elected party leader and Leader of the Opposition in 1891. From 1894 to 1899 he was Premier and Treasurer.

As a cautious supporter of federation, Reid opposed the Constitution Bill produced by the 1891 National Australasian Convention when it was debated in the New South Wales Parliament, as he feared the protectionist sympathies of the other colonies would overwhelm the free trade interests of New South Wales. In 1895, however, he was instrumental in advancing plans for the Constitutional Convention of 1897-98, which he attended, and where he chaired the Finance Committee. Although he was equivocal in his support for the Bill produced at the Convention

in the referendum of 1898, he campaigned wholeheartedly for a "yes" vote in the June 1899 referendum.

Reid was elected to represent East Sydney in the House of Representatives at the first federal election in 1901. As leader of the Freetrade faction in the first Parliament, he became Leader of the Opposition and led the fight against the tariff introduced by the Barton Government. A gifted debater, Reid enlivened the Parliament with his humour and biting wit. Reid was Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs 1904-05, then resumed as Opposition Leader until December 1909 when he was appointed High Commissioner to London, and resigned from Parliament. He received his first knighthood at this time.

Reid was an energetic and successful High Commissioner who established Australia House, supervised the construction of the Australian fleet, and during the First World War was active in Australian interests in Egypt and on the Western Front. At the end of his appointment in 1916 he was elected unopposed to the seat of St George's, Hanover Square, in the British House of Commons and held the seat until his death in 1918.

The electorate of East Sydney was named after its locality. The settlement of Sydney was named after Lord Sydney.