



# Robert Peel: A Biography

*Douglas Hurd*

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## **Robert Peel: A Biography** Douglas Hurd

Described as one of the 19th century's most dynamic prime ministers, Robert Peel transformed Great Britain into a modern nation. He invented the police force; steered through legislation that allowed Catholics to sit in Parliament; reorganized the criminal justice system; and invented the Conservative Party as it exists today. Above all he tackled poverty by repealing the Corn Laws, and thanks to Peel Britain chose free trade and opened the door for globalization. For all his achievements, however, Peel was not all politics: he built two great houses, filled them with famous paintings, and was devoted to his beautiful wife. Yet he was widely regarded as stiff and strange, with Queen Victoria describing him as "such a cold odd man" while Disraeli attacked him for dishonesty. But when in 1850 he was carried home after a fall from his horse, crowds primarily composed of working people gathered outside his house to read the medical bulletins. When he died a few days later, factories closed, flags flew at half mast, and thousands contributed small sums to memorials in his honor. Like Peel, Douglas Hurd served as Home Secretary and lived through a time of conflict in the Conservative Party. With one eye on the present, Douglas Hurd charts Peel's life and work through the dramas of 19th-century politics.

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