

Lillie Langtry, AKA Lilly Langtry; born Emilie Charlotte Le Breton; b. 13 October, 1853; d. 12 February, 1929

Actress; socialite; friend of Oscar Wilde; mistress of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, The Earl of Shrewsbury; Prince Louis of Battenberg and others.

The daughter of a Jersey clergyman, Ms. Langtry was introduced into society by the leading socialite of the day, Lady Sebright, in 1877. Her looks and demeanor immediately attracted the attention of Sebright's artistic circle and, by 1881 (and at the suggestion of her friend Oscar Wilde) she had established herself as one of the most popular (although not necessarily most accomplished) actresses of the day. She was also much in demand as a model for several of the more notable contemporary artists, including Frank Miles, John Everett Millais and Edward Burne-Jones. Miles' famous portrait of her was sold to Prince Leopold (son of Queen Victoria); while Millais' painting of her, named "Jersey Lily" after her birthplace and the flower of the same name, resulted in adoption of her nickname "Jersey Lillie".

It was only a matter of time before the Prince of Wales, never one to miss an opportunity to be introduced to a beautiful and beddable young woman, arranged to meet Ms. Langtry, at a party thrown by Sir Allen Young in May, 1877. As far as can be gathered, the Prince (despite his marriage to Princess Alexandra) almost immediately adopted her as his mistress and carried on a poorly disguised affair with her for the next three years. So open was the philandering that, after a while, even Alexandra developed a relationship with Langtry, albeit it a "cordial" one. When the relationship with "Bertie" ended in 1880, it is reported that he complained to her "I've spent enough on you to build a battleship." to which she curtly replied "And you've spent enough in me to float one." It is suggested that Langtry's attraction waned when she "misbehaved" at a dinner party – however it is more likely that Bertie was going on to pastures new, with the arrival in London in 1879 of the American actress Sarah Bernhardt.

Several affairs followed for Langtry, including the Earl of Shrewsbury, Prince Louis of Battenberg (Lord Mountbatten of Burma's father); New York millionaire Frederic Gebhard; and Scottish landowner George Alexander Baird. Through Gebhard she acquired a taste for horse-breeding and became a regular fixture in horse racing circles.

Langtry, who became a U.S. citizen in 1897, first visited the United States in October 1882 in a coast to coast tour arranged by Impresario Henry Abbey. Subsequently she toured the US on several occasions between then and 1917.

In 1899, she married Hugo Gerald de Bathe, a baronet and leading horse owner; however the marriage appears to have been largely one of convenience; and the two only came together on social occasions.

The legend of Lillie (or Lilly in the U.S.) has been enriched over the years by frequent use of her name in various media. In addition to her well known advertisement modeling for such items as Fry's Cocoa, it is believed that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle used her as the inspiration

for Irene Adler in his Sherlock Holmes short story "A Scandal in Bohemia". Parts of her life story were dramatized (often inaccurately) in the 1940 movie "The Westerner"; and the 1972 Western "The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean". Several TV shows featured Langtry, including "Lillie"; "Edward the Seventh"; and "Incident at Victoria Falls". She was even turned into a vampire for the 1996 series "Kindred: The Embraced". And, being a beautiful and notorious Victorian, she was of course involved with none other than Sir Harry Flashman, George MacDonald Fraser's fictional rogue.