

William Henry Downer

Isle of Wight County Press - 1 January 1944

Newport

Remarkable Sunday-school Service Record.— A joint record of service to the young as Sunday-school teachers which is probably unique was completed this week, when Mr. W. H. Downer, T.C., of 34 Chapel-street, and his wife resigned their positions as superintendent and teacher respectively in the Quay-street Methodist Sunday-school. Mr. Downer has attended the school as scholar, teacher, and superintendent for 70 years, having been the esteemed superintendent for 34 years, and his wife has an unbroken association with the school going back about 50 years, 43 years as a teacher. This is indeed a noble record of service to the children of Newport, the fruits of which are impossible to estimate. In the heyday of Sunday-schools some 30 years ago the Quay-street school was one of the largest in the borough, with about 250 scholars. The regrettable general decline in Sunday-school attendance has reduced the number to about 100, but, nevertheless, there must be thousands of ex-scholars who would desire to pay tribute to the good influence which Mr. and Mrs. Downer's teaching and example have had on their lives, and to with them the peaceful happiness they so richly deserve now the time has come for them to end their loving labours. It is not only in the Sunday-school that Mr. and Mrs. Downer have rendered outstanding service to local Methodism. Mr. Downer has been a lay preacher for 55 years and is still carrying on the work, and Mrs. Downer has always been one of the church's most enthusiastic workers at bazaars and social functions. Throughout the last war, and for a time in the early days of the present war, she was an indefatigable helper at the soldier's canteen and recreation-room in the Church-hall, which is now the British Restaurant. Mr. E. Higginbotham is succeeding Mr. Downer as superintendent.

Isle of Wight County Press - 16 May 1959

ESTEEMED METHODIST COUNCILLOR AND CRAFTSMAN

DEATH OF MR. W. H. DOWNER, OF NEWPORT

The death on Tuesday at the Frank James Hospital, East Cowes of Mr. William Henry Downer, aged 88, of 34 Chapel Street, Newport, brings to a close a life of devoted service not only to his native borough, but also in wider fields of opportunity which made his name known and respected throughout the Island. Mr. Downer, who had lived alone since the death of his wife in February 1953, became unwell towards the end of last week, and on Friday, when he celebrated his 88th birthday, he was visited by his son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Downer. They persuaded him to move to their home at 148 Mill Hill Road, Cowes, during the week-end, but his condition rapidly deteriorated and his death took place less than 24 hours after he had been taken to hospital.

Mr. Downer will be best remembered throughout the Island for his association with the work of the Methodist Church. A life-long member of the Quay Street (formerly Bible Christian and United Methodist) Church at Newport, he had held numerous appointments in many branches of its life. As recently as last month he was honoured by fellow local preachers at a gathering at the church in celebration of his completion of his completion of 70 years on the Methodist plan, and presented with a Moffat translation of the Bible. Among those present was the Mayor of Newport (Ald. G. C. Russell) and the many tributes paid to Mr. Downer on that occasion included the

following words written by Dr. W. H. Mildon (superintendent minister of the West Wight Methodist Circuit). "The Scriptures have been his delight, his one rule of faith and practice, and the people have heard him gladly. He has spoken, out of his own background of toil and dedication, a message so relevant, so human, so vital. We are proud of his witness and grateful for his friendship. We salute his long ministry and thank God for it". On that occasion Mr. Downer recalled that his first preaching engagement had been as a lad of 17 at Bowcombe Chapel in 1889. He was formerly on the Newport circuit but since Methodist union he had been on the West Wight plan.

At Quay Street his love for children was exemplified in his 34 years' devoted work as superintendent of the Sunday School, where his late wife was also a teacher for over 40 years. He was a trustee of his own and many other Methodist churches, and had held many other important offices, including that of circuit steward.

PROMINENT TEMPERANCE WORKER

A keen advocate of total abstinence, Mr. Downer was scarcely less widely known for his work for Island Rechabitism. He joined the order in March 1888, as a member of the Onward Tent at Newport, and after serving in minor offices he was in 1906 elected assistant secretary. In 1912, on the secretary-ship becoming vacant, he took the post which he held unbrokenly until his death. After representing his tent in the district meeting in 1896, Mr. Downer was appointed district deputy ruler, and was district chief ruler in 1899/1900. Since 1901 he had held office as a district trustee, being the senior trustee at the time of his death. He had also represented the I.W. District at many conferences of the order held in various parts of the country. In other associated spheres he was for many years president of the I.W. Band of Hope Union, and temperance secretary of the Portsmouth District of the United Methodist Church. A keen supporter of the I.W. County Hospital when it was a voluntary organisation, Mr. Downer took part in many money-raising schemes, and his work was recognised by his appointment as a life governor.

COUNCILLOR, CRAFTSMAN, SPORTSMAN

Mr. Downer became a member of the Newport Town Council in 1933, representing the central ward and remained in office until 1954 when he did not seek re-election on account of advancing years and deafness. He served on the General Purposes, Housing, Public Health, Town Planning, and Rating and Valuation committees during this period, and also represented the council on the I.W. Rodent Destruction Joint Committee and the Newport and Gatcombe Joint Burial Committee. When he retired, warm tributes were paid to the value of his advice and experience.

A craftsman of the old school, Mr. Downer was for about 66 years a valued member of the staff of Messrs. Snellgroves Ltd., of Newport, as a painter and decorator, and was responsible, among other work, for the Anaglypta (relief paper) ceiling in the court room of the Guildhall, put up over 40 years ago. In those days this form of decoration was novel, and many members of the council expressed doubts as to whether it would remain in place, but so well did Mr. Downer do his work that it withstood the blast of German bombs which wrecked the premises opposite in April, 1943.

Politically a strong Liberal, Mr. Downer had been a member of the executive of the I.W. Liberal Associations, and in the strenuous campaigns waged by successive Liberal Parliamentary candidates for the Island seat in the first 30 years of the century frequently advocated the cause from the platform. He had remained a member of the association with which his only son, Mr. L. W. Downer, is also prominently connected.

A keen supporter of cricket, and other forms of recreation, Mr. Downer was a regular spectator at Newport C.C. matches at the Victoria Recreation Ground, and often watched the Hampshire C.C.C. matches at Southampton and Portsmouth.

Mr. and Mrs. Downer reached their golden wedding anniversary in 1946, and this was the occasion for a double celebration at the Quay Street Methodist schoolroom, the other couple so honoured being Mr. and Mrs. Percy Scott, also well-known members of the church.

The funeral service will take place at the Quay Street Methodist Church, Newport, to-day at 3 p.m.

Isle of Wight County Press - 23 May 1959

THE LATE MR. W. H. DOWNER -LAST TRIBUTES AT NEWPORT

A congregation widely representative of Island Methodism and the Independent Order of Rechabites was present at the Quay Street Methodist Church, Newport, on Saturday, at the funeral service for Mr. William Henry Downer, of 34 Chapel Street, Newport, whose death at the age of 88 occurred on the previous Tuesday at the Frank James Hospital, East Cowes. The Mayor of Newport (Ald. G. C. Russell, J.P.) represented the Town Council, and over 20 Rechabite district officers and secretaries, wearing their insignia, were in the procession as it entered the church, including Mr. H. A. Kingswell, of Ventnor (district chief ruler).

The service was conducted by the Rev. Dr. W. H. Mildon (West Wight circuit superintendent), and the hymns were "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" and "When we walk with the Lord." Mr. W. G. Bartlett (organist) played music, including "Solemn Melody" (Walford Davies), at the close of the service. In a tribute, Dr. Mildon referred to Mr. Downer's life of devotion and service, which had been particularly associated with that church, and mentioned that he had been present at the opening of that building in 1880. His judgement was wise and penetrating, he could argue a case fairly and convincingly and he was a man of independent outlook and unshakable moral principles. There was no compromise in his nature, and he gave all he had in service to Christ and the well-being of his generation. It could be said of him without contradiction "Truly he served his day and generation."

The mourners were Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Downer (son and daughter-in-law), Miss E. M. Downer and Mr. G. L. Downer (grandchildren), Mr. and Mrs. J. Ding, Mr. J. Flux, Mrs. H. Flux and Mr. A. W. New (nephews and nieces).

(only family mourners transcribed)

Interment took place in the grave of his wife at Carisbrooke Cemetery, where, in the presence of the family and Rechabite representatives, Mr. F. F. Hollis, C.A. (district trustee) read the Rechabite funeral service.

Transcription by Kate MacDonell for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,
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