

New Mayor Speaks Of Town's Most Serious Problem

RAPID EXPANSION COULD NOT HAVE BEEN ENVISAGED

C.T. May 23, 1952

AFTER his election as Mayor of Christchurch last Monday, Councillor K. H. Ashcroft, of Highcliffe, told the large assembly in the Town Hall that the rapid increase of population in the past few years had overtaken the capacity of the Borough to deal with all the attendant needs and requirements of so large a number of people.

He said that the present population of 20,000 far exceeded anything that could have been envisaged 15 or 20 years ago. About housing he said: "This will continue to give grave concern to the Council and will be the most serious problem confronting the newly constituted assembly."

Councillor Ashcroft's appointment to the Mayoralty was warmly received, particularly by the people of Highcliffe, for it meant that for the second time the town's chief citizen has come from that part of the borough. The retiring Mayor, Councillor Mrs. Wallis Power who accepted the office of Deputy Mayor, also represents the Highcliffe Ward.

"It looks as though what I said a couple of years ago are coming true," commented Alderman E. J. Slinn, when expressing thanks to Councillor Mrs. Power. "The centre of gravity of Christchurch is shifting to the east."

The Mayor making ceremony followed the pattern of those that have gone before. The town's Books of Remembrance, which have now been brought up to date, occupied a place of prominence on a table draped with the Union Jack immediately in front of the platform.

There was no lessening of dignity in the conduct of the age old ceremony and the proceedings started with prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain, Canon R. P. Price.

TANK CORPS OFFICER

It was Alderman T. Markham, who was Mayor for four consecutive years during the last war, who proposed Councillor Ashcroft. He recalled that Councillor Ashcroft served in the forces during the 1914-18 war, first in the Royal Engineers and then as a commissioned officer in the Tank Corps.

"I have known him for some 20 years," continued Alderman Markham. "He is a keen, energetic business man, alive to everything that is going on not only in his own ward but in other wards and in the country as well."

After mentioning that Councillor Ashcroft was first elected to the Council in 1946, Alderman

Mayoral Lunch.

After the mayor-making ceremony the new Mayor and Mayoress entertained over 120 guests to lunch at the King's Arms Hotel. They included members of the Council and their wives, members of the Town Hall staff, and representatives of many local organisations.

Markham said that he threw himself energetically into the work; so much so that he gained the confidence of his colleagues to such a degree that he was elected chairman of the Beach Committee. That was a signal honour and suggested greater honours to follow.

QUICK DECISION

Alderman Markham mentioned that the work of the Beach Committee often called for quick and sound decisions, and Councillor Ashcroft had carried out the duties with great distinction. "He undoubtedly possesses the essential qualities of sound judgment, and I have often been struck by his lucid and ready explanations to the Council of recommendations of his committee," remarked Alderman Markham **After describing Councillor Ashcroft as a fluent speaker, Alderman Markham said: "We expect a great deal from our civic heads and in Councillor Ashcroft we have a comparatively young man who can, and will, shoulder the responsibilities with credit to himself and the town."**

In a reference to Mrs. Ashcroft, Alderman Markham said that he knew she would fill the office of Mayoress with grace and distinction. "I remember in the dark days of the war my wife and I frequently visited her when she was carrying out her duties in the W.V.S., of which she was a member," he said.

RENDERED GREAT SERVICE

Seconding, Alderman D. Galton said that although Councillor Ashcroft had only been a member of the Council for a short time he had rendered great service to the town. He was held in the highest respect and esteem by every member of the Council and he would fill the office of Mayor with dignity, firmness and kindness.

Mrs. Ashcroft would bring to her position as Mayoress a charming and pleasing personality.

After the proposition had been carried with acclamation, Councillor Ashcroft retired to the Mayor's Parlour where he put on the robes and chain of office.

On his return to the platform he made the statutory declarations and appointed Councillor Mrs. Wallis Power as his deputy.

Councillor Ashcroft then expressed the hope that he might prove worthy of the office to which he had been elected. In these sentiments, he said, he was joined by his wife, who had been his guide and counsellor for over thirty years.

He was fully aware of the very high standard which had been set by his predecessors, but he assured them that it would be his constant endeavour to maintain this standard and to prove worthy of the confidence which had been placed in him by his election to the office of Mayor of this beautiful and ancient borough.

WHOLEHEARTED SUPPORT

"I know that I shall be able to count on the whole-hearted support of my fellow councillors and I am indeed gratified to know that Councillor Mrs. Wallis Power has agreed to act as my deputy," he continued. "The experience and knowledge gained by her during her term of office will prove invaluable should I find it necessary at any time to seek her guidance."

Councillor Ashcroft congratulated Councillor Mrs. Wallis Power on being returned to the Council unopposed and also on her election to the County Council. He also congratulated the other Councillors who were returned at the recent elections.

"On occasions such as this it would be fitting for the general public to realise the wealth of service, and in many cases sacrifice, that is given freely and willingly by those who undertake civic responsibilities," he said.

Councillor Ashcroft welcomed the school children who came to witness the ceremony of mayor making. Much of the history of this traditional ceremony had undoubtedly been told to the boys and girls by their teachers, but he recalled that it had been carried out in Christchurch each year for over 500 years and was steeped in custom and tradition, as indeed, was the whole of the ancient borough.

AN ANCIENT RULE

"The majority of you may not be aware of the fact that many years ago Mayors were subjected to a very firm rule and control," he went on, and he then quoted the following rule made in 1682 and actually enforced by one authority in Hampshire:—

"We do ordaine and appoint that every Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Borough shall for ever hereafter not walk without his house into the town without carrying of a white staff in his hand between six and seven feet in length and an inch and a half in circumference, or else to wear his gown, upon the forfeiture of two shillings and six pence (to the use of the Corporation) for every default that shall be made therein."

Amid laughter, Councillor Ashcroft commented that if such a quaint rule existed nowadays he was sure one year of office would be sufficient for anyone.

He next mentioned as direct evidence of the town's local history, the Mace, which was 290 years old and replaced one which was mislaid in one of their more troublesome times. "I believe that history and tradition

form an essential background to a sound education and I am therefore very glad to see the school children here," he added.

VERY HEAVY BURDEN

Councillor Ashcroft went on to examine the position in which the borough now found itself, and this led him to mention the growth in population.

In 1946 the Council had a list of about 1,000 people who required housing. Up to date they had built roughly 1,000 houses and today they found themselves with still nearly 1,000 on the waiting list.

"The result of this has been to place a very heavy, and perhaps unfair, burden on the local ratepayers. This will continue to give grave concern to the Council and will be the most serious problem confronting the newly constituted assembly," he said.

They hoped that some progress might be made with the new sewerage scheme, which, of course, was partly made necessary by the rapid growth of the borough.

Reclamation of land on Stanpit Marsh was proceeding with the object of providing a large sports ground for the town.

The council had undertaken, on behalf of the County Council, to clear and layout the land at the rear of 15 High Street, as an open space for the public, and it was hoped that the necessary work would be commenced during the year.

This should undoubtedly prove an added amenity to the borough, especially as it would be situated in the centre of the town.

Much useful and constructive work had been achieved in sea defence work, for which they hoped eventually to obtain a State grant. Other improvements had had to be curtailed because of the restrictions on capital expenditure.

They had also to consider the forthcoming Coronation celebrations and the form which might be chosen within the borough. He had no doubt that committees would be formed and he would endeavour to see that all sections were represented. He thought that Christchurch should play a worthy part in these celebrations.

Referring to the work being carried out by those patriotic citizens who were already members of the Civil Defence organisation and those who were joining the newly formed Home Guard, Councillor Ashcroft said it was upon those people that a large measure of our national safety depended. "Let us wish them well and thank them for their service," he said.

This, of course, applied also to the many other voluntary organisations who gave so willingly of their services to all.

THEY SIMPLY SERVED

Councillor Ashcroft concluded with a reference to the Books of Remembrance. These contained the names of the men and women from this borough who laid down their lives in the 1914-18 and 1939-4 wars.

"They knew not where they went— they simply served— and I think they would be better pleased if I left it— just like that," he said.

Alderman E. J. Slinn expressed thanks to the ex-Mayor for her services to the borough and said that she had carried the prestige of the town far afield. "I think that it is a fitting finale to her two years of service that her name should have been added to the Commission of the Peace," he added.

Alderman J. W. Tucker also paid tribute to the work of Councillor Mrs. Power during her period of office. In her reply Coun. Mrs. Power thanked the Town Hall officials for their assistance during her period of office, and she also paid tribute to Canon Price for all the spiritual help he had given her.

Remarking upon the way in which she had been received by all organisations in the town she said: "Although we now have 20,000 people in this borough I feel I can claim them all as my friends."