

HE HELPED TO RUN SHEFFIELD DURING WAR

Mr. William Asbury, who has died suddenly at his home at Camberley, Surrey, was chairman of the triumvirate known as the Emergency Committee—the others were Ald. Sir (then Mr.) Harold Jackson, and Ald. F. Thraves—which virtually ran Sheffield during the last war.

Ald. Asbury was chairman of the Air Raid Precautions Sub-committee of the Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee which came into being before the war. Later, when hostilities seemed likely, A.R.P. assumed greater importance and the sub-committee became a full standing committee of the City Council, with him as chairman.

When war broke out that in turn was superseded by the Emergency Committee, whose real testing time was in December, 1940, when the city was heavily bombed, causing numerous casualties and widespread damage, and creating manifold problems.

These were tackled vigorously by Ald. Asbury and his colleagues. Sheffield owed more to



Mr. WILLIAM
ASBURY

him than it will ever know. The energy he showed and the amount of work he performed were prodigious.

'DISAPPEARED'

To enable him to carry out his responsibilities, free from unnecessary interruptions, he "disappeared" for a while and went to live at the Firvale Institution.

It was he who gave the first public announcement that over 70 bodies had been recovered from the blitzed Marples Hotel in Fitzalan Square. I heard him say it at a City Council meeting early in 1941, writes George Tomblin, Our Municipal Reporter.

During the war period his City Council colleagues offered him the Lord Mayoralty but he declined, taking the view that chairmanship of the Emergency Committee was more important at that time.

He expected that he would have an opportunity after the war of becoming Lord Mayor but the fates ruled against him.

The administrative ability he had demonstrated as chairman of the Emergency Committee was doubtless the reason why, in the following year, he was appointed by the Home Office as one of the Deputy Regional Commissioners in the Southern C.D. Region.

This meant his resigning the committee chairmanship and the leadership of the City Council.

EUROPE POST

From 1948 to 1950 he was Regional Commissioner of Schleswig-Holstein.

After returning to Britain, he became Deputy Chairman of the National Assistance Board. This was work after his own heart, because in Sheffield he had been the first chairman of the Public Assistance Committee, formed after the abolition of the Board of Guardians on which he had also served. That was the time of the great industrial depression.

He was also for several years chairman of the Health Committee.

A Labour man, he was first elected to the City Council for Burngreave in 1924 and he was one of the stalwarts who performed the spadework which led to his party gaining control in 1926. In 1929 he was elected for the newly-created Firth Park Ward.

Ald. Asbury was a railway guard until becoming full-time agent for the Brightside Labour Party in 1930.

MR. WILLIAM ASBURY

PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. William Asbury, deputy chairman of the National Assistance Board, died on May 19.

The son of William Asbury, of Edingale, he was born in 1889 and educated at Wakefield. In 1917 he married Mary Bryce, daughter of James Wright, of Sheffield. There were one son and one daughter of the marriage.

Asbury was a member of the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance from 1930 to 1932. From 1942 to 1945 he was Deputy Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, Southern Region. In the latter year he joined the Assistance Board, of which he was a member until his appointment in 1946 as Land Commissioner for North Rhine-Westphalia, C.C.G. In 1948 he was transferred to Schleswig-Holstein, where he held the post of Land Commissioner until 1950. In that year he became a member of the National Assistance Board, of which he was appointed deputy chairman in 1954. He was made C.M.G. in 1951.

Asbury had been on the Sheffield City Council from 1924 to 1942, had been chairman of the Public Health and Public Assistance Committees and an alderman. He was made a J.P. of Sheffield in 1931.

Sir Geoffrey Hutchinson writes:—

The death of William Asbury removes from the National Assistance Board one of its senior and most experienced members. I would not wish it to pass without adding to the notice which you publish today my own personal tribute to his achievement and character.

When I became chairman of the board in 1954 he was appointed my deputy chairman. He had then been for some years a member of the board. We worked together until his death in the greatest friendship and the closest harmony. Asbury brought to his work an immense knowledge of the problems of poverty, acquired in the hard school of industrial Yorkshire during the years of the depression. His approach to the problems of the board always seemed essentially a practical one. But his work was illuminated by a broad, deep and generous sympathy which made him quick to detect anything which seemed to him likely to be a source of hardship to some individual; and having detected it, he was never content to let it pass. He possessed to a marked degree that most valuable gift of the social administrator, a capacity to see administrative proposals translated into terms of human realities.

Asbury spoke little of his experience as a Land Commissioner in Schleswig after the war. But I am sure that his practical gifts and his deep and generous sympathy for all suffering must have been of great value in a district much affected by the problems of the refugees, as Schleswig then was.

The National Assistance Board have lost by Asbury's death a wealth of knowledge and experience of the poor and the distressed, which will not be easy to replace. And I have lost a valued partner whose friendship and unfailing kindness I shall not forget.

HE MOWED HIS LAWN THEN DIED

THE funeral took place yesterday at St. John's Crematorium, Woking, of Mr. William Asbury, who collapsed and died suddenly after mowing the lawn at his home at 195 Frimley Road, Camberley. Mr. Asbury, president of Camberley Working Men's Club since 1953, was 71. Mr. Asbury's career was one of great achievement, for he started life as a railway porter (with a wage of a few shillings a week) and went on to carve himself a distinguished career. He held a number of posts of high responsibility.

He took an active interest in politics from an early age, being particularly interested in all aspects of social welfare. He was associated with the Labour movement most of his life. He left the railways to become Parliamentary Agent for Mr. Marshall, who was then Labour M.P. for the Sheffield constituency of Brightside. He was a member of Sheffield City Council from 1924 to 1942, became an Alderman and for most of the time was leader of the Labour-controlled council. He was appointed a J.P. in 1931. In addition, he was a member of the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance set up in 1930.

ADMINISTRATOR

In September, 1942, Mr. Asbury left his beloved Sheffield for Reading to take up the post of Deputy Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence (Southern Region). He made his mark as an able administrator and remained until the war's end. The setting up of the Control Commission in Germany brought Mr. Asbury the two most responsible appointments of his career. He went to Germany in 1946 as Land Commissioner for North Rhine-Westphalia, and two years later moved to take over the same office for Schleswig-Holstein. These appointments were of civilian governor status and equivalent in rank to that of an army general.

Mr. Asbury returned to England in 1950 and came to live in Camberley after his new appointment as member of the National Assistance Board necessitated frequent visits to London. He was appointed deputy chairman of the Board in 1954 and was still in office at the time of his death. He was made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in the New Year Honours of 1951, and received his award from the late King George VI.

Mr. Asbury took a great interest in Camberley Working Men's Club and spent many happy hours there amongst friends. The club took on a new look during his presidency and many improvements were made.

Mr. Asbury leaves a 75-year-old widow, Mary, whom he married 44 years ago, and a married son and daughter. He was admired and respected by all who knew him.

Official mourners at Mr. Asbury's funeral were Mr. H. Archer, representing the Rt. Hon. John Boyd Carpenter, Minister of Pensions and National Insurance; Sir Geoffrey Hutchinson, Chairman of the National Assistance Board; and Sir Donald Sargent, Permanent Secretary, National Assistance Board.



MR. WILLIAM L. ASBURY

*Camberley (?)
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