

William Blake

Isle of Wight County Press - 5th December 1953

CIVIC LEADER AND SPORTSMAN

DEATH OF MR. W. BLAKE, J.P., OF NEWPORT

The death took place early on Saturday of Mr. William Blake, J.P., of Sunnymeade, Castle Road, Newport, a former Mayor of the borough, prominent business man, and keen sportsman in many fields, who was known throughout the Island for half a century for his able public work and his energy in promoting the interests of Island football and other sports. He had been in failing health for many months.

Mr. Blake's service on the Newport Town Council, of which, at the time of his resignation in December of last year, he was the senior alderman, went back to 1920, when he was elected for the old south ward division. In 1926 he was appointed Mayor, his tenure of office being marked by his enthusiastic revival of many ancient customs, notably the ceremony of beating the bounds, carried out in April 1927. The perimeter of the borough was then much smaller, extending from Shide on the south to where the petrol depot now stands on Fairlee Road, and the Castle and Banner, Hunnyhill, on the north, and from Cedar Hill on the west to Polars on the east. Beating the present borough bounds would be a far more formidable undertaking. In the same year Mr. Blake inaugurated a Guy Fawkes procession, followed by a bonfire at the Seaclose refuse tip (now the Recreation Ground). He accepted an invitation to continue his mayoralty in the following year. This was marked by the opening of a new cattle market in South Street and ending of the centuries-old custom of holding the market in the public highway at St. James's Square, which had hitherto been closed every Tuesday for this purpose.

Mr. Blake was a member of the maximum possible number of committees as well as chairman for 20 years of one of the busiest, the General Purposes. He resigned from the aldermanic bench in December of last year, when a resolution was passed placing on record appreciation of his long and able services. Ald. Mrs. E. R. Chandler, J.P., remarked on that occasion it would be impossible to calculate the number of hours he had spent on the council's work. He was again Mayor in 1942-3 and in the following year. Mr. Blake's appointment to the Commission of the Peace dated back to 1931, and he was third in seniority in the list of magistrates appointed for the borough, those with prior appointments being Mr. J. C. Millgate (appointed 1914) and the present chairman, Mr. E. W. Landon (appointed 1923).

MANY SPORTING AND BUSINESS INTERESTS

The sport in which Mr. Blake was best known was football. Few in the Wight have done so much for the game generally, or could point to such a lengthy period of activity in all sections of the sport. His association with the game dates back to 1888 and the inception of the Newport club, in which he was one of the best players. Strangely enough, the records of the first general meeting show that he was responsible for a proposition that Rugby should be played (the game appears to have flourished prior to this period in Castle Road), but the proposal was defeated.

In 1892 he took over the position of honorary secretary of the club, changing to the office of honorary treasurer in the late 1890's. The club closed down during the 1914-18 war, but resumed activities in 1919, this time with Mr. Blake as president. He led the successful efforts to save the Church Litten ground, which had been placed on the market for building purposes in the 1920's. Negotiations in which he took a notable part resulted in a very reasonable offer being made to the club, who were able to buy the ground.

The frontage to Church Litten was sold off, and with the resultant funds the club were enabled to lay out a new pitch further to the east, which gained the reputation of being one of the best appointed in the county. He was one of the trustees appointed at this time, and his business knowledge and experience have been of inestimable benefit to the club and have played a large part in laying the foundation for the successes which Newport have enjoyed in recent years, notably when, following a deficit in 1933, the club was re-organised as a registered company. He retained the presidency to the time of his death.

In the wider sphere of Island football he was one of those who fostered the earliest competitions, first as chairman of the I.W. League, and later as a founder, in 1898, of the I.W. Football Association. In 57 years' continuous service with the association he has been a council member, honorary auditor, representative to the Hants F.A., and for some 30 years honorary treasurer. As long ago as 1921 he was awarded the I.W.F.A. long service medal.

Mr. Blake was also particularly well-known as a bowler, having been a member of the old Carisbrooke club later a member of the Newport club in the days when their green was at Staplers Road. In the late 1920's he provided a new green at Castle Road when the Staplers green was lost to the club. The new green was opened in 1929, and after being the local centre of the game for some seven seasons, was closed in 1936, the special turf being transferred to the present green at Seaclose. At that time Mr. Blake also took a prominent part in the County Bowling Association, passing through the junior offices and becoming president in 1930. He retired from bowls, so far as the association was concerned, in 1936.

As a young man he was a keen cyclist and oarsman, riding an "ordinary" in meetings and road races arranged by the old I.W. Cycling Club, and being a member of the Newport Rowing Club, of which for some time about 50 years ago he was treasurer. Latterly he had also taken an interest in sea angling. In former years Mr. Blake was a prominent member of the Newport Carnival Committee, and for some years their treasurer.

Mr. Blake was the proprietor of a successful family printing business in Town Lane, Newport, and a director of several local firms, being well-known in the commercial life of the Island as a business man of ability and acumen. He was deputy chairman of the I.W. Trustee Savings Bank, having joined the committee in 1916 and becoming a trustee in 1935.

He was prominently associated with the Newport Literary Society as a member since the 1880's, a committee-man, and a vice president at the time of his death, and he was a former prominent member of the Newport Rotary Club and its president in 1929-30.

Mr. Blake was twice married. Sympathy is extended to his widow, who is also well-known in Island public life as one who gave capable and graceful support to her husband during his mayoralties,

as a co-opted member of several County Council Committees, and president of the Carisbrooke Women's Institute. He also leaves five sons and seven daughters.

THE FUNERAL

The funeral service took place on Wednesday afternoon at St. Thomas's Parish Church, Newport, in the presence of a large gathering fully representative of Mr. Blake's varied public, sporting, and business interests and evidencing the esteem in which he was held. The Mayor (Ald. Lieut-Col. F. J. T. Mew. T.D.) and the members of the Corporation in their robes, the borough magistrates, and borough officials walked in procession from the Town Hall preceded by the maces, which were draped with crepe.

The Vicar (the Rev. C. R. Farnsworth) conducted the service which included the hymn "The King of Love" and the 23rd and 103rd Psalms. The organist (Miss K. Lower) played "Jesu, joy of man's desiring," "I know that my Redeemer Liveth," and "O rest in the Lord." The Vicar said Mr. Blake had served his generation well and faithfully, being associated with every good work in the town. It was only natural that a goodly number of people should attend the service and by their presence, assure those who felt the loss most keenly that they had the sympathy and the heartbeats of their friends.

The family mourners were Mrs. E. Blake (widow), Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Blake, Mr. A. K. Blake, Mr. and Mrs P. H. Blake, Mr. J. W. Blake, and Mrs. F. Blake (sons and daughters-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. H. Morris, Mr. and Mrs. I. Williams, Mr. and Mrs. R. Emberson, Mr. and Mrs. M. Driver, Mr and Mrs. H. H. Ince, and Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Platt (sons-in-law and daughters), Mr. and Mrs. W. G. H. Weeks, Mr. and Mrs. F. Weeks, and Mr. W. B. Weeks (nephews). Mr. F. W. Blake (eldest son) was unable to attend owing to illness, and Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Holman (son-in-law and daughter), Mrs. A. K. Blake (daughter-in-law), and Mr. J. A. Platt (son-in-law) were unable to attend.

The staff of Messrs. W. Blake and Son followed the family mourners and representatives of the following organisations were present: I.W. Road Safety Committee. I.W. Trustee Savings Bank, Hampshire and I.W. Football Associations, I.W. Society of the Referees, Newport Football Club and Newport F.C. Supporters' Club, the Cowes, Shanklin, D.R.O.B. (Cowes), and Sandown Football Clubs, Newport Bowling Club, Central District of the Boy Scouts' Association, 1st Newport Scouts' Group. Newport Recreational and Literary Society, Hampshire Constabulary, County Fire Service, 76th H.A.A. Regiment, British Legion, Newport Rotary Club, Inner Wheel, Earl Yarborough Lodge of Oddfellows, St. John's Men's Bible Class, St. Thomas's Bible Class, Newport Citadel of the Salvation Army, Newport Carnival Committee, Newport Amateur Musical and Dramatic Society. Newport Repertory Club, Carisbrooke Women's Institute, W.V.S., British Road Services, and the I.W. Meat Traders' Association, The arrangements were carried out by Mr F. Groundsell and interment followed at Carisbrooke Cemetery.

It was Mr. Blake's wish that there should be no floral tributes, but that donations should be sent to the Hampshire F.A. Benevolent Fund. — Mrs. Blake and family thank all who sent messages of sympathy, which will be acknowledged as soon as possible.

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