

George Edward Gray

Isle of Wight County Press - 21 June 1958

Newport's "Grand Old Man"

Mr. G. E Gray Dies, Aged 99

Newport lost one of its rare "characters" by the death of Mr. George Edward Gray on Saturday at St. Mary's Hospital, where he had been a patient for about the last six years. Had he lived until September 11th, he would have celebrated his 100th birthday. A grand old chap with a sunny disposition and always ready for a joke, Mr. Gray was an original member of the St. John's Men's Bible Class, which was started 78 years ago, and he maintained his interest to the last, although he was not able to attend in later years. He made a host of friends in Newport because for about 27 years he carried on a local newspaper round, and he could claim the title of "Britain's oldest newsboy", a distinction all the more commendable when it is realised that he only took up the round when he was 65, not wishing for an idle retirement! Prior to that he was a stonemason.. Mr. Gray was a musician, and in his early days was a member for 17 years of the I.W. Rifles Volunteers' Band.

"NEWSBOY" at 92

A native of Portsmouth, he was the son of John Gray, a quartermaster in the Royal Navy. After his father's death, he came as a lad to the Island with his mother, and lived in Carisbrooke for many years. For some time he was employed by his brother, the late Mr. Robert Gray, at the Hunnyhill Dairy, and also helped on the round. Then he turned to the building trade, and was employed as a mason by Mr. Groundsell and by Mr. Bunce, helping to build many houses in Carisbrooke Road and in Caesar's Road, Newport. About the time he retired at 65, Mr. Gray, who was single, went to lodge at Clarendon Place, Newport. When his landlady, Mrs. M. E. Payne, died in 1944, her daughter, Miss M. Payne, continued to look after him for a while, and then he resided with Mr. Orchard in nearby Melbourne Street for a time. During his lengthy spell as a newsboy for Miss Greengrass, a well-remembered local newsagent, Mr. Gray was out in all weathers—a sturdy, active five-foot figure wheeling a box-barrow, and he carried on this work to the age of 92. Another interest was gardening; he kept an allotment in Melbourne Street, and planted what was to become a large apple tree in Miss Payne's garden.

About the time he gave up the newspaper round, Mr. Gray became totally blind, but his jovial nature was not subdued by this affliction. He was devoted to the staff of St. Mary's Hospital, and looked on those who ministered to his wants as members of a family. He was popular with his ward companions, too, and as recently as a few weeks ago, would entertain them with a tune on his mouth organ and concertina. On one occasion when the Salvation Army Band played in the grounds, Mr. Gray asked that they might come into the ward — which they did — and he accompanied them skilfully on the mouth organ. His nephew, Mr. Walter Gray, of 146 Carisbrooke Road, and Mrs. Gray, on their regular visits to the hospital during those six years, found him to have an ever-ready interest in day-to-day affairs as well as a fund of reminiscences of the past. He also expressed a constant concern for the welfare of his many friends and acquaintances. When the hospital chaplin visited him, Mr. Gray liked to discourse on theology. Other visits to which Mr. Gray looked forward were those from members of the I.W. Society for the Blind, who were also generous in their gifts.

The funeral took place at St. John's Church, Newport, on Wednesday, conducted by the Rev. L.J.D. Wheatley. The hymns "O' Love that wilt not let me go", and "Nearer, my God to Thee" were accompanied by Miss Welby-Pryer at the organ. The family mourners were Mr. J. A. Gray, Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Gray, Mrs. B. Howes, and Mrs. J. Leppard (nephews and nieces). The St. John's Men's Bible

Class were represented and also sent a floral tribute. The interment was at Carisbrooke Cemetery. The arrangements were made by Mr. Walter W. Wells.

Mr. and Mrs W. W. Gray wish to thank all for beautiful floral tributes and messages of sympathy, and for kindness shown over many years.

Transcription by Ian Roach for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries © 2019
<https://www.foncc.org.uk>