

## **Richard Bird Cheverton, J.P.**

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### **DEATH OF MR. R. BIRD CHEVERTON, J.P.**

#### **His Notable Record of Public Service For Newport**

A notable record of splendid public service for the borough of Newport during the last half century is brought to mind by the death on Wednesday, at the advanced aged of 88, of Mr. Richard Bird Cheverton, J.P., of Ravenswood, Carisbrooke-road, Newport, the senior magistrate of the borough, a former mayor, an alderman for nearly a quarter of a century, a town councillor for some years before that, a former active member of the Borough Education Committee, and one of Newport's earliest representatives on the County Council. Though advancing age and personal considerations influenced him to seek a respite some 14 years ago from the major part of his many public activities when he retired from the Town Council, he continued with praiseworthy devotion the discharge of his duties as a magistrate until early this year, when increasing deafness made it well-nigh impossible for him to continue. He was, however, wonderfully active until practically the end, and he had not long relinquished other responsible public work such as the chairmanship of the Advisory Committee on the appointment of the borough justices, and his long presidency of the Newport Burial Board. His general health was preserved in a remarkable degree until the onset of his last illness early in the summer.

When quite youthful the late Mr. Cheverton, after being apprenticed as a cabinet maker, was called upon owing to the early death of his father to take charge of the well-known carriage and coachbuilding business in Lugley-street, Newport, which he did so much to develop and make famous in pre-motoring days, when horsed vehicles provided the only means of road transport. That fame extended far beyond the Island for Mr. Cheverton's firm enjoyed the patronage of the late Queen Victoria and other members of the Royal family, as well as of the distinguished clientele in the Island and elsewhere. The firm's notable productions included about 20 carriages built to the order of Queen Victoria during her Majesty's long residence at Osborne. Some of these carriages are still preserved at Windsor Castle and elsewhere. It is interesting to recall that at an exhibition at Olympia in 1921 of historic vehicles, such as were fashionable in the early Victorian era, three carriages lent by the King for exhibition included a sleigh constructed to be drawn by two horses, which, as the catalogue of the show stated, was "Built by Messrs. Cheverton, of Newport, Isle of Wight, early in the reign of Queen Victoria and used by her at Windsor". Outstanding quality of workmanship was invariably the feature of his firm's productions upon which the late Mr. Bird Cheverton always insisted.

Notwithstanding increasing business and family responsibilities the late Mr. Cheverton, some half a century ago, patriotically responded to the call to enter upon a long and eminently useful career of civic service for his native town, which he loved so well and served so faithfully. His marked business abilities, high integrity, and outspokenness and independence early won the respect and confidence of his colleagues. He was honoured by election as an alderman in 1895 and was appointed as a borough magistrate in 1896, and elected mayor two years later. All these positions he filled with the greatest credit to himself and to the great advantage of the borough. He was a worthy contemporary of such notable civic chiefs of former days as Alderman Francis T. Mew, Ald. Francis Pittis, Ald. Cornelius Salter, and Mr. Charles E. Pinnock, the last named of whom he succeeded in the chief magistracy. He served as deputy mayor on several occasions. Keen upon keeping a firm hand on finance and a consistent advocate of sound economy he rendered conspicuously able service as the chairman of the borough Finance Committee for the long period of 21 years, and his able and painstaking work in that responsible position deservedly won the warm appreciation of the Council and the burgesses. He was for a time the chairman

of the Borough Waterworks Committee and took an important part in the highly successful development of the Corporation's water undertaking, which has proved an invaluable boon to Newport and other districts. In the re-sewering of the borough many years ago and in other important improvements the late Mr. Cheverton gave valued advice and support. Consequent upon increasing pressure of business and advancing age, in November, 1919, he resigned his long membership with the Council. "I cannot sever my long and pleasant association with the Council without regret", wrote the late ex-alderman, "and I thank the members for all the kindness and consideration extended to me during the whole of the period I have been associated with them". Deep and sincere was the regret felt by the Corporation and the town at the severance from the Town Council of one who for the long period of 35 years had laboured so devotedly for the advancement and welfare of his native town, and glowing tributes to his work and worth were paid by his colleagues of all political parties who with cordial unanimity passed a resolution placing on record "deep regret at his resignation, most cordial appreciation of his long and continuous service to the municipality, and acknowledgement of the ability and value of his work as chairman of the Finance Committee for the period of 21 years, and its recognition of the honesty of purpose, courage, and fearlessness which characterized his actions". The individual tributes paid by the members of that day included such expressions as "A fearless exponent of what he considered right" and "No one had done more for keeping down the rates". In his acknowledgement of these tributes the late alderman said "It is a great satisfaction to feel that my humble efforts have been so generously accepted and whilst memory lasts I shall look back with pride and pleasure to my long association with the work of the Council, during which time I have made many friends, and I hope and trust no enemies".

With the passing of the Education Act of 1902 he commenced active participation in the administration of education, as a member of the Education Committee, a position he occupied until his retirement. He also found much scope for assisting to advance the interests of the borough in its wider relationships as a member of the County Council for two terms in the early days of the county parliament, and thus made a worthy contribution to county government in days when there was keen competition for seats on the County Council. A staunch supporter of the Parish Church, where he was a regular worshipper for so long, he enthusiastically co-operated with prominent church people and other friends in promoting the success of the scheme for restoration of the noble tower and western façade of St. Thomas' Church during the vicariate of the Rev. H. Edmund Sharpe, in 1901, when the late Lord Randall Davidson, then Bishop of Winchester, unveiled the principal feature of the restored western front. The late Ald. Cheverton was the very capable and enthusiastic chairman of the Executive Committee responsible for the scheme, the cost of which (£2000) was raised by public subscription. In politics the late Mr. Cheverton was a staunch Conservative and an active and valued supporter of the party, and one of those responsible for the founding of the Newport Conservative Club. A keenly patriotic citizen he was an enthusiastic supporter and member of the old Volunteers, in which his distinguished himself as a marksman by winning a number of prizes, including the Wykeham-Martin prize competed for by Newport and Cowes members, when he was a recruit in 1866. He was one of the oldest of local Freemasons and was present at the installation as grand master of King Edward when Prince of Wales. He was very entertaining when recounting some of his interesting reminiscences and would recall that as a lad, when staying in London, he witnessed the public execution by hanging outside Newgate of a notorious prisoner named Muller. When the motor began to oust horsed vehicles the late Mr. Cheverton was associated for some time in pioneer motor trade enterprise in the Island.

Mr. Cheverton was twice married, and had celebrated two silver weddings. His first wife was Miss Flux, sister of the late Major J. Flux, of Ryde, who charmingly served as Mayoress during his occupancy of the civic chair, and some years after her death he married Miss Whittington, sister of Mr. W. J. Whittington, J.P., for whom, as well as for his seven surviving children of a family of 13, all by his first wife, much sympathy is felt.

## The Funeral

The borough standard flew at half-mast on the Guildhall and there were many other tributes of mourning and respect to be seen when the funeral took place yesterday (Friday) morning at Newport Parish Church. The late Alderman's former colleagues of the Corporation and magistracy, headed by the borough maces draped with crepe, walked in procession to the service, and the large attendance included many old friends of the deceased gentleman in both his public and business activities. The officiating clergy were the Vicar (the Rev. J. F. Seymour Glynn), the Rural Dean (the Rev. H. S. Footman), and the Rev. Dr. S. W. Sutton. The choir led the singing of the hymns "Abide with me" and "On the resurrection morning" and the organist (Mr. H. W. Stubbington, F.R.C.O.) played "O rest in the Lord", "I know that my Redeemer liveth", and the Dead March in "Saul".

The family mourners were: Mrs. R. Bird Cheverton (widow), Messrs. R. B. Cheverton, jnr., W. H., F. A., and A. J. Cheverton (sons), Mrs. Knott, Miss Dora Cheverton, and Mrs. Willmott (daughters), Messrs. Arthur Cheverton, Richard Bird Cheverton, and S. J. G. Knott (grandsons), Miss Violet Cheverton (grand-daughter), Mrs. Archer J. Cheverton (daughter-in-law), Messrs. W. J. Whittington, J.P. (brother-in-law), F. G. Flux, R. L. Flux, W. H. Dann, J.P., B.A., and Ald. W. Blake, J.P. (nephews), Mrs. G. Weeks (niece), and Mrs. Lloyd (grand-niece).

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