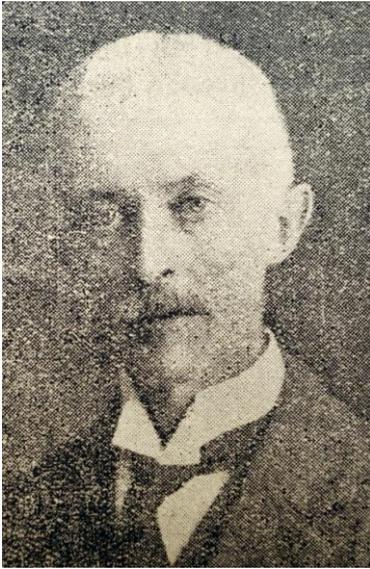


Interesting Recollections of Mr. John Druitt.



Mr. John Druitt, who recently resigned as Town Clerk of Christchurch, is a member of a very well known and highly respected family in the town, It is interesting to record that although the present branch of the family has resided in the Borough for only three or four generations, yet there were Druitt's who lived in Christchurch long before that, notably Dr. Philip Druitt who was in practice here.

Curiously enough, too, the present line of the family are also descendants of a doctor, Mr. John Druitt's grandfather having been in medical practice at Wimborne. The late Mr. James Druitt, the son of the Wimborne doctor, was born at Wimborne, and came to Christchurch to reside in 1838, a year after the late Queen Victoria ascended the throne, and he died in 1904. Twice married, Mr. James Druitt had thirteen children who reached their majority, and Mr. John Druitt was the eldest son of the second family.

There is an old saying "Like father like son," and this is exemplified in the case of the Druitt's, for Mr. John Druitt followed in the footsteps of his father who became Town Clerk of Christchurch, and between them father and son have faithfully served the old town in the official capacity stated for more than seventy years. Mr. James Druitt was appointed Town Clerk in 1846 and held the position until 1886, or for just forty years, although he was deputy Town Clerk for four or five years before. Mr. John became Town Clerk on May 4th, 1892, on the resignation of the late Mr. R. D. Sharp (who held office for 5½ years), and his resignation took effect on April 30th last, but he continued as acting Town Clerk until May 31st, and Mr. Harley, his successor, took over the office on June 1st. Mr. John Druitt has therefore been the Town Clerk of Christchurch for 33 years, and his resignation was received by the Council and the townspeople with feelings of genuine regret.

Mr. John Druitt was kind enough to grant our representative an interview, and to speak of some of his experiences during his long period of public service. "During the time that I have been Town Clerk, there have been many changes," he said, "and there is not a single member of the Council now who was there when I was appointed, and the only name perpetuated on the Council is that of Lane, Ald. Frank Lane's father being a member at the date of my appointment. Not only has there been an entire change of the personnel of the members of the Council, but as far as I know there are only two gentlemen living in Christchurch who were members when I was appointed. They are Mr. John King. J.P., who is a County Council Alderman, and Mr. W. Tucker, J.P., who was the Mayor when I became Town Clerk. It is interesting to state, too, that

after his resignation of this office, in 1886, my father came on the Council. He was five times Mayor, twice under new regime and three times under the old Corporation, and when he died was Senior Alderman. Two Mayors have died in office during my 33 years' association with the Council. They were Mr. Samuel Bemister and Mr. A. H. Searle. There is only one other official who has longer service with the Corporation than myself, and he is our Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Legate, who was appointed in 1888, and who is still 'in harness.'

"The Council work has very considerably increased since I took over the appointment, Christchurch itself has grown apace, especially in the last decade. The population in 1891 was 3,194, and now it is over 7,000, the present population including, of course, those residing in the area which was added to the Borough in 1911. The rateable value of the town in 1891 was about £13,900 and now I don't think it would be any exaggeration to say that it is about £33,000 or £34,000, and it is continually increasing on account of the building activity.

"Christchurch, of course, has not the wealth of Bournemouth or the rateable value to play with, but there have been many improvements effected, although what some people think are improvements others may think are not, and there is a difference of opinion always on that point. Everything is open to criticism, but those who criticise should give credit for the good motives of those who form the administrative body."

Referring to the enlargement of the Borough boundaries in 1911, Mr. Druitt recalled that a new state of things came into existence as a result on April 1st, 1912. Previously the whole of the Borough was one ward, and it was governed by 12 Councillors and 4 Alderman, including the Mayor. After the date stated, however, the Borough was divided into wards and its constitution altered to 15 Councillors—three to each ward—and 5 Aldermen.

Mr. Druitt also recalls to mind the advent of some public services to Christchurch during his tenure of office. Firstly, there was the West Hampshire Water Company, which started operations about 1894. Some ten years later the trams made their appearance in the Borough, and then came the sewerage scheme, the "battle of the drainpipes."

He has also held and still holds many other offices. Notable amongst these are Clerk to the Justices, to which appointment he succeeded his father in 1897, after the late Mr. James Druitt had filled that position for over half a century; Clerk to the Christchurch Burial Board Committee, which post he has held since 1892; Receiver of Clingan's Charity; while on several occasions he has acted as assistant to the Returning Officer for the parliamentary elections. On one occasion, after Bournemouth Borough was constituted a separate constituency, he acted as Deputy Returning Officer in the election when Mr. Perkins was returned unopposed.

At that time it was left to Mr. Druitt to decide where the nominations and declaration of the result of the election should take place, and as a result

Christchurch was chosen, and it is assumed that this will continue on future occasions it being the largest municipality within the area of the New Forest and Christchurch Parliamentary Division.

Another highly important office held by Mr. Druitt is that of Coroner for the Hundred of Christchurch and Liberty of Westover, which appointment he has held since 1917, but before that year he was Deputy Coroner for the Hundred of Christchurch for some years. He also acted as clerk to the local military tribunal during the war.

In spite of these many activities in the public service, the former Town Clerk has always taken a keen interest in local affairs, "I do not always agree with what is being done, and it would never do for the country if everybody did agree on every subject. I think that it is a mistake to a certain extent for a place which has a semi-rural character to try and imitate too closely what is being done for a modern seaside port, such as Bournemouth."

"Christchurch," he continued, "looks upon herself as the mother of Bournemouth and she is proud of her daughter, and I suppose that Poole is the aunt or the great aunt. Time does work wonderful changes. Once it was necessary for letters to be addressed Bournemouth, near Christchurch, but nowadays many people make the mistake of addressing their letters 'Christchurch, near Bournemouth,' which is quite wrong and results in delay of delivery. Christchurch existed centuries before Bournemouth was ever thought of and it is still 'on the map' so to speak, and is growing rapidly.

"Alterations are unavoidable in the course of time," Mr. Druitt concluded. "Nobody would wish to see things stand as they were 10, 50 or 100 years ago, but at the same time improvements ought to be made carefully and deliberately, and carried out with not too much of a rush so that the people might repent of them at a future date. I am Conservative in politics and perhaps that enters into my feelings regarding other phases of life. I should like to add regarding my association with the Town Council that I hope I have always got on with everybody in a friendly way. There may have been storms occasionally, as there generally are on similar public bodies, but they have been in the proverbial teacup. I shall cherish in my memory many pleasing little incidents of the past 33 years as Town Clerk of Christchurch both with the governing body and also my brother officials."

It might be added that other members of the family have notable records in the public service. Mr. Alan Druitt, brother of the former Town Clerk, was Clerk to the Christchurch Board of Guardians from 1892 until last year, while he is also church-warden at the Priory Church. Another brother, Mr. Melvill Druitt, is the Commodore of the Christchurch Sailing Club. Mr. Herbert Druitt takes a keen interest in archaeological matters. Mr. James Druitt, of Bournemouth, was for some years Clerk to the old Board of Commissioners there (succeeding his father in that post) then Town Clerk and afterwards Mayor of Bournemouth.

Of the thirteen brothers and sisters who attained their majority nine are still living, and all are natives of Christchurch.

Mr. John Druitt is married and has one son. Mrs. Druitt takes an active interest in parish work and is the presiding member of the Mothers' Union in Christchurch and district.