

James Thomas

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DEATH OF MR. JAMES THOMAS, J.P.

The death of Mr. James Thomas, J.P., of Beechwood, Newport, early yesterday (Friday) morning, which we record with the deepest regret, means the severance of a long, prominent, and honourable association with the public and commercial life of the Island, and the loss of a notable and an eminently useful and highly esteemed citizen. The deceased, who was in his 80th year, continued many of his public and private business activities practically to the end, having been engaged at the office of Messrs. Thomas, Gater, Bradfield and Co., Ltd., the well-known corn merchant, etc., of which firm he was the senior member, as recently as Friday week, but in the recent damp and cold weather he had evidently caught a chill, which restarted old bronchial trouble, with the result that he was critically ill on Sunday. Although he rallied slightly, the grave illness which developed proved too much for one of so advanced an age, and, in spite of the best medical attention and most skilful nursing, he gradually sank and passed peacefully away as stated above. During late years he had experienced more than one serious illness, and this, coupled with the successive heavy blows by the loss by death of his wife and two of his four children, a daughter and a son, had visibly weakened him, though he courageously persevered in the performance of his many engagements, although he was naturally obliged to relinquish his public work on the County Council and County Education Committee. He felt very keenly the death of his younger son, Mr. Clive Thomas, who gallantly joined the Army as a private early in the War, and was killed in action on the Western front.

The late Mr. Thomas was born at Chelsea in November, 1842, and was educated at a private school at Taunton. He came to the Island about 45 years ago as a representative of the old firm of Messrs. Dear and Morgan, of Cowes. He was afterwards partner with Mr. Dear, of Ventnor, and on the death of Mr. Frank Ash, he became a partner with Mr. William Ash in the business of Messrs. Ash and Thomas. On the death of Mr. William Ash, the business was formed into a limited liability company, under the style of Messrs. James Thomas and Co., Ltd., with the late Mr. Thomas as the managing director. Under his far-seeing and able management the business developed wonderfully, and absorbed other well-known firms both in the Island and on the mainland. A few years ago he handed over the managing directorship to his son, Mr. Leigh Thomas, under whom, latterly, the great extension of the firm's business has been emphasised by the addition of new directors, and the alteration of the style of the firm to that of Messrs. Thomas, Gater, Bradfield and Co., Ltd.

Mr. Thomas's principal public business commenced in 1894 when he became a member of the County Council, on which his remarkable business abilities and his keen sympathy with the cause of education found ample opportunity for beneficial exercise. His work was rewarded by elevation to the aldermanic bench in 1901, and to the vice-chairmanship of the County Parliament in 1904, and he held both offices till his retirement in 1919. He was also during that period the capable chairman of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, and in those positions he rendered very devoted and highly valued service to the cause of Education, as he did as a member of the old Newport School Board, of which he was for some time the chairman. About 16 years ago he sought election as a member of the Newport Town Council, and tied with another candidate, who was returned by the deciding vote of the returning officer. At the annual meeting of the Corporation in the same year he failed to secure election both as alderman and mayor, by the casting vote of the presiding alderman, whose vote resulted in the re-election of the late Ald. C. Salter, J.P., to the Mayoralty.

He was a prominent member and liberal supporter of the Congregational churches, particularly of that at Newport, of which he was a senior deacon for many years. He was a former chairman of the Hants

Congregational Union. His great solicitude for the welfare of the children was by no means confined to his work on education authorities, as was evidenced by his long and splendid record of Sunday-school work, which embraced a quarter of a century's service as the superintendent of the Newport Congregational Sunday-school, and his presidency for some time of the I.W. Sunday-school Union.

An ardent temperance reformer, he was for many years actively identified with Band of Hope work at Newport, and with other temperance organisations.

In politics he was one of the leading members of the Island Liberal party, and was for many years the energetic president of the Newport and District Liberal Association. He was one of the senior Newport Justices, having been appointed in 1894, and was very regular in attendance at his magisterial duties.

Works of charity and benevolence found in him a liberal helper. He was for many years hon. treasurer of the Newport Benevolent Society, and was a warm supporter of local efforts for Dr. Barnardo's Homes and other well-known charitable institutions, and his lovely gardens at Beechwood have been the venue of the annual sale of the Young Helpers' League for Dr. Barnardo's Homes.

Sufficient has been said to show that his death is a heavy loss to the Island, and to Newport in particular, and his cheery presence and smiling greeting will be greatly missed. The sympathy of the whole community will go out to the bereaved family at their sorrow.

The funeral has been fixed to take place on Monday, when the interment at Carisbrooke Cemetery will be preceded by a service at the Congregational Church, Newport, at 2.30.

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