

Frank Ernest Whitcher

Isle of Wight County Press – 10 February 1951

DEATH OF MR. F. E. WHITCHER, J.P., OF NEWPORT.

FOUR TIMES MAYOR OF THE BOROUGH.

Newport is mourning the loss of one of its most valued citizens, as the result of the death, at his home in College Road on Saturday, of Mr. Frank Ernest Whitcher, J.P., at the age of 84. He was a prominent and esteemed figure in many phases of the life of the borough for over half-a-century---four times its chief citizen, 45 years a member of the Town Council, a Justice of the Peace, an enthusiastic worker for education, a devout Congregationalist, a staunch Liberal, an able and pleasing speaker, and a man of marked business ability. In a life full of good works, Mr. Whitcher deservedly won the highest respect of succeeding generations of his fellow-townfolk, and his many beneficial labours, so cheerfully and ably performed, will be remembered with gratitude. Much sympathy is felt with Mrs. Whitcher in the parting after nearly 50 years of happy married life. She was his charming helpmeet in all his public work, and herself has rendered the borough notable service by her active support of many worthy causes.

A son of the late Mr. and Mrs. E. Whitcher, of Newport, Mr. Whitcher was born on the premises of the outfitters' shop, which his father established in Nodehill in 1865, and in which his own long business career was spent. He was educated at the Portland House Academy (the site now occupied by the premises of Messrs. H. W. Morey and Son). After a period of training at an outfitting establishment on the mainland, he worked in his father's shop, and took over the management on his death at the beginning of the century. He was a well-known figure in the Chamber of Commerce, and was also a founder member and a past president of the Rotary Club. He retired from business in 1949, when the firm was made into a company. The family skill and aptitude in the outfitting business was also demonstrated by his brother, Mr. Stanley Whitcher, who pursued the same career on the mainland, and is now the owner of a chain of shops in the Midlands.

Mr. and Mrs. Whitcher, and their families, have been worshippers at the Congregational Church for many years. Mr. Whitcher's long service as deacon for more than 50 years was marked by his appointment three years ago as life deacon. He was also at various times financial treasurer, editor of the church magazine, bazaar secretary, and chairman of trustees. He was a well-known figure in the county organisation, being a past chairman of the Hants Congregational Union, and treasurer of the Southern District of the Union.

He first entered public life in 1901, when he gained the highest poll of the three representatives returned to the Town Council by the north ward electors. He had the distinction of serving continuously until November 1945, a term of office believed to be the longest served by any member since the borough received its charter in the reign of Henry

II. He was first elected mayor in 1912, and was re-elected for three years in succession from 1916. In that capacity he announced to the town the signing of the Armistice in November 1918, and in the same year he became an alderman. His outstanding services as mayor during the difficult period of the war were recognised on his retirement in 1919 by a civic presentation. In 1923 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace. He served on practically every council committee, and had been chairman of most of them. Some of his notable work was carried out as a member of the Borough Education Committee, of which he was chairman for many years, and it was a sad blow to him when that committee's functions were transferred to the County Council.

A further recognition of his outstanding services to the community in so many fields was made in June 1946 when, at a special meeting of the Town Council, he was presented with a framed illuminated address, and perhaps no better indication of the esteem in which he was held can be given than by quoting the words of that address : "Whereas Frank Ernest Witcher, Esq., a Justice of the Peace for the Borough of Newport, has well and truly served the best interests of his native town of Newport during his membership of the Council of the said Borough over a period of more than 44 years, during which time he was elected to the high office of Mayor in the years 1912, 1916, 1917, and 1918, and was an alderman from September 25th, 1918, until the date of his retirement on November 9th, 1945, now therefore may all men know by these presents that we, the Mayor, Aldermen, and Burgesses of the Borough of Newport, capital town of the Isle of Wight, as and acting as the Council of the said Borough, do unanimously resolve that our best thanks be and are hereby accorded to the said Frank Ernest Witcher for the many services he has rendered to the Borough, and that a permanent record of these proceedings be included in the minutes of the Council."

In addition to his interests in the civic life of the town, Mr. Witcher was also prominent in political circles in his younger days, being a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party. He was a former president of the Newport District Liberal Association, and a vice-president of the Liberal Club.

His tireless efforts for public charities included the chairmanship of the trustees of the Newport Grammar School, the Town Council's representative on the Blue School Foundation, and the chairmanship and treasurership of the Newport Charities Trust, whose main work is associated with the Grammar School and the Almshouses. He was a member of the Oddfellows, and was for many years a vice-president of the Literary Society.

Memorial Service.

There was a large and representative attendance at the Congregational Church, Newport, on Thursday, at a service which preceded the cremation at Southampton. The Rev. Dr. N. Spoor (minister) officiated, and Mr. A. Mearman (organist) accompanied the hymns "O God, our Help in ages past," Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," and "For All the Saints."

Dr. Spoor said that of Mr. Whitcher it might justly be said that his labour was not in vain. He gave the best part of his life to the service of the borough and to the service of that church. He did as much for the borough as anyone could hope to do in one lifetime, and enjoyed the confidence and respect of all sections of the people. To do anything approaching justice to all that he did for the church and corporate life of Newport was more than he would attempt, but the Rev. E. Nicholas, of Sandown, a retired Congregational Minister, who was Mr. Whitcher's life-long friend, would add his tribute.

Mr. Nicholas said that one could not pay adequate tribute to a man who had been deeply loved for his readiness to help, aid, and guide with counsel and practical assistance. He was quiet and unostentatious---a character worth knowing. He was real, and genuine, and a good Christian. "We owe much to God for sparing such a man for so many years," he added "What he and Mrs. Whitcher have meant to the town I cannot adequately describe because they have been in every good work." The speaker went on to refer to Mr. Whitcher's connection with the Hampshire Congregational Union, and the fact that he had been on its executive for many years, in 1929 being elected chairman---the greatest honour which they could give.

The family mourners were Mrs. Whitcher (widow), Mr. and Mrs. H. W. Bevis (brother-in-law and sister-in-law, also representing Mr. A. L. Bevis in South Africa), Miss D. Seymour, Miss J. Whitcher and Mrs. F. Morey (nieces), Mr. W. Watson, Miss M. Bevis, and Mr. W. Whitcher, also representing Miss E. Whitcher (cousins), Mr. and Mrs. T. Ross Pratt, Mr. and Mrs. J. Dufton, Mrs. J. H. Deacon, Miss A. Powell, Mr. T. D. Mills and Miss A. M. Warne.

The borough flag was flown at half-mast over the Guildhall, and the Mayor and members of the Corporation, magistrates, and borough officials walked from the Guildhall, preceded by the borough maces, draped in crepe, borne by Town Sgt. B. Eldridge and Mr. W. R. Clarke. Members of the Town Council attending were the Mayor (Mr. A. O. Purdy, C.C.), Aldermen Mrs. E. R. Chandler, J.P., J. J. Simmonds, and A. E. King, Councillors W. H. Downer, J. F. Launder, S. V. Croucher, J.P., A. B. Shaw, M.B.E., E. C. Pearson, H. E. Harvey, G. C. Russell, J.P., G. F. Bloomfield, C.C., W. G. Bartlett, A. P. Simmonds, S. W. Wendes, and R. C. Turner, together with the Town Clerk (Mr. F. H. W. Buxton), borough treasurer (Mr. R. J. Malchin), borough engineer (Mr. F. Rath), and harbour master (Mr. V. H. Eldridge). The magistrates attending, in addition to those named with the representatives of the Town Council, were Mrs. K. Lockhart, Lt.-Col. C. W. Brannon, M.C., T.D., D.L., and Messrs. J. C. Millgate, F. E. Welsh, W. G. Sibbick, and H. R. Watson, with Mr. P. W. Harman (represented Mr. H. R. Palmer, magistrates' clerk, who was unavoidably prevented from attending). Chief Inspector A. R. Bird represented the police force. Ald. W. Blake, J.P., was prevented, through indisposition, from attending.

The officers of the Congregational Church attending were Messrs. W. Bale and E. Upward (deacons), Mr. H. Porter (secretary), Miss L. M. Harvey (Women's Guild), and Messrs. A. Williams and J. Clark (P.S.A. Brotherhood, of which Mr. Whitcher was life vice-president),

Major P. W. F. Erith (head master), Mrs. Erith, and twelve senior scholars represented the Newport Grammar School, and among those also present were the Rev. L. J. D. Wheatley (former head master of the Grammar School), Miss E. J. Crews (former head mistress, Newport County Girls` School), Miss G. M. Wiles (County Girls` School), Mr. W. J. Bailey (secretary), and Mr. E. W. Barton represented the Charity Trustees; Mr. R. J. Eldridge, the Blue School Foundation; Mr. W. L. Bright (president), and Messrs. W. G. Rodway and A. H. Cook, the Literary Society; Messrs. F. C. O. Minns (junior vice-president), W. R. Turner (secretary), F. W. Bright, O. G. Day, F. Burton, F. Blake, S. F. Holmes, and A. Wasson, the Newport Rotary Club; Messrs. C. Golding (agent), and S. E. Whildey, the I.W. Liberal Association; Mr. G. H. Snellgrove (hon. secretary), and T. Warne, the Newport Liberal Club; Dr. W. S. Wallace, M.C. (county medical officer of health), the County Medical Authority; Miss C. M. Quinton, and Miss Saunders, the British Red Cross Society; and Mr. C. T. Haskell, the I.W. Rose, Carnation, and Sweet Pea Society. --- Messrs. H. and F. Damp made the arrangements.

Magistrates` Tribute.

Before the sitting of the Borough Magistrates on Monday, Ald. Mrs. E. R. Chandler, who presided, paid tribute to Mr. Whitcher`s long and able service as a Justice of the Peace, and a vote of sympathy was passed with Mrs. Whitcher.

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