

NOTABLE BURIALS

at

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH ALFRISTON





BARON DENIS HEALEY - *grand old man of British politics*

Denis Winston Healey, Baron Healey CH, MBE, PC, FRSL (1917-2015) was a British Labour Party politician who served as Secretary of State for Defence from 1964 to 1970, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1974 to 1979, and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party from 1980 to 1983. He was a MP (Member of Parliament) for 40 years (from 1952 until his retirement in 1992) and was the last surviving member of the cabinet formed by Harold Wilson after the Labour Party's victory in the 1964 general election. A major figure in the party, he was twice defeated in bids for the party leadership.

Denis was born in Mottingham, Kent but moved to Yorkshire aged five. His middle name was in honour of Winston Churchill, which was prophetic because he was to become one of the best-known and important political figures of the post-War period.

One of two siblings, his father was an engineer who worked his way up from humble origins. However, Denis, possessing a powerful intellect won an exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1936. Here he became involved in Labour politics, and for three years joined the Communist Party (as many young men did in the 1930s). It was also here that he met Edward Heath, who became a lifelong friend and political rival.

In the Second World War he served as a gunner with the Royal Artillery, seeing action in the North Africa and Italian campaigns, and most notably was the Beachmaster during the Anzio landings.

He was made an MBE in 1945, and leaving the Service as a Major, straight away immersed himself in politics. Initially, failing to win a seat (but doubling the Labour Vote), in 1952, following a by-election, he was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Leeds South East. When Labour won the 1964 election he became Secretary of State for Defence, in which role he made many difficult changes. Finally, in 1974 he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, with his first budget being strongly progressive, with increases in food subsidies, pensions and other benefits.

When Harold Wilson stood down as Leader of the Labour Party in 1976 he stood in the contest, but did not win. Many believe that Denis Healey was one of greatest politicians of the last century not to become Prime Minister, perhaps because he was a courageous straight talker.

Following the infamous "Winter of Discontent" the whole political scene changed in 1979. Shortly after, Denis was favourite to be Labour Leader, but was beaten by Michael Foot, just as there began defections to the SDP (Social Democratic Party). Now, as Deputy Leader, he was part of the battle for the soul of the Labour Party, as he contested with Tony Benn. In the 1980s he became Shadow Foreign Secretary, perhaps his last major role in the Labour Party outside the House of Lords.

Throughout his career, his notably bushy eyebrows and piercing wit earned him a favourable reputation with the public. Mike Yarwood, the impersonator made him a central pillar of his comedy routine, and, he was a mainstay of the popular 80's satirical programme "Spitting Image". None of this is surprising given that Denis was not short of one-liners, such as his famous comment, when he likened an attack by his friend, Geoffrey Howe, to being "savaged by a dead sheep".



In 1945 Denis married Edna. They were married for over 60 years, producing three children. As residents of Alfriston, the presence of Denis and Edna was greatly appreciated in the area. They both joined and supported local organizations, and were always looked upon as "down to earth", supportive and friendly. Even after a lifetime of public service Denis Healey could still talk to anyone.

Outside politics, Denis was an amateur photographer for many years, and a keen lover and supporter of music and the arts. He was also a musician himself (a pianist), and an excellent painter. As late as 2012 he was swimming 20 lengths a day in his outdoor pool!

The Guardian wrote this upon his death:

"The death of Denis Healey ... means much more than the passing of a grand old man of British politics. He was the last of the political generation that shaped post-

war Britain, men and women who had not only lived through, and often fought in, the Second World War, but who had also seen at first hand the terrible years of sustained depression of the 1920s and the 1930s."

Denis Healey was indeed part of the generation that through enormous courage and energy created the NHS (National Health Service) and instigated so many of the changes of the post-War period. So much of what we take for granted in our public *and* social life was created by him and his contemporaries, however, it was Denis Healey, through his intellect and spirit, who often made the case, when difficult arguments had to be presented.

He is buried with his wife, Edna, in St Andrew's Church lower churchyard (north corner).



BRIGADIER GENERAL WILLIAM BODLE - *pioneer of southern Africa*

William Bodle (1855-1924) was born in Alfriston, the son of Charles, an agricultural labourer and Elizabeth, a schoolmistress. He left home when he was fifteen to join the Army; firstly the Sherwood Foresters and later the Inniskilling Dragoons. At the age of just eighteen Bodle was posted to southern Africa where he saw service in the Basuto War (this was a skirmish with local tribesmen over land which now forms part of Lesotho). Bodle was decorated for his role.

He stayed in Africa and in the late 1880s joined the Bechuanaland Border Police. Bechuanaland had been declared a British protectorate, and in 1888 the Police Force was formed of just 100 European men who patrolled a huge area of, what is now modern day Zimbabwe and Botswana. The history of southern Africa in Victorian times is complex and, as in India, was very much influenced by large charter companies keen to exploit the continent for its minerals and other resources. One such company was the British South African Company, founded by Cecil Rhodes. It received its Royal Charter in 1889 and was so large it maintained an army and its own Police Force. In October 1889 Rhodes himself appointed William Bodle as a police recruiting officer and the following year he was promoted to Sergeant Major.

Bodle settled in Salisbury (now Harare) and for a short time ran a general store, but the new country of Rhodesia was expanding its borders and in 1893 Bodle took part in the invasion of Matabeleland to the west. Once the territory had been taken, a Police force was required to keep order and Bodle was made their commander. Excitement (and maybe imperialism) seemed to drive Bodle, and in 1896 he took a leading role in the Jameson Raid, south into the Dutch held Transvaal. He led a group of mounted policemen in the raid which was intended to trigger an uprising but failed. Bodle was detained by the Boer government and deported back to England. The raid was the main cause of the Matabele Wars, which in turn led to the Boer War.

Bodle returned to Africa within six months and became second-in-command of the new police force for Rhodesia (confusingly named the British South Africa Police, BSAP). He was soon off again, this time taking a contingent of the BSAP to fight in the Boer War. He led his troops (with Baden-Powell) to relieve the Siege of Mafeking on 17th May 1900, and a few weeks later was involved in the capture of Pretoria. For his actions

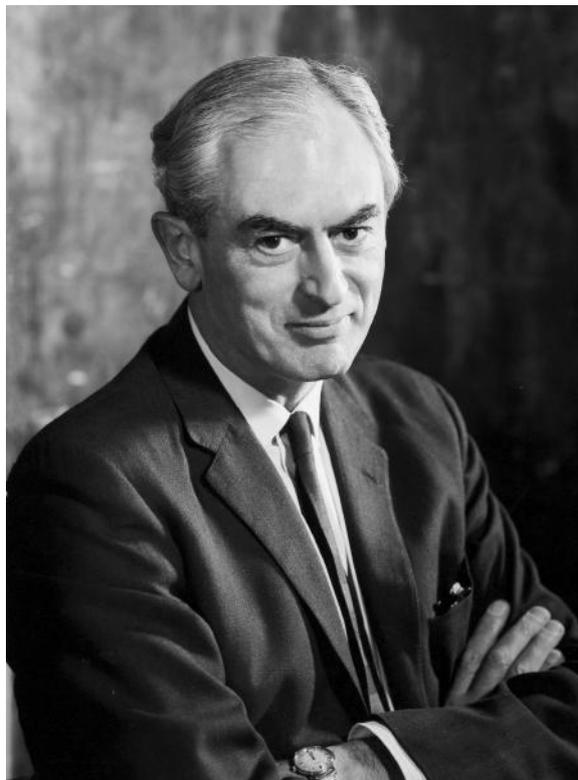
during the Boer War Bodle was honoured by Queen Victoria with being awarded a CMG (Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George).



The Boer War ended in 1902 and shortly afterward a number of different police forces within Rhodesia amalgamated and Bodle, now a Lieutenant Colonel, became the first Commissioner of Police, a position he held until his retirement in 1909.

His retirement was short lived with the outset of the First World War, and Bodle felt the call to arms. He assisted in recruitment, including organising the City of London Reserve Force. Despite his age he then took on the command of the Norfolk and Suffolk Territorial Brigade and in 1916 even saw service in France. He finally retired the following year in the rank of Brigadier General but continued to act as Recruiting Officer for his old Police Force in Africa.

After a life of excitement Bodle retired to his home village of Alfriston, living in the 17th Century Follers Manor on the Seaford Road. He died in the house in 1924, and is buried on the south west side of St Andrew's Church in the closed churchyard. His gravestone is in the form of a Celtic cross and is inscribed "Brig Gen. W Bodle CMG Pioneer of Rhodesia".



SIR PETER MEDAWAR - *one of the greatest scientists of his age*

Sir Peter Brian Medawar OM CBE FRS (1915-1987) was a British biologist born in Brazil, whose work on graft rejection and the discovery of acquired immune tolerance was fundamental to the practice of tissue and organ transplants. For his works in immunology he is regarded as the "father of transplantation".

He is remembered for his wit in real life and popular writings, as well as possessing a formidable intellect. The famous evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, referred to him as "the wittiest of all scientific writers" (The New Scientist magazine's obituary called him, "perhaps the best science writer of his generation"), and Stephen Jay Gould (another leading evolutionary biologist) called him, "the cleverest man I have ever known".

Peter Brian Medawar was born in Rio de Janeiro in February 1915 to an English mother and a Lebanese father. After schooling at Marlborough College he went to Magdalen College, Oxford as a "Commoner" to read Zoology in 1932, becoming a Senior Demy (or research Scholar) in 1936. He became a Fellow of the College between 1938 and 1944 and then again between 1946 and 1947, then accepting the Chair of Zoology at Birmingham University.

At Oxford he was much influenced by Howard Florey (A Nobel Prize Laureate in Physiology or Medicine) in whose department he was to meet his wife Jean Taylor. They married in 1937.

In 1959 he delivered the Reith Lectures, entitled "The Future of Man", and in 1960 he was awarded a Nobel Prize (jointly with Sir Frank MacFarlane Burnet) for their work on tissue grafting which is basic to organ transplants. This work stemmed from War-time research, when improvements were sought for dealing with skin grafts required after severe burns. The significant contribution was the demonstration that graft rejection could be entirely prevented in mice and chickens if foreign cells from the future graft donor were introduced into the recipient during neo-natal life (i.e. when the animals were immunologically immature). This represented a clear demonstration that the immunological barriers to the transplantation of foreign tissue and organ grafts, thought to be insurmountable, could be overcome by subtle immunological interference, opening up a vast field of scientific endeavour.



He was made an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen in 1961 and a year later became Director of the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill. In 1969, when only 54, he suffered a massive brain haemorrhage, as a result of which he was seriously handicapped for the rest of his life. He did, however, remain extraordinarily active mentally.

Medawar was a scientist of great inventiveness who was interested in many other subjects including opera, philosophy, cricket and the role of science in the world. He was an exceptionally brilliant writer with a gift for clear exposition, and produced a stream of books and essays, many of which continue to be in print. He was recognised as one of the outstanding scientists of his generation, gifted with an infectious enthusiasm.

His last book, published in 1986, was entitled "Memoirs of a Thinking Radish" which was an account of his scientific aspirations and working life. He describes in it what it is like to be physically handicapped, avoiding both self-pity and self-revelation. He died in 1987.

He was awarded virtually every honour known to the world of science, a FRS (Fellow of the Royal Society) at the age of 34, scores of honorary degrees and a Knighthood in 1965. He was made Companion of Honour (1972) and a member of the Order of Merit (1981). He was the first President of the International Transplantation Society and became President of the British Association in 1969. He is buried in St Andrew's Church lower churchyard (north corner).



WILLIAM "BILL" SPARKS - *last of the "Cockleshell Heroes"*

William Edward "Bill" Sparks DSM (Distinguished Service Medal), (1922-2002), was a British Royal Marine Commando in World War II. He was the last survivor of the famous "Cockleshell Heroes", a team of commandos who paddled 85 miles from the Bay of Biscay up the Gironde River to Bordeaux in German occupied France, to plant limpet mines on merchant ships supplying the Nazi war machine. The action is considered one of the most outstanding of the Second World War, and was made into a film in 1955.



Sparks was born in Bartholomew Buildings, Seward Street, Clerkenwell, London and joined the Royal Marines upon the outbreak of World War II. He volunteered for hazardous service as a way of avenging his brother Benny, who had died on the cruiser HMS Naiad.

During the night of 7 December 1942, ten Royal Marines set out in five canoes on Operation Frankton. They caused considerable damage to five ships, but six of the men were shot by the Germans and two drowned. Sparks and Major Herbert "Blondie" Hasler were pursued through France and Spain by the Germans for three months before they reached safety in Gibraltar.

When Hasler flew home, Sparks was sent back to England under arrest, as no one in Gibraltar could corroborate his story. On arrival, he escaped from the MPs (military police) and went to see his father, who had been told that he was missing in action. Two days later, he reported to the Admiralty and was about to be arrested again, when he slipped out to Combined Operations Headquarters, where he was greeted with astonishment.

During the rest of the war, he served in Burma, North Africa and Italy. Afterwards, he worked as a bus driver, during the Malayan Emergency as a police lieutenant, and then as a bus inspector.

Bill lived for many years in Loughton, Essex, before moving in the early seventies to Canvey Island. After the death of his first wife Violet in 1982, Bill and his second wife, Irene, relocated to Alfriston, where he is buried in St Andrew's Church lower churchyard.

CHARLES BATTEN - *decorated airman*



Flight Lieutenant Charles Batten RAFVR (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve) died on 24th September 1945, aged 25. His parents (Elijah and Jessie Eugenia Batten) were residents of Alfriston at this period.

Charles was awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) when he was a pilot with 692 Squadron, flying De Havilland Mosquitoes (the award was published in The Third Supplement to The London Gazette, of Friday 12th January 1945).

The magazine, "The Barbican" (of The Lewes County School for Boys, his old school) stated in July 1946 that Flt Lt Batten "survived hostilities only to become the victim of a flying accident".

Charles is buried in a CWGC (Commonwealth War Graves Commission) grave, in the closed churchyard at St Andrew's Church (south west side).