

Albert Midlane

1901 Census – Forest Villa, St. John's Road, Newport

Albert Midlane	Head	75	Ironmonger	Newport, Isle of Wight
Miriam Midlane	Wife	75		Newport, Isle of Wight
Emily Mills	Daughter	49		Newport, Isle of Wight
Albert G Midlane	Son	47	Tin plate worker	Newport, Isle of Wight
Donald Mills	Son-in-law	54	Retired clerk	London, England
<i>[other records suggest James Joseph Mills]</i>				
Annie Rolf	Servant	23	General servant	Arreton, Isle of Wight

Isle of Wight County Press 6 March 1909

DEATH OF MR. ALBERT MIDLANE.

We record with deep regret the death, which occurred just before midnight on Saturday, at his residence, Forest Villa, Newport, of Mr. Albert Midlane, the author of the famous hymn "There's a Friend for little children." As we reported last Saturday, Mr. Midlane, who was in his 85th year, was stricken with an apoplectic seizure early on the previous Thursday morning, and became unconscious next day. In spite of all that medical skill and tender nursing could do, the venerable hymn writer never rallied again, but passed peacefully to his long rest during sleep in the presence of the devoted partner of his life, Mrs. Midlane, and his daughter and sons, with whom widespread and very deep sympathy is felt in their heavy bereavement.

The late Mr. Midlane, who prided himself on being a native and life-long resident of Newport, and on the fact that he had always lived in the historic parish of Carisbrooke, was born in Newport on January 23, 1825, three months after the death of his father, being one of a large family. His mother was a member of the Newport Congregational Church, of which the Rev. Thomas Binney, author of the beautiful hymn "Eternal Light ! Eternal Light"—which, by the way, was written at Newport—was then the pastor, and it was in that church that Mr. Midlane received his early religious training. Mr. Midlane began his life's work in a local printing office, under Mr. Kingswell, but after about three years he became an ironmonger's assistant, and ultimately started in the business of a tinsmith and ironmonger on his own account. Mr. Midlane was one of the most prolific hymn-writers of our time, his literary work being marked by intense religious fervour and a passionate love for children. But hymn-writing by no means exhausted his literary efforts, as the columns of the *County Press* and other journals and periodicals, in which have appeared innumerable poems on national and local events and other subjects, have borne eloquent testimony. As an enthusiast in the study of the annals of his much-loved Island home, he wrote a history of Carisbrooke Castle entitled "A Catalogue and Text Book of Carisbrooke Castle," and "The

Story of Princess Elizabeth.” Versification, however, was his principal delight, and his first poetical attempts date from the time when he was a small boy. His first published hymn was written at Carisbrooke in 1842, and since then he has written and published hymns by the hundred. His first attempts at hymn writing were included in “A Collection of Hymns for the use of the Young Men’s Union Improvement Society, Newport, I.W.,” and the first hymn in this book with his signature began

God is our witness that we are
In mutual love combined;
We love as brethren in the Lord
As His Word hath enjoined.

He often told how as a child at the Sunday services, instead of listening to the sermons, he used to search through the hymn-book for the names of the authors of the hymns, and in his young days he contributed poems and hymns to various magazines under the *nom de plume* of “Little Albert.” Mr. Midlane’s first used hymn was written in 1844, when he was 19 years of age. It was the well-known hymn “God Bless our Sunday School,” sung to the tune of the National Anthem. Mr. Midlane was also the author of the familiar hymn “Revive Thy work, O Lord,” which is used at revival services of all denominations; but, of course, “There’s a Friend for little children” is the hymn by which the late Mr. Midlane will be principally remembered through the coming ages. It was on February 7, 1859, that this famous hymn was penned. Stimulated by a passionate desire to write a special message for the little ones, Mr. Midlane, after a busy business day, settled down in the quiet of the evening to what proved the great task of his life, and by 2 o’clock in the morning his supreme effort in hymnology was completed. But it was achieved at the expense of great physical fatigue, which was most marked after a hard day’s work in his business, and he recently told the writer of this notice that he was found in a state of collapse and had to be medically attended. “But the hymn was completed,” added Mr. Midlane with a radiant smile. That Mr. Midlane was a voluminous versifier is attested by the fact that in one recent year he wrote about 400 hymns, largely for publication in America. Over 300 of his hymns were collected to form his “Bright Blue Sky Hymn Book,” of which a jubilee edition was lately published. The title of the book is taken from the celebrated hymn, the opening lines of which are—

“There’s a Friend for little children,
Above the bright blue sky.”

This hymn soon achieved great popularity, and is constantly being sung by the Sunday-school children not only of the English-speaking races, but of many others, including the Japanese and Chinese, for it has been translated into many tongues. It is in common use among all denominations. It was first taken into the “Hymns Ancient and Modern” when the supplement of 1868 was published, Sir John Stainer having written the tune “In

Memoriam" for it. In the opinion of some judges, says the *Times*, his hymn "A little Lamb went straying" deserves at least an equally high place.

To an interviewer who asked in how many hymn-books the hymn is contained, Mr. Midlane remarked that it would be impossible to tell, as he had kept no record; but it was included in at least 200 books, and there was scarcely a collection of hymns published which did not contain it. "I never took out copy-right for it," he added. "Every one who asked had permission to use it. These applications were very numerous. I have had as many as five in one week. Mr. Broom published it in his "Hymns for Youth," and then many took it up. The hymn was unsigned at first, and its authorship was attributed to several. Curwen, in one of his publications for children, brought it out under the name of Paxton Hood, and it was copied into papers with his name attached to it. The mistake arose in this way. Paxton Hood chose it for an anniversary hymn, and most of the hymns in the selection were written by himself, consequently Curwen thought they were all by that eminent minister." With pardonable pride Mr. Midlane referred to the fact that the late Queen Victoria graciously accepted several volumes of his compositions, among them being "Leaves from Olivet," published in 1864. Of "The Vecta Garland" (illustrated) and "Isle of Wight Souvenir" the Prince Consort had 12 copies, and he afterwards sent for more. The late Mr. C. H. Spurgeon incorporated a good many of Mr. Midlane's compositions in his hymn-book, and Mr. Midlane was wont to refer to an afternoon and evening which he spent at Mr. Spurgeon's house as among his most cherished memories. Mr. Midlane for some time edited an interesting magazine entitled "Island Greetings." He gratefully acknowledged that Lord Tennyson, the late Poet Laureate, had written to him and encouraged him very much in his hymn writing, and that Edmund Peel, the author of "The Fair Island," was an intimate friend and inspired him with enthusiasm for writing.

On March 20, 1901, the late Mr. Midlane and his wife celebrated their golden wedding, and then, as on many occasions since, notably on the commemoration of the jubilee of the writing of his most celebrated hymn just three weeks before his death, Mr. Midlane received numerous affectionate messages of congratulation and good wishes from admirers in all parts of the land, including many little children, whose touching epistles specially rejoiced the heart of the veteran hymn-writer. He was particularly grateful for the full acknowledgment of the catholicity of his celebrated hymn, which he delighted to think was sung in all places of worship, from the stately cathedral to the humble meeting-place. In his closing days this knowledge of the widespread influence for good of his hymn was a constant joy to him and his partner in life. It will be remembered that the jubilee commemoration of the hymn was specially marked in Newport by the Sunday-school children of all denominations assembling in the Market-place and singing the hymn which had made its author famous. This occasion was made specially memorable by the presence of Mr. Midlane, who, leaning on the arm of a close friend, walked from his home to the Market-place, and from the steps of the Victoria Monument delivered a touching address, in which he said he stood before them, not only as the writer of the children's hymn, but as an

old Sunday-school teacher and lover of little children. He added that he was deeply thankful that the little hymn had become so popular and had been blessed to so many little children as well as children of a larger growth. He paid a generous tribute to the memory and influence for good of the writers of other celebrated hymns who had lived in Newport, and concluded by expressing the hope that he would have the joy of meeting them all in that "Home above the bright blue sky."

Mr. Midlane was one of many men who have done great things without reward. Though the author of numberless hymns, he had received no monetary profit from his work, and after over half a century's toil in his ironmongery business he found himself a bankrupt for £500 through having become guarantor for a friend. His misfortune was made known to the public, and Sunday-school friends throughout the country subscribed generously, with the result that Mr. Midlane was able to pay all his creditors and get his bankruptcy annulled, and an annuity was secured which relieved the veteran hymn-writer and his wife of further anxiety in this connection.

For the greater part of his life Mr. Midlane had been connected with the Brethren who now worship in the Gospel-hall in Union-street, Newport, and here, at Sunday evening's service, touching allusion was made by Brethren to the deceased's life and work. To-morrow (Sunday) evening a special memorial service will be held at the Gospel-hall, Union-street.

A pathetic interest attaches to several of the latest hymns written by the late Mr. Midlane. One of these, entitled "The Bridge of Time," was written in his 84th year whilst standing upon the rustic bridge at Shanklin Chine, and the composition must rank amongst his best and most touching hymns. In it occurs the following verse, which has now a pathetic significance :-

Upon the Bridge of Time all stand,
And moments roll before;
The place which knows us now will soon
Be knowing us no more.

Strangely prophetic was the poem which the late Mr. Midlane contributed to the *County Press* of January 23 last, entitled "On my 84th Birthday," two verses of which were as follow :-

What is the world to one whose hopes
Are fixed beyond the skies ?
What can impede the charioteer
Just near to grasp the prize ?

Enough ! One`s cup is brimming full,
All earthly struggles o`er;
Beneath the shadow of His wings,
In bliss for evermore.

In a poetic tribute in the *Westminster Gazette* “G. H. R. D.,” speaking with the knowledge of close association as a former resident of Newport, writes :

What time the Winter stay`d the Spring,
And all the hills were tipp`d with snow,
A tender spirit lifted wing
And soared to where our children go;
O children ! he was good and true
And showed your Heavenly Friend to you !
His simple saintly life he poured
As Love`s libation on your lot,
The servant of a tender Lord,
He would not see ONE child forgot,
For, children ! well your true friend knew
The Friend of Friends who waits for you !

In churches, chapels, and Sunday-schools in the Island, as well as in other parts of the country, reference was made to the loss of Mr. Midlane and a tribute was paid to his work and worth. In some Sunday-schools “There`s a Friend for little children” was sung.

At the Congregational Church, Newport, on Sunday morning, the Pastor (the Rev. Arthur Jones) prefaced his sermon by a touching reference to Mr. Midlane. He said most of them were aware that Mr. Midlane had passed away during the night, and he felt sure it would be their desire that he should make a reference to that event. Most of them knew that the late Mr. Albert Midlane was a scholar in their Sunday-school, and that he was trained in that church. Only recently, when a letter of congratulation was sent from the teachers of their Sunday-school to Mr. Midlane on the occasion of the celebration of the jubilee of the writing of his famous hymn, the veteran and esteemed hymn writer, in his reply, referred in very affectionate terms to his connection with their church and Sunday-school, and confessed that the knowledge he had of that Friend of whom he sang in his hymn first came to him through the instrumentality of teachers in their Sunday-school. One who had come so prominently before the public, not only in that town, but throughout the land—thanks to the inspired words of that beautiful hymn, which had been translated into many languages—should not pass from their midst without some special reference there, and without their rendering in their prayers thanks to God for the life of him who had now been taken from them, and for the inspiring words which he had left to them and which they trusted would continue to be a blessing to many who heard or sang them. The rev.

gentleman then offered a special prayer of thanksgiving for the life of him who had given them a hymn which had been a source of blessing and help to so many.

THE FUNERAL

--took place on Thursday, the ceremony being, as the late Mr. Midlane would have wished, touching in its simplicity, and the interment was at Carisbrooke Cemetery, in full view of the Castle, which he loved so well. There were many signs of mourning in the town and the flag over the Guildhall was at half-mast as a tribute to the memory of one of the most estimable and widely known of Newport's citizens. The coffin, of polished elm, bore the inscription : "Albert Midlane, fell asleep in Jesus, February 27th, 1909, aged 84." By special request there were no floral tributes, although many would have been sent had it not been made generally known that the late Mr. Midlane, who loved to see flowers in their natural state, did not wish them to be used in this connection. The coffin was conveyed from the residence to the Cemetery in a hearse, and the principal mourners included Messrs. A. G. and W. H. Midlane (sons), Mr. Douglas A. G. Mill (grandson), of Jersey, Mr. G. H. Toomer, Miss May Dudley, and Mr. William Smith (for some 50 years in deceased's employ). Amongst others were Mr. and Mrs. Vine (Portsmouth), representing the Rev. Carey Bonner and the Sunday-school Union, Councillor Dye (president of the Portsmouth Sunday-school Union), representatives of the Brethren from Newport and other parts of the Island, as well as from the mainland, and superintendents and other officials of Sunday-schools in the district, school children, and others. The Mayor of Newport (Mr. A. Gill-Martin) wrote regretting inability to attend in consequence of being confined to the house with a cold, and others holding official positions were also unavoidably absent, including Mr. Robey F. Eldridge, J.P., and Mr. James Eldridge. A letter was received from Sir John Kirk, of the Ragged School Union, regretting that he could not be present and stating that thousands of little children sent their sympathy, as he did himself, in touching terms. The first part of the service was conducted at the Cemetery Chapel by Mr. J. R. Holman (Bembridge), assisted by one of the Brethren from the Gospel-hall at Newport. Among others present were the Revs. A. Johnson (Wesleyan), W. Bridge (Primitive Methodist), P. Cudmore and J. Rawilds (United Methodist), Major Windham (Bembridge), Messrs. R. Bullen, J.P., J. Thomas, J.P., (superintendent of the Newport Congregational Sunday-school), H. W. Morey, A. G. Harrison (Newport Congregational Church), A. W. Abraham (superintendent Baptist Sunday-school), W. Smith (secretary Newport Primitive Methodist Sunday-school), Arthur Kemp (secretary I.W. Sunday-school Union), Fred Morgan, T.C. (late secretary of the I.W. Sunday-school Union), Ald. G. D. Rich, Messrs. C. Salter, J.P., and F. Cooper (Hand-in-Hand Society, of which deceased had been a member from his young manhood), D. F. Ritchie (churchwarden of the Parish-church), Dr. McKay, Messrs. G. Baker, J. B. Garlick (Totland), W. Wells, E. W. Tyler, C. Turner Clark (representing Mr. Godfrey Baring, M.P.), T. Lee, J. W. Marshall, H. W. Adams, W. Couldrey, A. Cooke, W. Colenutt, G. Brooke, G. F. Quinton, G. H. Dunford, Case, Roy, Moorman, Priestley, Griffiths, Morley, Cooper, and S. W. P. Whitcombe, Mrs. and Miss Farquhar, Miss Dibbens, and many others, including school girls from the

National and Nodehill Council-schools, under Mrs. Westmore. After an opening prayer by one of the Brethren of Newport, one of the deceased's hymns—

Star of the morning, rise,
Disperse these shades of night

--was sung, and Mr. Holman then read the 23rd Psalm and another portion of Scripture and gave a touching address, in the course of which he said their beloved brother could say in the language of the Psalmist "The Lord is my Shepherd." Absent from the body, present with the Lord—and the Apostle Paul spoke of that state as being "far better." They knew that the deceased was one who through a long life proved the goodness and faithfulness of God, not only to save, but to keep. He trusted not to his own righteousness or goodness, but he stood on the solid Rock Christ Jesus and His righteousness. They knew he was blessed with the knowledge of the forgiveness of sin and that he was indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and that was the secret of his happy and useful long life of service. And now he rested and now he saw the King in His glory. Then followed a prayer by Mr. Holman, who besought comfort for the bereaved ones. At the graveside the hymn "Amen—one lasting long amen," was sung, and the service was concluded by Mr. Holman. It had been arranged during the week that a number of children from each school in the town should sing Mr. Midlane's celebrated hymn at the grave, but owing to the fall of snow during Wednesday night it was deemed inadvisable to carry out this arrangement. However, a number of children were at the grave, and they sang the well-known hymn. And so the last sounds heard at the open grave of the children's poet were children's voices sweetly singing the last verse of the children's hymn :--

"There's a robe for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
And a harp of sweetest music,
And a palm of victory.
All, all, above is treasured,
And found in Christ alone;
Oh come, dear little children,
That all may be your own."

As the singing ended one of "the little children" was being laid to rest in another part of the Cemetery.

Mrs. Albert Midlane and family wish to return their heartfelt thanks to the numerous friends of the late Mr. Albert Midlane for their kind inquiries and letters of sympathy, the latter being so great in number that it is quite impossible to acknowledge them individually.

Mr. Francis White, of Cowes, writes suggesting that it would be fitting that a children's memorial should be erected to Mr. Midlane and the late Mrs. Lake, the latter the writer of the hymn "I think when I read that sweet story of old."

Hampshire Observer 19 March 1910

THE LATE MR. ALBERT MIDLANE.—There has just been erected over the grave of the late Mr. Albert Midlane, in Carisbrooke Cemetery, a Sicilian marble headstone bearing the following inscription :-- "In loving memory of Albert Midlane, of Newport, I.W., author of the favourite hymn 'There's a Friend for little children' who passed peacefully to rest February 27th, 1909, aged 84 years. 'He being dead yet speaketh.' This memorial is erected by Sunday School children of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight."

*Transcription by Jeremy Hallam for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries
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