

# An appreciation of Alderman Quilley.



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ALFRED HENRY QUILLEY, M.B.E., K.S.B., L.P., LL.D., J.P.

A COLLEAGUE'S TRIBUTE.

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BY

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ALFRED HENRY QUILLEY M.B.E., K.S.G., L.P., D.L., LL.D., J.P.  
1897 - 1983

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Looking back over the years I seemed always to be aware of the presence of Alf Quilley and the impact he made upon the political life of the town. In reality, however, it was in 1928 that I first became acquainted with him. At that time he had made his mark in local politics and the following year was elected a Councillor representing the North Ward of the Eastleigh and Bishopstoke Urban District Council.

My parents came to Eastleigh in 1904 when my father was transferred there from the Nine Elms Works of the London and South Western Railway Company, a few years after that company had opened its newly constructed Carriage and Wagon Works in this new town in southern Hampshire. The L.S.W.R. had built their purpose designed workshops in 1898 as their works at Nine Elms had become out-dated and inadequate..

The Quilley family took up residence in 1903 at 152 Desborough Road. They had moved to Eastleigh from Woking where they had been living, having originated from Basingstoke. They were married on Boxing Day 1895 and their son, born at Woking in 1897, was christened Alfred Henry Quilley; he was their only child.

Shortly after the family settled at Woking Alfred's father became ill and had sustained a series of operations. Unlike today, then the "Welfare State" was only a dream, so to support her husband and child Mrs Quilley was forced to seek employment and obtained a job with Burberry's, the well known

manufacturers of raincoats. To make out resources she also took in lodgers. Caring for an ailing husband, a young child, holding down a job, and the cleaning and catering which a family and lodgers entailed, must have been a tremendous task for the young housewife. Her struggles to maintain family and home, Alf never forgot, and he had a deep lasting love and admiration for his mother. The hardships suffered by the family during his childhood left him with a determination to attempt to change the conditions under which the majority of working class people then lived and worked.

Having regained his health, the L.S.W.R. offered Mr Quilley a job at Eastleigh which he was pleased to accept, and the family moved there, and became just one more of the many families which at that time were moving into the new and rapidly growing town.

In the early days of this century Eastleigh was a forerunner of the "new towns" which followed some fifty years later.

Eastleigh in 1904 must have had some of the characteristics of a "gold rush" town as houses were hastily erected. By 1907 most of Newtown, that area lying between Archers Road and Winchester Road (later to be renamed Twyford Road) and between Romsey Road and the Salisbury/Eastleigh railway line had changed from fields in agricultural use and a brick-field to streets of terraced houses.

Alf. began his schooling at the Holy Cross Roman Catholic School in Leigh Road. This was a corrugated iron structure which, since 1888 had served as the Roman Catholic Church until the present Church was built. An avid scholar, Alf. enjoyed his school days and recalled with affection the Headmistress, Miss Lucas, "a very kindly lady". Miss Lucas was the Headmistress when I first attended this school, retiring a year or so later. Her successor was Miss Metters. Although my parents were non-Conformists they were not religious bigots. Holy Cross School had an excellent record and was close to my home.

Alf..left school when he was thirteen years old and his first job, learning his trade as a leather-worker, was in the employ of Mr H.C. Fellows a harness maker and saddler whose business premises were in Market Street..

Mr Fellows was the father of Frank Fellows, the Leader of the Conservative Group of the Borough Council at the time that I was elected to the Council in 1950, and who was one of Alf's most vociferous opponents. However, out of the Council Chamber they were friendly enough.

After working three years with Mr Fellows he left and started work with the railway company at their carriage works, where he followed his craft. Here he remained for the remainder of his working life except for the time spent during World War 1 in the Machine Gun Corps where his primary duty was to repair and maintain the pack saddles and harness of the horses and mules. Through much of the war he served in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and in India. It was during his three years of active service, when he rubbed shoulders with men from all walks of life, although mainly from the poorer sections of the community, that he reinforced his resolve to improve the lot of the less fortunate members of society.

From Baghdad his regiment returned home and he was demobilized in 1919. The regiment en -trained at Southampton where it was shunted into a siding for a while. Alf chanced to be looking out of the carriage window and noticed a railway worker walking along between the tracks, and to his great surprise and joy he saw that it was his father. Alf handed his father an object that his mother would instantly recognise as he thought that his mother would find difficulty in believing that her son was home in England. After his discharge from the army, Alf came home on Boxing Day, the wedding anniversary of his parents. This day always held a special significance for him.

In 1921 he married "the girl next door", the same girl who accompanied him to school at the beginning of his school days. Alf and his wife lived for many years at 9 Chamberlayne Road. Mrs Quilley was one of seven daughters born to Mr and Mrs Butcher, a well known and respected Eastleigh family who were staunch Roman Catholics. On two occasions he was elected Mayor of the Borough, first in 1943 - '44 and again in 1947 - '48. During both of his terms of office Mrs Quilley ably performed the duties as Mayoress. The first time he was Mayor he succeeded his brother-in-law, Councillor Eric Woodward, whose wife was one of Mrs Quilley's sisters.

Memories of his childhood, and the harsh conditions then endured by the poor, had, as I have mentioned, created in Alf a desire

to bring about a change. The vehicle which appeared to offer the most practical means to achieve this aim was the Labour Party, subsequently he became a member and took an active part in local politics. In 1921 he joined the National Union of Vehicle Builders, and later the National Union of Railwaymen, and the Transport and General Workers Union. At the time he joined the Labour Party, Eastleigh was part of the Winchester Constituency, the constituency which consistently returned Conservative Members of Parliament, a trend only broken once, when in the General Election of 1945 George Jegar was returned, a "flash in the pan" never to be repeated during the existence of that constituency.

His desire to acquire knowledge stemmed from his school days and manifested itself from the time he entered the work-a-day world. In addition to his love of reading and the knowledge he gained therefrom, he further prepared himself to enter the political arena by attending evening classes where he studied economics, history and political science organised by the Workers Educational Association. He would refer to the W.E.A. as "my University". He also studied through the National Council of Labour Colleges. From these two bodies he derived a great deal of knowledge and understanding of local government, its functions, administration and practice. This enabled him, together with a natural aptitude for speaking in public, to debate with confidence those matters affecting both local and national politics. He also acquired an understanding of the intricacies of local government finance, a subject at which there were few laymen with a greater knowledge. One wonders whether there are many local government candidates today who prepare themselves in like manner. He considered it essential to possess a thorough grounding of the functions for which local government was responsible, and the many and diverse Acts of Parliament which in one way or another featured regularly on the agendas of the various standing committees, especially the Environmental Health, Housing, and Planning Committees. Frequenting the Eastleigh Public Library, he read books on all manner of subjects, mainly on local government, especially on finance. Lord Citrine's book on "Chairmanship" he studied in detail along with the works of the early socialists, and the biographies of famous politicians of the past as well as those of his contemporaries.



In debate he was statesman-like and correct, generally unemotional, and to the point. He abhorred political "clap trap" believing in force of argument backed up by facts. Councillor Reg Lofting and I were colleagues for many years when we served together on the Eastleigh Borough Council. Once after a lively debate he remarked "when Alf has spoken in a debate he leaves only crumbs for the rest of us" How true! he was an outstanding member of the Council, a big fish in a small pond.

His Election Address of 1929, the year of his election to the Council, listed ten items which he considered to be of prior importance, in less than ten years from the date of his election all except one of these had been achieved. In this Address he stressed the need for a swimming pool, the filling in of the Lawn Road gravel pit to make a recreation ground, to press the County Council for a new school to cater for the needs of the North Ward, the building of houses "within the limits of the average wage earner", the repair of the existing housing stock, and the construction of public toilets in the town centre. In addition he advocated the speeding up of the provision of playing fields, road improvements, permanent allotments, the naming of streets, and to urge the County Council to provide a public library for the town. This last item he considered to be of prime importance.

Five years after his election he became Chairman of the Council, and in 1947 an Alderman. In 1953 the Freedom of the Borough was conferred upon him. He resigned from the Eastleigh Council in 1954. For a time he held two aldermanic offices, that of the County Council and of the Borough. He was also Vice-Chairman of the County Council. Returned as a Labour Councillor to the County Council in 1934 he served for thirty years, retiring in 1971. His main interest as a County Councillor was undoubtedly the Education Committee, after twenty-two years he became the Chairman of that Committee, a committee responsible for the largest expenditure of all the County Council Committees.

His many years of service as a member of the County and Borough Councils earned him the award of the M.B.E. "for voluntary public service". He was President of the National Association of Educational Committees besides holding membership of many other educational bodies.

He was honoured by the University of Southampton with an honorary degree as Doctor of Law. One of his greatest interests was the Eastleigh Public Library, in the provision of which he has played a major role. It was his drive and encouragement that took the library out of two rooms in the Town Hall to the fine new library erected upon the Recreation Ground in 1935. He was Chairman of the Eastleigh Library Committee from 1930-1936.

I am grateful to Mr J.A.Birtwhistle, O.B.E., for the somewhat amusing copy of an appraisal by one C.B.H., which was probably produced for some special occasion and was typed on the back of an application for a cake making competition, and dated 3 Sept. 1934.

#### NOTED CELEBRITIES.

##### QUILLEY. ALFRED H.

As a boy was very fond of reading and spent most of his pocket money on Comic Cuts, True Blue, etc. When sent for fish and chips, his passion for reading the newspaper in which they were wrapped would cause the fish to arrive home cold. much to the annoyance of his mother. Later took great interest in local council work and tried to interest the Council in acquiring a Library for his fellow workers. After years of ceaseless worrying of brother Councillors, they at last, allotted one small room, containing a few dozen books, and placed him at the head of control, thus hoping to hear no more of this book business. But alas for their hopes, for his fellow townsmen supported him to such an extent that when four or five persons opened books in this "Library" there was no room left for the Librarian to blow his nose, and naturally he objected to having to go into the passage to perform this necessary function, and so he resigned, With such support behind him he continued to worry not only his Councillors but higher authorities, who no doubt had heard of his tenacity of purpose, granted him a larger building in which to store books. But even now he did not seem to be wholly satisfied and appears to have gone near and far to interest those who could let him have an up-to-date building. And at long last this has been achieved, and a building of the very latest design has arisen to perpetuate the memory of one whose Bee was not in his bonnet but in his books.

Eastleigh's latest aquisition,  
In a prominent position  
Is a building which does not belie its looks  
And although it may sound silly  
It is mostly due to Quilley  
That we have a Library to store our books.  
C.B.H.

Appointed a Magistrate in 1938, in this capacity he took a great interest in the Juvenile Courts, and was Chairman of the Juvenile Panel until his transfer to the supplementary list.

The Alderman Quilley County Secondary School had been built and named after him, a privilege only previously granted post-humously. This school will be a lasting tribute and memorial to a man who, although having been born elsewhere, had nevertheless lived in Eastleigh for eighty years, in which time he had seen many changes and a growth in population from about 10,000 to close on 100,000. In his life-time he had worked hard for the townspeople especially the children and young people.

As a Roman Catholic he regularly attended the Holy Cross Church. However, because of his religious convictions he would not enter Churches of other denominations. [I refer to the period between 1950-54]. On a Sunday following the election of the Mayor, it was customary, and still is, for the Mayor and Corporation, accompanied by the Town Clerk and the Council's Chief Officers, to attend Church. Alf always marched in the Mayoral procession, but unless the service was held in a Catholic Church, he would remain outside the Church or Chapel until the Mayor's party emerged, when he would rejoin the procession. There was an occasion when I referred to this suggesting that it appeared illogical for Christians not to worship in the Churches of other Christian denominations. Alf's reply failed to convince me nor did I feel that he was entirely sure of his own argument. Nevertheless he stood firmly by his principles. The stand he took on this point surprised me somewhat as there were among his many attributes two that were outstanding, namely his vision and his common sense. In today's more tolerant religious climate I think things would have been different, indeed, I believe Alf would have been pleased to see it so.

The Roman Catholic Church recognised his sterling service to the Church and mankind by conferring upon him the Knighthood of St Gregory the Great. With a little motivation from the County Education Department, the Knighthood was awarded to him at a luncheon at the school bearing his name by Bishop Worlock on behalf of the Pope. Representatives of Church and Civic life came together to honour him for his years of service to the community.

The honours and public recognition he greatly appreciated, although they lay lightly upon him. He was never pompous, nor did he treat newly elected members of the Council with superiority; always ready to help or advise, he considered it the duty of the Aldermen to assist and pass on their knowledge and experience of local government to those requesting it.

It was Alf Quilley who in 1949 suggested that I should consider allowing my name to go forward as a Labour candidate in the Council elections which were held in May of the following year. Successful in the election, in due course I took my seat in the Council Chamber and found myself seated next to Alderman Quilley, Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Finance and Establishment Committee. He had, I learnt later, arranged for my seat to be next to his so that he could "keep an eye on me". It took very little time for me to see that he stood out from his fellow Councillors. He had that special quality of statesmanship that is exceptional in local government. He was not the kind of member who jumps to his feet at the "drop of a hat", in fact he usually preferred to speak as the debate was nearing its end. When he did speak often the effect was most marked. His common sense approach to a problem and his width of vision looked beyond that of many of his colleagues; modest, quietly attired, serious minded, his mode of speech was persuasive and logical. His sense of humour was almost non-existent only showing on rare occasions. He had the quiet confidence of a man who was not only sure, but in command of his subject.

Alf Quilley was the most able and outstanding Chairman of the Finance and Establishment Committee that I had seen during the many years I served on the Eastleigh Council. When he made his annual "budget" speech at the meeting when the rate for the ensuing year was announced, not only was he armed with the usual information given to the Chairman by the Borough Treasurer, but also with a paper prepared by himself. His handling of complicated financial matters was excellent, I cannot recall any other Chairman of the Finance and Establishment Committee who rendered such an informative and concise budget speech.

Characteristic of the man was his habit of leaving the Council Chamber as soon as the meeting was over. Years later when I found myself in the same position I made a practice of doing the same.

After Council meetings it was not unusual for small "meetings" to start up, especially if the meeting had been controversial. By leaving the Chamber directly the meeting terminated. Alf kept aloof from the "left" and "right" factions inherent in most political parties, and thereby was seen to be a Leader of the Labour Group holding a "centre" standpoint. Another reason he gave for his prompt departure at the conclusion of meetings was that often he had left home early in the day to attend to Council business and was rarely able to return home until about 10-00 pm. He regarded it as being unfair to his wife not to go home as soon as possible although he knew that she was fully aware that there were times when it was necessary for the Chairman of a major committee to be away from home for quite long periods, and often prominent members of the Council would attend Council or political party meetings four or five evenings a week.

His relationship with the Chief Officers of both the Borough and the County Council was excellent. He was a popular member and greatly respected. He had been the Chairman of the Sub-Committees which had appointed three Town Clerks, the Borough's first Town Clerk, Mr F.W.Cuthbertson, who as Clerk to the Eastleigh Urban District Council, played a major role in obtaining Borough status for Eastleigh, Mr J.Gardner who succeeded him, and who became a close friend, and Mr Roland Roddis. It was Councillor A.H.Quilley who in 1934 moved the motion that led in 1936 to the creation of the Borough of Eastleigh, one of a very few Charters of Incorporation granted by the uncrowned King Edward VIII.

Several officers of the Eastleigh Council had joined the Council upon leaving school. The names of those who normally came in contact with Alf Quilley spring to mind, Wally Humphries, Douglas Faithfull, Harold Marsh, Roy Bynam, Bert Ives and his wife Mrs Eileen Ives. A mutual respect and regard existed between them. Mrs Ives, who for a great many years was Mayors' secretary, was very involved with Alf and his wife during the two occasions he served as the Mayor of the town.

Alf sustained a bitter blow when in 1967 his wife and companion for most of his life died. She had been his constant support through the good times and the bad. Her death left a grievous sense of emptiness in his life. This was the year that he

received his Papal Knighthood, the Honorary Degree of Laws of the University of Southampton, and his appointment as Vice-Chairman of the Hampshire County Council.

Among politicians he had a high regard for Sir Stafford Cripps, Aneurin Bevin, Hugh Gaitskill and Lord Ashburton, one time Chairman of the Hampshire County Council.

When Alf retired from work he had completed fifty years of service in the railway industry. During that time he had worked under three administrations, his first being the L.&S.W.R. Coy., which after the amalgamation of the railway systems in 1921 became the Southern Railway, and finally British Railways, the name under which the railways of Britain have operated since they were nationalized in 1947. After retirement he became involved in the training of apprentices for British Railways at their Eastleigh works.

For a great many years, especially the latter years of his life, his two staunchest friends were Mr J.A.Birtwhistle O.B.E., a former Deputy Education Officer of the Hampshire County Council and Mr Edgar Jones, a former foreman at the Eastleigh works of British Rail. Mr Birtwhistle was helpful to him in ways too numerous to mention, as Alf grew older he took and escorted him to those functions he wished to attend, albeit with less frequency as his years advanced. Edgar Jones was a confidant and a work mate of many years standing. When Alf became a patient at the Mount Hospital, Bishopstoke, Edgar was one of his most frequent visitors.

On Tuesday the 12 April 1983 Alfred Henry Quilley M.B.E..K.S.G., J.P. died at the Mount Hospital, Bishopstoke, Eastleigh, at the age of 86 years.

At the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church, in Leigh Road, Eastleigh on the 18 April 1983 representatives of many spheres of community life packed the Church to pay tribute to one of Eastleigh's best known public figures. Eastleigh's loss was also that of the County for Alf was known throughout the County and far beyond.

Requiem Mass was celebrated by the Very Reverend Canon Patrick O'Mahoney, the Reverend Father Joseph Levey, formerly of Eastleigh, the Reverend Father Norman Fisher, Eastleigh's Parish Priest, and the Reverend Father Maurice Twomey of Chandler's Ford, Chaplain to St. George's School, Southampton.

At the service. Mr J.A.Birtwhistle gave the bidding prayers, Mr E. Jones and Mr B.Johnstone, the Headmaster of the Alderman Quilley School gave readings from the Bible.

Present were the Mayor (Councillor Peter Molyneux) who was accompanied by the Chief Executive (Mr Dennis Tranah.) and the Mayoress Mrs Freda Molyneux. The Mace of the Borough was carried draped.

Five Freemen of the Borough were present in the large congregation: Mr Charles Soar B.E.M., Mr Tom Coles M.B.E., Mr Tom Stubbs, Mr Norman Norris M.B.E., and the Leader of the Borough Council Councillor Godfrey Olson.

The Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire was represented by a Deputy Lieutenant, the Hon. V.P.H.Wills. Other County representatives included Sir Andrew Wheatley (former Clerk to the County Council), Mr Richard Clarke (County Education Officer), Mr Jeffrey Aldam (former County Education Officer) and Mr John Bell (Deputy County Recreation Officer).

In the congregation were several former Mayors of the old Borough Council, members of the County and Borough Councils, together with representatives of numerous organisations connected with the life and administration of the town.

A friend of Alf Quilley writing in the issue of the Eastleigh Weekly News of the 18 April 1983 gave a very clear pen picture of the man, his religious faith, his political back-ground, his early struggles and lack of opportunities and his deep involvement in local government, especially in the field of education.

So passed a man who during his life-time devoted much of his time and energy helping to improve the working conditions and standards of life of the working people, whether they worked with hand or brain. There is no doubt that he found his true vocation in the field of education, and for a long time to come the children of Hampshire will benefit from his endeavours.

He is buried in Eastleigh Cemetery by the side of his wife.

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At the Alderman Quilley School on th 10 May 1983, "A Celebration of the Life of Alfred Henry Quilley M.B.E., K.S.G., D.L., L.Ld., J.P.,"took place.

Tributes were given by Mrs E.R.Beavis a former Mayor of the Borough and for many years a member of the Council, by Mr Edgar Jones. a friend of many years and a colleague at their place of work, and Mr Tom Coles M.B.E., a former Mayor of the Borough, Tom had worked closely with Alf when they served together on the old Borough Council and the County Council.

Sadly Tom Coles died fourteen months after the death of his friend, at the age of 90 years.

During the ceremony pupils at the school added their own tributes to the man who had given his name to the school. The proceedings started with the school orchestra playing "Cazone" by Purcell, followed by an Address of Welcome given by Richie Hunt (Head Boy). An excerpt was then read from "The Border Country" by Raymond Williams (A railwayman talks to his son) by Kenneth Lefley (First Year). Susan Strang, Karen Dunn and Debbis Hill then read an excerpt from "Half Our Future" - The Newsom Report on Secondary Education - these were Second Year pupils. Rudyard Kipling's "If" was read by Nicholas Poling (Third Year), Katie Lewis (FourthYear) read James Russell Lowell's "Ode", and the Head Girl, Christine Jarvis read "So Heart be Still" by Minnie Louise Haskett. .

The Celebration concluded with the Hymn "The Lord's my Shepherd" (Crimond), Prayers were offered by the Reverend Father Norman C. Fisher and the orchestra played "March" by J.A.Bach.

Among those present were members of the old Borough Council and representatives of the Labour Party and Trades Unions. Also present was Mr Dennis Tranah, the Council's Chief Executive, as well as many of Alf's friends and colleagues who had worked with him at the Eastleigh Railway Works.

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"I found a niche in education  
I wanted to see everybody have a better  
chance than I had".

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