

## STANLEY, HENRY EDWARD JOHN 3rd Baron Stanley of Alderley and 2nd Baron Eddisbury (1827 - 1903), Diplomat, translator and writer, hereditary peer

**Name:** Henry Edward John Stanley  
**Date of birth:** 1827  
**Date of death:** 1903  
**Spouse:** Fabia Stanley (née Roman)  
**Parent:** Henrietta Maria Stanley (née Dillon-Lee)  
**Parent:** Edward John Stanley  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Diplomat, translator and writer, hereditary peer  
**Area of activity:** Politics, Government and Political Movements; Travel and Exploration  
**Author:** Jamie Gilham

Henry Stanley was born on 11 July 1827 in Cheshire. He was the first of the ten children of [Edward John Stanley](#) (1802-1869), the second Baron Stanley of Alderley and first Baron Eddisbury, who served as a Whig Member of Parliament and Paymaster General, and his wife Henrietta Maria (née Dillon-Lee, 1807-1895), Baroness Stanley of Alderley, who campaigned for the education of women.

Henry Stanley was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. From a young age, he was hindered by very poor hearing (which further deteriorated with age) and a reclusive nature, which greatly worried his parents. In childhood, Stanley became fascinated with Eastern and African cultures, dazzled by the exotic tales in the popular *Arabian Nights* and travelogues about Africa and Asia. This led him to study Arabic at Cambridge University (1846-47).

In 1847, Stanley joined the Foreign Office in London as an assistant précis writer to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston (1784-1865). It was a highly problematic time for European diplomats as they dealt with the so-called 'Eastern Question', or what should become of the vast Islamic Ottoman Empire as some of its mainly Christian subject peoples and their rulers sought to secure autonomy or independence from it. The 'Great Powers' - Russia, Britain and France - attempted to contain the tensions and conflicts but also exploited them to their own advantage. Stanley was dazzled by Palmerston's charisma and intellect. He especially admired Palmerston's championing of the Ottoman Turks as 'a highly improving and civilised race' when British attitudes towards the Ottoman leaders and their Islamic faith were generally negative. Stanley, like Palmerston, appreciated the social and spiritual benefits which Islam provided the Ottomans. He also found the Ottoman Empire to be more acceptable than the strategic, political and religious threat posed by Russia in the East, including British India.

Perhaps sparked by the political and social turmoil that spread across Europe in 1848, Stanley experienced both political and spiritual crises during his first year in Whitehall. He became less confident in the Whig-Liberal outlook he had inherited from his parents, and increasingly conservative politically and morally. Although he did not lose faith in God, theological doubts - not least about the literal accuracy of the Bible - kept him away from church for the first time in his life.

Unusually for a Briton in the mid-Victorian period, Stanley gravitated towards Islam, the religion of the Ottoman Turks. In a sign of his spiritual conflict, whilst in Paris in 1849 he received instruction from a charismatic Sufi shaykh (spiritual master in Sufism, or Islamic mysticism) and also had long conversations with a Roman Catholic priest. In the short-term, however, Stanley settled back to his life and career in London.

In 1851, Stanley went to Constantinople as attaché to Stratford Canning (1786-1880), the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Stanley came to loathe the diplomatic scene in the heart of the Ottoman Empire and European interference there, and disagreed with Canning's policy to bring Ottoman Turkey into modern Europe under Christian tutelage. Despite these misgivings, Stanley remained in the diplomatic service throughout the 1850s. In 1853, he was promoted to take charge of the British consulate in Varna (Ottoman Bulgaria) and, from 1854-59, he was secretary to the British Legation at Athens.

Stanley's resentment of British bullying and exploitation of the Ottoman Turks led to his resignation from the diplomatic service in 1858. He briefly returned to London, where, during periods of leave, he had become well-connected with numerous travel and Orientalist organisations, including the Hakluyt Society, the Royal Asiatic Society and the East India Association.

In late 1858, Stanley travelled to Egypt and then on to Arabia. In January 1859, he reached Jidda, the principal gateway to the Holy City of Mecca. Very little is known about the circumstances of his visit to Arabia, but whilst there he defied convention and the express wishes of his family by converting to Islam. The news of his religious conversion was broken by several

newspapers in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), shortly after Stanley arrived there from Arabia in May 1859. It was first reported in the British press on 11 June. Some reports claimed that Stanley had made the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, but this cannot be corroborated. He told his brother Johnny Stanley (1837-1878), who was serving with the British army in India: 'I have always been a Mussulman [Muslim] at heart.' Lord and Lady Stanley of Alderley were furious and so embarrassed that they issued a public denial that their son had converted to Islam.

Stanley returned to England in April 1860. He is the first recorded Briton to convert to Islam abroad and return to Britain as a practising Muslim. Stanley spent the next decade mainly in Switzerland, writing and translating texts for learned societies. In Algeria in 1862 he married Fabia, a Spanish Catholic, according to Islamic law, but he kept the relationship secret until after his father died in 1869. It was later reported that Fabia's real name was Donna Serafina Fernandez y Funes, who, in 1862, was legally married to a man in Spain. Stanley remarried Fabia according to Islamic law in Constantinople in 1862 or 1863.

In June 1869, Henry Stanley succeeded his father to become the third Lord Stanley of Alderley and second Baron Eddisbury. He settled permanently in Britain with Fabia, whom he married according to English law (1869) and later with a Roman Catholic ceremony (1874).

Stanley was a hereditary peer in the House of Lords and thereby became the first Muslim peer of the realm. Still a Liberal at heart but intellectually and morally drawn towards the Conservative Party, he sat on the cross-benches in the Lords. Although he spoke out against British aggressive imperialism and for the welfare of colonial subjects, including Muslims (he was a member of the Aborigines Protection Society), he was never vocal publicly about his Islamic faith. He did not use a Muslim name in public and was little involved in late-Victorian attempts to institutionalise Islam in Britain. Stanley remained a very private man despite his public office. Some contemporaries criticised his unconventional attitudes towards the Ottoman Empire and British imperialism, and few peers in the Lords had the patience or inclination to listen to his speeches, which were delivered in a very low voice due to his deafness. Conversely, Stanley was well-respected by prominent Orientalists such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) and Muslim leaders including the Anglophile judge and writer, Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928). His passion for justice and ambition to end further imperialist encroachments were, in many respects, ahead of their time and morally vindicated in the twentieth century.

In 1884, Stanley inherited the large Penrhos estate on Anglesey following the death of a childless uncle, [William Owen Stanley](#) (1802-1884). Stanley spent his final years in Cheshire, Anglesey and London. In north Wales, he took keen interest in the Penrhos estate, which was overseen by agents. It was stated after Stanley's death that he was 'a good landlord, though imperious in manner, and he was greatly loved by his tenants' in Wales and England. Yet, no landlord is wholly popular and a scan of the Welsh press during the 1880s and 1890s shows that Stanley had to deal with numerous disputes with tenants and other landowners in Wales. For example, in 1886, he threatened to destroy any unleashed dogs that belonged to his tenants because he said they were disturbing shoots on the Penrhos estate.

Stanley's attraction to the Conservative Party later in life helps to explain some of his public activities in Wales and speeches for Wales in the House of Lords. Shortly after inheriting Penrhos, he endorsed the Conservative campaign against the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. He became an active member of the Church Defence Institution to preserve the ecclesiastical, constitutional, legal and historic identity between the church in Wales and England. He also criticised the teaching of the Welsh language in state-inspected schools and fumed about what he perceived to be the 'secularisation' of education in Wales and in England.

Stanley's defence of the Church in Wales led to his patronage of several Anglesey churches. As a Muslim, Stanley respected Christianity as a 'sister-faith' of Islam and, in line with his politics, he sought to preserve the Church of England in Wales. He therefore contributed significant sums and materials for the building of new churches, including St Michael's at Valley, near Holyhead (1887-88). He also paid for the refurbishment of churches, most notably Llanbadrig, or St Patrick's (1884). In line with Stanley's stipulations, the interior of Llanbadrig incorporated elements of Islamic design, including stained glass windows with blue, red and white geometric rather than figurative designs; unique blue glass tiles with geometric and floral patterns fitted around the Sanctuary; and a panel of The Good Shepherd in blue and gold opaque glass. This church may have given rise to the unsubstantiated claim in DWB ([Stanley Family](#)) that Stanley established a mosque in Anglesey.

Stanley died of pneumonia in Cheshire on 11 December 1903. He was buried in unconsecrated ground on the Alderley estate with an Islamic service led by the Imam (religious leader) from the Ottoman Embassy in London. Since he and Fabia had no children, Stanley was succeeded by a younger brother, [Edward Lyulph Stanley](#) (1839-1925).

## Author

Jamie Gilham

## Sources

[British Newspaper Archive](#)

[Welsh Newspapers](#)

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Wikidata: [Q5728623](#)

Published date: 2024-05-09

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