

William Crabtree 1857 - 1934



William Crabtree and Elizabeth Pollard

Image courtesy of Alan Longbottom and

Malcolm Bull's 'Calderdale Companion' website
(<http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~calderdalecompanion/>)

Alderman William Crabtree was born on 23rd March 1857 to George Ripley Crabtree and Elizabeth 'Betsy' Crabtree of Halifax. Not much is known about his early life other than he had a younger brother named Lewis and by the age of 14 he was living with his aunt and uncle. As a youth, he was employed at Trafalgar Mills (run by the Scarborough Brothers) in King Cross where under the tuition Richard Drummond he went through training in all the branches of manufacturing. He remained there until the Scarborough Brothers discontinued manufacturing and then began merchanting on his own accord becoming the head of his own business, Wm. Crabtree and Co., Ltd., Woodside Mills, which had a large export business in coating manufactures.

William married Emily (nee Alderson) in the 1870's and had two children, a son Arthur Ripley (1879-1882) and a daughter Ethel (1881-1882) who both died at a young age. They are recorded as living at 44 Bentley Street, Halifax when William's

occupation is given as a 'Fluff Finisher'. Emily died on 22nd August 1884. After only 11 months as a widower, William then aged 28 married second wife Emma (nee Bidder-Dickinson) in July 1885. Thirteen years his senior, Emma was a milliner and had a son William (b.1867) and a daughter Elizabeth (b.1869) from her first marriage in 1866 to Richard Pollard. They did not have any children of their own and are recorded as residing at Prescott Street and Savile Grove, Halifax in the Census records.

William was an active freemason for 43 years. In 1891 he was received into St. James' Lodge, where he became Master in 1904. He also took an interest in the formation of Victory Lodge, Halifax in 1919 and even became their treasurer. He started out in a provincial rank of Junior Deacon in 1915, and by 1933 he had reached the honour of being the Past Senior Grand Warden.

He was involved in many other useful roles. He was a scholar (and it's oldest) at the Stannary Sunday School where he was the treasurer, an active worker in the Halifax Liberal Association for which he also acted as treasurer, the chairman of Mary Farrar's Trust and treasurer of Ann Holt's Charity. William was also a member of the Halifax Club, the Halifax Golf Club and an Odd Fellow.

In 1920 William entered public service becoming a Councillor for the South Ward; he was a very popular man having never had to contest an election. He would often receive letters from rate payers expressing an appreciation for the work he did on behalf of the town. His chief interest was in the Markets and Parks Committee of which he was elected Vice-Chairman in 1924. On Friday 15th October 1926, Edward, Prince of Wales visited Halifax for the ceremonial opening of Shibden Park, and William as a Councillor was "presented" to him at the Town Hall. Other great ventures under his Chairmanship of this Committee were the building of the abattoirs in Square Road and the development of the Woolshops and Market Streets by the erection of the Prince's Arcade.

He was unanimously elected as Mayor of Halifax on November 9th 1932 for the period 1932-1933. He was in fact to that date Halifax's oldest Mayor at the age of 75. At a time in life when most people were 'easing off' in their public work, Alderman Crabtree embraced his new duties with great determination and courage receiving admiration from all. After his year as mayor he returned to his former post as Chairman of the Markets and Parks Committee. He also remained as Deputy Mayor up until his death. A Miss Pollard (pictured with William in the image above) is listed as being Mayoress for the period. This lady was in fact his step daughter, Elizabeth, as by this time his wife, Emma would have been rather elderly at 87 years of age and may have found it difficult to assist him as Mayoress.

On the 29th August 1934 William became a widower for the second time, as sadly Emma passed away at the grand old age of 89 years. She was buried at St Pauls Church, King Cross the following day. William followed her only two and half months later, after having contracted double pneumonia he died on 10th November 1934

aged 77 years at his address in Savile Grove. The funeral was held on Wednesday 14th November 1934 and the cortege was an imposing procession headed up by a detachment of the police and the Mayor. The mourners included family, representatives from the Council, the Church, the Freemason brethren and many business associates. A service was held at the Stannery Congregational Church first followed by a service at Lister Lane Cemetery both carried out by the Rev. S. G. McLellan. William was interred in plot number 282 along with his first wife, Emily, their two young children Arthur Ripley and Ethel and a Louis P. Alderson.

William was described as of a genial and kindly disposition and welcomed in any company. He was particularly fond of flowers and was seldom seen, either winter or summer without one in his coat. He was obviously very proud of Halifax as he devoted his whole life to promoting and improving it and he would often relate to people that he was born and always lived within 1 mile of Halifax town centre.