

Robey Frank Eldridge

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DEATH OF MR. ROBEY F. ELDRIDGE, J.P.

PUBLIC TRIBUTES AND FUNERAL.

With the deepest regret we have to record the death of a notable Newportonian in the person of Mr. Robey Frank Eldridge, J.P., of Melrose, Watergate-road, Newport, who rendered eminent public service for his native borough and county, and who held an honoured position in local literary life as an author and poet of considerable distinction. Having reached the ripe age of 86 years, the late Mr. Robey Eldridge had outlived most of his contemporaries in the public service of the Wight, and as health considerations had compelled his retirement from public work for many years he was not well known to the post-war generation, though he was able to be out and to visit old friends until the last year or two. He cheerfully bore the long illness which preceded his peaceful passing on Saturday evening last.

Mr. Eldridge was the son of the late Mr. James Eldridge, and of Maria, daughter of the late Francis Pittis, of Newport, two of the leading and most esteemed local families. Educated privately, he was admitted a solicitor as far back as 1865, and on the death of his father became the senior partner in the well known firm of Messrs. Eldridge and Sons, solicitors, of Newport, Ryde, and Cowes. He married in 1878 Harriett, daughter of his late uncle, the Rev. Robey Eldridge, rector of Desford, Leicestershire, and had a son and two daughters. For a time he deputised for his father as town clerk of Newport before becoming a valued member of the Corporation. He soon won the confidence of the city fathers of those days and was honoured by election as mayor of his native town in 1884-5. So splendidly did his discharge of the duties of the mayoralty justify the choice of his colleagues that he was elected an alderman of the borough. This position he ably filled until 1898, and he had previously been honoured by appointment to the Commission of the Peace for Newport, and for over 30 years he had been the senior magistrate of the borough. His mayoralty was rendered especially memorable by the marriage at Whippingham Church on July 23rd, 1885, of H.R.H. Princess Beatrice to the late Prince Henry of Battenberg. Mr. Eldridge had the honour of being invited by the late Queen Victoria to attend the marriage ceremony as mayor of the Island capital. Shortly before the wedding he attended Osborne and presented addresses of congratulation and good wishes from the Corporation and inhabitants of Newport to the Queen and Princess Beatrice, and also Newport's marriage gift – an edition of the works of Shakespeare – to the Island's future Royal Governor.

In the wider sphere of county administration the late Mr. Eldridge rendered equally distinguished service. He became one of the first members of the Island County Council for one of the divisions of Newport, and continued his membership for some 15 years during which he was honoured by election as an Alderman and vice-chairman of the County Parliament. He ably held the vice-chairmanship, in succession to the late Col. R. Pearson Crozier, J.P., for over five years, and the aldermanic distinction for six years. Perhaps his most notable and memorable work on the County Council was that which he did as chairman of the Technical Education Committee, in which capacity it fell to his lot to propose the resolution for the erection of the County Technical Institute (now the County Secondary School) and the Seely Free Library at Newport, of the latter of which the first Sir Charles Seely, Bt., was the munificent donor. The provision of the Technical Institute accompanied the introduction of technical education by the State for the benefit of those whose instruction had been mostly limited to the facilities offered by the elementary schools. Mr. Eldridge was enthusiastic in his efforts to secure the fullest advantages of advanced education for the young people who could not otherwise obtain them, and under his direction an excellent scheme of technical education, with a county organiser in Professor Custance, was initiated and carried out.

Endowed with literary attainments and a poetic gift of no mean order, the late Mr. Eldridge found agreeable relaxation during a busy professional life and devoted public service by writing several books, many short stories and articles, and much poetry as the columns of this journal have borne eloquent testimony on numerous occasions. For many years he regularly contributed to the *County Press* a specially written and much appreciated poem at Christmas time. Happily he was able to continue his literary and poetic work during his years of enforced retirement from public service. The principle books which he published and which stamped him as an author of much merit were "The Kestyns of Cather Castle (1897), "The Scheming of Agntha Kenrick" (1899), and "Jerry" (1898). He ranks among the "Poets of the Wight," immortalised in Mr. C. J. Arnell's excellent "Anthology of Vectensian Verse," in which the author of that admirable work says of Mr. Eldridge "In his poems is found a delicate human touch and depth of feeling, many of them have attracted high commendations from large circles of readers, notably among these are 'A Newport maiden's gift to King Charles I' and 'The Little House.'

Mr. Eldridge was a very devout Churchman and valued supporter and regular worshipper, whilst health permitted, at the Parish Church, Newport. He held the appointment of Registrar of the Archdeaconry of the Island from 1898 until a comparatively short time before his death.

As a staunch Conservative, the late Mr. Eldridge rendered invaluable help as the leader of the local Conservative party and the Primrose League, and his eloquent and forcible addresses were a great asset to the party, particularly during the period when the Island had the distinction of being represented in Parliament for so long by the late Lord Alverstone, who greatly valued Mr. Eldridge's co-operation in assisting the continued triumph of the constitutional cause in the Island. Mr. Eldridge was also a warm supporter of Friendly Society work and particularly of the Earl Yarborough Lodge of Oddfellows, and of much charitable and other laudable effort carried on in the borough during the last half century.

No cause could have a more capable champion than he proved to be during his long period of active public service. His intervention in debate was often marked by speeches in which rare eloquence, felicity of expression, and convincing force and apt poetic quotation were distinguishing characteristics, and his death has severed a treasured link with the past. The deepest sympathy of the whole community will go out to the widow and the other members of the family in their bereavement.

THE FUNERAL

The first part of the funeral service took place at the Parish Church, Newport, on Wednesday, the large attendance of fellow townsmen testifying to the esteem in which the deceased was held. The officiating clergy were the Revs. W. H. Mackinnon (vicar of St. John's) and Miles Atkinson (vicar of St. Paul's, Barton).

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