



History 101

The Scandalous Lily Langtry

She was born Emilie Charlotte Le Breton (1853–1929). One of Lillie's ancestors was Richard le Breton, one of the reputed assassins of Saint Thomas a Becket in 1170. She had six brothers, all but one older than she. Proving too much for her French governess, Lillie was educated by her brothers' tutor, becoming unusually well educated for women of the time.

In 1874, twenty-year-old Lillie married twenty-six-year-old Irish landowner Edward Langtry. Lord Ranelagh, a friend of her father and sister-in-law, invited Lillie Langtry to a high-society reception at which she attracted notice for her beauty and wit. Before the end of the evening, Frank Miles had completed several sketches of her that became very popular on postcards. Another guest, Sir John Everett Millais, eventually painted her portrait. Langtry's nickname, the "Jersey Lily," was taken from the Jersey lily flower – a symbol of Jersey. The nickname was popularized by Millais' portrait, entitled *A Jersey Lily*. She became much sought after in London society, and invitations flooded in. Her fame soon reached royal ears.

The Prince of Wales, Albert Edward, was a well-known philanderer. He became infatuated with Langtry and she became his semi-official mistress. The affair lasted from late 1877 to June 1880, but in July 1879, Langtry had already begun an affair with the Earl of Shrewsbury. They were planning to run away together, but in the fall of 1879 there were rumors published in *Town Talk* that her husband would divorce her and cite, with others, the Prince of Wales.

Langtry started an affair with Prince Louis of Battenberg, although she was also involved with Arthur Clarence Jones (1854–1930), an old friend. In June 1880, she became pregnant. Her husband was definitely not the father; she led Prince Louis to believe that it was him. When the prince confessed to his parents, they had him assigned to the warship *HMS Inconstant*. Given some money by the Prince of Wales, Langtry retired to Paris with Arthur Jones. On March 8, 1881, she gave birth to a daughter, Jeanne Marie. The discovery of Langtry's passionate letters to Arthur Jones in 1878 and their publication by Laura Beatty in 1999 support the idea that Jones was the father. Prince Louis's son, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, had always maintained his father was the father of Jeanne..

At the suggestion of either her close friend Oscar Wilde or Sarah Bernhardt, Lillie embarked upon a stage career. In December 1881, she made her debut.

From 1882 to 1891, Langtry had a relationship with the New York City millionaire Frederic Gebhard. She an American citizen in 1897. She finally divorced her husband Edward Langtry the same year. Langtry was involved in a relationship with George Alexander Baird, millionaire, from April 1891 until his March 1893 death. In 1899, she married the much younger Hugo Gerald de Bathe. Langtry died in Monaco in 1929. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lillie_Langtry]

