

Walter Henry Mackinnon

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TRAGIC DEATH OF NEWPORT VICAR.

Fatal Fall Down Stairs.

It was with a keen sense of personal loss and profound regret that the people of Newport heard of the tragically sudden death on Friday week of the Vicar of St. John's for the last 31 years, the Rev. Walter Henry Mackinnon, M.A. In the afternoon the Vicar had the misfortune to fall down the staircase in the Vicarage, pitching heavily on his head. After medical attention he was removed in a semi-conscious state to the Maycroft Nursing Home, Shanklin, but died from a fracture of the skull soon after his arrival there. For some months the Vicar had not been in the best of health. He had been troubled with a disability in one leg, and this leg gave way under him and caused him to fall.

Mr. Mackinnon was probably the best known and most popular man in Newport. Apart from his devotion to his clerical duties, which naturally brought him into contact with many people throughout his long residence in the borough, he had helpfully identified himself with numerous other matters, and in all his activities his genial presence, kindly and courteous ways, and, above all, his open-handed generosity, won him general respect and esteem. Every day he would be seen cycling or walking around the town with a cheery word for everyone he met, particularly for the children. The happiness of the little ones was always nearest his heart, and there are hundreds of adults in the borough today who have happy memories of their childhood being brightened by his generosity. This side of his character was consequently well known, but its extent could not have been fully appreciated as he was constantly giving to needy ones, even to the point of self-sacrifice, and no one but himself and those who benefitted by his charity ever knew of it.

A man of fine stature, over 6ft. in height and proportionally built, he was an outstanding figure in any company, yet his nature was to shun all forms of self-advertisement; quietly to perform the duties of his high calling, and to contribute his all to the welfare of his fellows. His clerical colleagues in the district would be the first to agree that it was his example of broad-minded tolerance and fervent goodwill towards all men that contributed more than anything else to the spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding which so happily exists among the leaders of the various religious communities in the town. The respect he enjoyed among all sections of the church was demonstrated on Sunday when, in almost every pulpit, references were made to his passing, and sympathy was offered to St. John's parish in its bereavement. The Vicar of Newport (Canon W. B. Hogg) admirably summed up his character when he described him as "a simple, great-hearted soul, and a fine Christian gentleman". His own people at St. John's will sorely miss his ministrations and thoughtful sermons, which were always free from rhetoric, but full of the wisdom of the Scriptures, of which he was a deep student.

Outside the church he had been very active. He had been a member of the Albany Lodge of Freemasons since his early days in Newport, its chaplain for the greater part of the time, and its Worshipful Master, and had been honoured with the high offices of Assistant Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England, and Grand Chaplain of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Province. In his early days at Exeter College, Oxford, he was a skilful oarsman, a member of his college eight, and had a trial for the inter-Varsity crew. He won numerous prizes for rowing at Henley and Walton-on-Thames as a member of the London Rowing Club. His other sporting inclination favoured golf and fishing. He was a good golfer, one of the oldest members of the Newport Club, and had been president of the I.W. Angling Society since its formation. His favourite hobbies were astronomy, photography, and stamp collecting.

He had an observatory erected in the Vicarage garden containing a 12in. telescope with which he studied the heavens, and his sermons often evidenced the inspiration he obtained from this source. He was a member of the I.W. Philatelic Society and had a valuable collection. Many will remember the good use he made of his skill in photography during visits abroad, by his lantern lectures illustrated with slides made from his photographs. One instance of his keen interest in the welfare of children was his generous support of the children's piano playing classes at the I.W. Musical Festival. He gave several challenge trophies. For many years he had been president of the Newport and Arretton branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

The late Vicar was the eldest surviving son of the late Brigade-Surgeon Charles Mackinnon, A.M.D., and Mrs. Mackinnon, formerly of Southampton and Eastbourne. His father died in 1914, a few months after his appointment to the vicariate of St. John's, and Mrs. Mackinnon erected the handsome communion rails in St. John's Church in his memory. Mrs. Mackinnon died in 1923. He leaves a sister (Mrs. James Eldridge, of Newport) and two brothers, Major A. L. Mackinnon (late of the Scottish Rifles), of Aberdeen, and Mr. A. C. H. Mackinnon, of Weston-super-Mare. Much sympathy is felt with them in their unexpected bereavement, particularly with Mrs. Eldridge, who has been closely associated with her brother throughout his long ministry at Newport. Mr. Mackinnon was ordained in London in 1907, and before coming to St. John's in 1913 he held curacies in London and at St. Margaret's, Brighton.

In the Carisbrooke Parish Magazine the Rural Dean (the Rev. Harold Ewbank) wrote a personal tribute to Mr. Mackinnon and at the meeting of the Newport Foresters (Court 1821), tribute was paid to the late Vicar who was an honorary member of the Court.

An inquest was held by the Acting Coroner (R. E. A. Webster, Esq.) at Maycroft Nursing Home, Shanklin, on Saturday. Dr. C. K. Sylvester, of Newport deposed that he had attended Mr. Mackinnon for about 17 years and described previous attacks of leg cramps. He also attended following the fall and described the victim's condition and that, in his medical opinion, death was due to fracture of the vault of the skull. Elsie May Long, housemaid at St. John's Vicarage, and who was present at the time of the fall, also deposed Mr. Mackinnon's comments just prior to his fall; the fall itself; and her actions following the fall. The Coroner returned the verdict that death was due to a fractured skull sustained when deceased accidentally fell downstairs at his home.

The Funeral

At the funeral service in St. John's Church, Newport, on Wednesday every seat was occupied, the gathering of mourners numbering about 500 and including about 30 of his fellow clergy and ministers of the Free Churches and about 100 brother Freemasons, mostly members of the Albany Lodge, Newport, but also representatives of many other Island Lodges. The Archdeacon of the Island (the Ven. C. W. Hampton Weekes, vicar of Brading) represented the Bishop, who was unfortunately unable to be present, and paid an eloquent tribute to Mr. Mackinnon's long and devoted services to the parish. The Vicar of St. Paul's, recited the opening sentences of the burial office, the Vicar of Newport (Canon W. B. Hogg) read the lesson from Revelation, the Rural Dean (the Rev. Harold Ewbank) offered prayers, and the choir, with Miss D. Welby-Pryer at the organ, led the chanting of the 23rd Psalm and the singing of the hymns "The King of love" and "For all the Saints". The organist played "O rest in the Lord" at the close.

The Archdeacon said he had been requested by the Bishop to express his sorrow at the passing of one of the senior clergy in the diocese, and at his inability to attend the funeral to show his sympathy with the bereaved ones and with the people of the parish and of Newport generally in the loss of one who was so well beloved. Walter Henry Mackinnon was one of his (the Archdeacon's) oldest friends among the Island clergy. He was the senior Island clergyman but one, and it had been his privilege to know him throughout the long period of his vicariate there. During that long time Mr. Mackinnon kept the friendship and warm respect of his people. He had never heard him say an unkind thought of anyone. He

was the embodiment of that forbearance and loving-kindness which was one of the attributes of the true Christian. He was not the type of man to try to turn the world upside down, but he was certainly a man who tried to keep the world right side up. God alone knew the effect of the influence of such a man on that parish and town. Two outstanding things about the parish of St. John, in which the late Vicar took his full share, were the Men's Bible Class, which had flourished for 64 years, and the enterprise which had marked its consistent support of Christian missions. In his parochial work and his many other activities he brought every act and thought into obedience to Christ. They thanked God for his good influence and that, although he had reached the allotted span, he was spared the infirmities of old age. He had indeed been faithful unto death and had received the "Crown of life". It was for them all to try to follow his good example.

On behalf of the Freemasons present, the Rev. J. B. Allen, M.C. (vicar of Shalfleet) delivered an oration honouring their brother and the Freemasons then sang their "Closing ode".

The chief mourners were Major Arthur L. Mackinnon and Mr. Andrew Mackinnon (brothers), Mrs. James Eldridge (sister), Leading Aircraftman James Eldridge, R.A.F. (nephew), Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Eldridge, and the Misses E. N. and I. E. Long (staff at the Vicarage), Mr. James Eldridge (brother-in-law) was unable to attend.

In addition to the clergy mentioned as taking part in the service, the list included many clergy from around the Island; diocesan lay readers; various parish representatives; representatives of the many clubs and societies that deceased was associated with; and representatives of Freemasonry. Among those also present were the Mayor and Mayoress of Newport; numerous Aldermen; various town officials and church representatives too numerous to mention here.

The interment was at Carisbrooke Cemetery and there were about 40 floral tributes, including those of a public nature from the following: the Churchwardens; the Parochial Church Council; the organist and choir; superintendents and teachers of the Sunday-schools; children of the Sunday-schools; the Men's Bible Class and Athletic Club; leaders and members of the Mothers' Meeting; secretary and members of the Scripture Union; the Young People's Fellowship; the Vicar, churchwardens, and members of the Parochial Church Council of the Parish Church; the vicar, leader, and members of St. Thomas's Bible Class; Captain and Brown Owl and members of St. John's Guides and Brownies; the Worshipful Master, officers, and brethren of Albany Lodge; M.W.S. and members of the Vectis Chapter Rose Croix; Worshipful Master, officers, and brethren of the Needles Lodge; I.W. Angling Society; Newport Cricket Club; and the officers and brethren of Court Island Foresters.

Messrs. H. and F. Damp made the arrangements.

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