

## **James Eldridge**

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### **DEATH OF MR. JAMES ELDRIDGE**

#### **SOLICITOR AND CHURCHMAN.**

The Island lost its doyen of the legal profession and a man who for the greater part of his long life was a strong and active evangelical Churchman, by the death of Mr. James Eldridge at his residence, Grassington, Avondale Road, Newport, on Wednesday, in his 92<sup>nd</sup> year. By his high principled life and generous support of many good works Mr. Eldridge won the esteem of all who knew him, and his passing removes a revered figure in the Island Capital.

Mr. Eldridge was born at Newport on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1856, and apart from five years' residence with his parents at Sandown in his early manhood he had spent the whole of his life in the ancient borough. His father was James Eldridge, for many years town clerk and twice mayor of Newport, and his mother was also a member of an old Newport family, a sister of the late Sir Francis Pittis, J.P. He was educated at Spring Hill School, Southampton, Nassau School, Barnes, and Weymouth College, and after being articled to his brother, the late Mr. Robey F. Eldridge, was admitted a solicitor in 1878 and became a partner in the firm of James Eldridge and Sons, solicitors, of Newport and Ryde, being for many years the firm's representative as steward of the Lind Estate at Ryde. For some years he acted as deputy to the late Mr. Francis A. Joyce, the Island deputy-coroner, and assisted his brother in the office of archidiaconal registrar. In 1907 he succeeded the late Mr. W. H. Wooldridge as clerk to the Newport borough justices and held that position with marked ability until 1934, when he retired and was presented with a handsome testimonial of appreciation by the justices.

Although well known as the occupant of the offices mentioned above and by his general work as a solicitor, Mr. Eldridge was even better known for his many-sided and devoted services to the Church of England. He had been closely identified with St. John's Church, Newport, since 1880, when at the request of the vicar (the Rev. H. Graham Thwaites), he commenced the St. John's Men's Bible Class with four members, and thus commenced a religious work, and a personal record in connection with it, which have become probably unique in the country. The Bible class has flourished ever since, Mr. Eldridge being the active leader for 56 years. He continued as its nominal leader, but still taking an intense interest in it, until the last. He visited the class one Sunday last summer and, although nearing his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday, gave a short but stirring address on loyalty. On completing 50 years' leadership in 1930 he was presented with a gold watch. He had also served St. John's parish as churchwarden for 30 years, as choirmaster, and as conductor of an orchestra which entertained soldiers at local canteens during the first great war. Mr. Eldridge was one of the first lay readers to be licensed in the Diocese of Winchester, afterwards continuing in the Diocese of Portsmouth, and for some years he conducted mission services at St. Mary's, Cowes, and St. Paul's, Newport. As one of St. John's representatives at the Diocesan and Rurl-decanal Conferences, he frequently contributed to the debates, taking a strong line on anything which he considered was not in keeping with his evangelical views. A skilful player of the English concertina, he often delighted audiences at local concerts with his performances on this instrument.

Mr. Eldridge had been living in partial retirement since 1936, when he had a serious illness, but he made a remarkable recovery and although he had become feeble physically of late, he fully retained his mental alertness and keen interest in the life of his native town, the Church, and his Bible Class.

In his younger days he was a fine all-round athlete, an above-average performer at cricket, football, golf, hockey, skating, tennis, badminton, and cycling. His interest in athletics is reflected in his

foundation, and constant support as its only president, of the St. John's Athletic Club. He was an original member of the old I.W. Cycling Club, winning the first race the club promoted, from Shorwell to Brighstone, and coming in second in the first open race from Yarmouth to Gunville. He and the late Professor John Milne, the eminent seismologist, of Shide, were chiefly responsible for the formation of the Newport Golf Club in 1896. He followed the Professor in its presidency and, on his retirement from the position in 1931, was made a life member of the club. He was also a founder-member of the Shanklin and Sandown Golf Club and had won many golf competitions in the Island in his early days.

Mr. Eldridge was twice married. His first wife, formerly Miss Frances Thomas, of York, died in 1907\*, and in 1919 he married Miss L. T. E. Mackinnon, sister of the late vicar of St. John's, Newport (the Rev. W. H. Mackinnon), who survives him with her son, Mr. James C. M. Eldridge, who recently qualified as a solicitor and has succeeded his father as Messrs. James Eldridge and Sons' representative at Ryde. There were two sons of the first marriage, but only one survives, Mr. Paul Eldridge, who is a solicitor at Leicester. His brother Maurice, an electrical engineer, died a few years ago.

The funeral will take place to-day (Saturday); service at St. John's Church, Newport, at 2 p.m.

*\* Frances Eldridge was buried at St. John's Church, Carisbrooke/Newport 7 October 1907*

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