

## **John Curtis Millgate**

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### **NEWPORT'S ONLY HONORARY FREEMAN**

#### **Death of Mr. J. C. Millgate, J.P.**

#### **Architect, Archaeologist, and City Father**

Newport yesterday paid tribute to one of her foremost citizens at the funeral of Mr. John Curtis Millgate, J.P., of Canterbury House, Castle Road, whose death on Tuesday at the age of 89 brought to a close a life lived in the finest traditions of service to the ancient and historic capital.

Thrice Mayor and a member and alderman of the Town Council for a continuous period of over 40 years, covering the two world wars, he received in 1949, on his retirement from the council, the unique distinction of becoming the first honorary freeman of the borough, and has remained the sole holder of that office.

Mr. Millgate took a deep and unselfish interest in architectural treasures which he regarded as part of Newport's heritage, and on at least two occasions he personally took action which resulted in the preservation for posterity of features of exceptional archaeological and historical work.

The funeral service yesterday afternoon at the Newport Parish Church was largely attended and took place with full civic honours.

#### **Designed Newport War Memorial**

John Curtis Millgate was the younger son of the late William Millgate, an artilleryman and native of Canterbury, who was commissioned in the field during the Crimean War. His father came to the Island in 1860 to join the staff of the local militia, having married two years previously Christabella Curtis, of the Bridge Inn, Lymington. As a youth he was articled to a Newport architect and learned the profession so thoroughly that he later became a partner, and his name was added to the style of the firm which became Messrs. Stratton and Millgate, and has retained that title.

Mr. Millgate was responsible for the design of many of the chief business premises in the town and was for many years the architect responsible for the various restoration schemes carried out to the stonework of the Newport Parish Church. For some years early in the century he was diocesan surveyor, and he was also associated with restorations carried out at St. Mary's Church, Carisbrooke.

A notable example of his work is the war memorial in St. Thomas's Square, a design which called for very careful consideration in view of the varied nature of the surrounding buildings. A man of the greatest integrity and courtesy, meticulous in all his dealings, it was a pleasure to meet him whether by way of business or social contact.

#### **Mayor on Three Occasions**

Mr. Millgate commenced his long and distinguished career in local government in 1906 when he was returned at the head of the poll in the south ward of the old borough. His qualities so impressed his fellow members that he was elected mayor in 1911, and his daughter, Miss C. Millgate, became the youngest mayoress in the country at that time, her father having been a widower since 1903.

In 1920 Mr. Millgate's services were further recognised by his election as an alderman. He again filled the office of first citizen of the borough in 1915 and 1925, with Miss C. Millgate again as mayoress. The review of county districts greatly enlarged the borough in 1933, and the whole of the council had to seek re-election, but Mr. Millgate was held in such esteem that he was re-elected as an alderman and was never again forced to seek votes to retain his place on the council. Sincere in all his actions he could be forthright in debate when the occasion warranted plain speaking, but he was not a publicity seeker and preferred to remain quietly helpful.

Among other matters to which reference is made below, Mr. Millgate played a large part in securing for the borough the Seaclose Recreation Ground, originally intended only as a playing field, but subsequently provided with such amenities as a swimming pool, tennis courts and pavilion when public subscriptions were raised during the depression following the first world war to employ out-of-work men on projects of benefit to the neighbourhood.

### **Preserved Ancient Treasures**

Although his record of public service rests on a far wider basis, Mr. Millgate will be chiefly remembered for two occasions in which he saved archaeological treasures for posterity. One was when there was a move to demolish the well-known God's Providence House to allow freer access to the centre of the town. Mr. Millgate later described this occasion as the only one of which he acted against the council's wishes. He co-operated privately with the late Mr. Percy G. Stone, F.S.A., to acquire the property and having it scheduled by the Ministry of Works as an ancient monument, thereby preserving it from destruction or alteration.

The other concerned the discovery of the remains of a Roman villa off Cypress Road, Mount Pleasant. To prevent damage by souvenir hunters, who were taking away the tessellated pavement, he purchase the site, erected a protective building over it, and later offered it to the town. For various reasons the offer was not accepted but Mr. Millgate unhesitatingly shouldered the financial liability and has since maintained the site as part of what is considered to be Newport's historical heritage.

### **First Borough Freeman**

At a special council meeting at the Guildhall on November 9th, 1949, following his retirement from the position of "father of the council", Mr. Millgate was paid what he then described as "the greatest compliment I have ever received" and became the first and only honorary freeman of the borough. Reference was then made to the fact that it was 43 years to the day since he first entered the building as a councillor, and the resolution, passed by the council, spoke of their "grateful recognition and highest appreciation of most eminent services rendered by him to the borough".

The new freeman took an oath including the words "as one of the free burgesses of the Borough of Newport for which you are chosen, for and during so long a time as you shall continue to be in the said office, you shall to the utmost of your power defend, maintain and preserve all charters, privileges, immunities, customs granted or in any other way belonging to this borough and in all other things during your said office you shall faithfully demean yourself".

The motion was proposed by the then Mayor (Ald. G. C. Russell, J.P.) and seconded by Ald. Mrs. E. R. Chandler, O.B.E., J.P., who, in her tribute, said that the words of the oath had been exemplified over and over again in Mr. Millgate's life.

### **The Senior Magistrate**

Mr. Millgate had been on the Commission of the Peace as one of the justices for the Borough of Newport since 1914, although for many years he had been on the supplementary list. He was the first

chairman of the juvenile panel of magistrates. His other associations included Freemasonry, in which he was a past master of the Albany and Albany Mark Lodges and a member of the Vectis Lodge, London.

He was one of about half-a-dozen founder-members of the Newport Rotary Club, and was the first president of the club for three years. He was also a member of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Architectural Association. A keen student of local history, he frequently lectured on old Newport.

In his younger days he excelled at many sports, notable cycling, in which he won something like 40 prizes in three seasons, and to the end of his life he was a great walker, scorning the use of a car and going almost everywhere on foot.

He leaves one son, Mr. J. W. Millgate, who assists in the business, and two daughters, the Misses C. and G. Millgate.

### **Town Council's Tribute**

At the commencement of Newport Town Council meeting at the Guildhall on Wednesday, the Mayor (Mr. W. G. Bull) said that they had all heard with great regret of the death of Mr. Millgate. Although he had not had as much personal contact with him as some of the older members, he knew Mr. Millgate as a man of the highest integrity who had rendered conspicuous and valuable service to the borough.

During a long life he had also had many sporting associations with rowing, boxing and cycling. He was proud of Newport and considered that a proper civic pride was something every Newportonian should have. His professional skill would be remembered for many years. The Mayor cited the late Mr. Millgate's council record of service and concluded by proposing that they place on record their deep sorrow of the death of a "father" of the council who was their first and only honorary freeman. Silent tribute was then paid.

The Borough flag was flown at half-mast over the Guildhall until after the funeral yesterday.

### **Civic Honours at Funeral**

The funeral service at the Newport Parish Church yesterday afternoon was conducted by the Vicar of Carisbrooke (the Rev. J. Souttar) in the absence from the Island of the Vicar of Newport (the Rev. C. F. Farnsworth). The Mayor and members of the Corporation, magistrates of the Newport Petty Sessional Division and borough officials walked in procession from the Guildhall to the church preceded by the borough maces draped with crepe. The leather-bound album which was presented to Mr. Millgate containing his charter as a freeman of the borough rested on the coffin with the family wreaths during the ceremony.

The service included the hymn "The King of Love", and Miss K. Lower (organist) played "Jesus, Joy of man's desiring", "I know that my Redeemer liveth", "God be in my head", and "Solemn Melody" as a recessional.

The personal mourners were Mr. J. W. Millgate (son), the Misses C. and G. Millgate (daughters), Messrs. E. F. Millgate, H. F. Payn, and G. Yelf (nephews), Mesdames E. H. Abraham and E. Gustar, and the Misses M. E. Millgate and M. Payn (nieces), Mr. E. H. Abraham and Mesdames H. F. Payn and M. L. Millgate, and Mr. D. Millgate (great-nephew).

Included in the civic procession were the Mayor (Mr. W. G. Bull), accompanied by the Town Clerk (Mr. W. R. Wilks), Aldermen Lieut.-Col F. J. T. Mew, T.D., J. J. Simmonds, Mrs. E. R. Chandler, O.B.E., J.P., E. C. Pearson, and G. C. Russell, J.P., and Councillors S. W. Wendes, H. E. Harvey, K. E. Miller, Commander C. W. Fairall, G. Steel, G. F. Tomlinson, R. C. W. Turner, E. E. Fuller, A. J. A.

Harris, D. F. F. Colledge, and T. C. Hartnell, and the following magistrates: Messrs. E. W. Landon, W. G. Sibbeck, W. S. Warne, and Lieut-Col. C. W. Bannon, M.C., T.D., D.L., accompanied by the Magistrates' Clerk (Mr. E. Band). The congregation also included members of other organizations with which Mr. Millgate was associated.

As the service ended the Mayoral procession headed the cortege as far as the Guildhall, where the two ranks divided to form a guard of honour through which the remainder of the procession passed on its way to Newport Cemetery, where the interment took place beside the grave of his wife.

The church service was preceded by brief devotions at the house, at which, in addition to the personal mourners mentioned above, there were present Miss. H. E. Millgate (niece) and Miss B. Spranklin (housekeeper).

There were numerous floral tributes, including one from the Mayor, the aldermen, and councillors, and others from organisations with which Mr. Millgate had been associated.

Mr. A. E. Wyatt, of Messrs. Moormans, of Newport, made the arrangements.

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