

DEATH OF JAMES BELL

Transcript – Durham County Advertiser, Friday 11th January 1907

Death of Mr James Bell

The death took place under circumstances of a particularly melancholy nature, on Friday, of Mr James Bell, of Arcot Villa, a gentleman well-known in the city and county, both in his business capacity of district manager for Messrs Hepworth, the well-known Leeds clothiers, and as a leading layman of the Primitive Methodist body. Mr Bell was about as usual on Saturday sen., but felt unwell in the evening and thought that he had contracted a chill. Dr Vann visited him next day, and at once saw that Mr Bell was suffering from pneumonia, and that it was a very serious case. Every attention was paid him, but despite all efforts the attack proved fatal. Mr Bell was 55 years of age. As a Primitive Methodist he was a vice-president of the Conference, a local preacher and class leader. He was a Liberal in politics. He evinced the inclination at one time of seeking election on the City Council when the area was extended, but did not come out. As a matter of fact he only once went to the poll, and that was on the occasion when the rector of St. Margaret's was elected a Guardian, and Mr Bell was only third of the three candidates. He was a supporter of the Railway Servants' Orphanage, and in his own community he was a man of strong philanthropic tendencies, and gave liberally both to the fund of the religious body with which he was connected and to friends in need privately. The deceased gentleman was very highly esteemed by the firm for whom he had done such good service, and the secretary wished an expression of their great respect to go forth at this time, and a sense of the great loss sustained. Mr Bell opened the first shop of the firm, and had practically built up the north-country business. He was twice married, and leaves a widow and a married daughter, Mrs C. Heslop.

THE FUNERAL

The interment took place on Monday afternoon, and was marked by a most significant demonstration of the respect and value which attached to the memory of the deceased. The service was held at the Jubilee Chapel, North Road, and many who were present out of respect for a townsman gathered during the sympathetic references, a melancholy revelation of the virtue and merits of the deceased, and the words of consolation to the bereaved were well chosen, whilst to the outsider a note which seemed to reverberate through the lesson, which one speaker after another sought to convey, was that a brother had fought his battle well in the truest sense of the word. Encased in a handsome polished oak coffin, the remains were brought by hearse from Arcot Villa to the chapel, followed by a long line of sympathisers. Members of the Church were present from all parts of the county, and representatives came from the conference itself. The Rev. E. Philipson (superintendent) and the Rev. J. Williams, the Durham ministers, had the assistance of several clergy. Amongst those present were the Rev. G. Parkin (president of the conference), Rev. R. Hind, York, representing the General

Committee; Rev. George Armstrong, Gateshead, representing the Sunderland and Newcastle District Committee; Mr. A. Martin, Newcastle; Rev. M.P. Davidson; Mr. Brackenbury, Darlington, representing the Northumberland and Durham Band of Hope Union; Rev. E. Campbell, Sunderland and Newcastle District Sunday School Committee; Rev. E. Cairns and Rev. M.A. Drummond, Durham (ministers on superannuation); Rev. M.T. Pickering, South Shields; Rev. P. Campbell, Rev. W.A. French, Newcastle; Rev. J.W. Glover, Newcastle; Rev. E. Trotter, Bishop Auckland; Rev. J.T. Gallon, Willington; Rev. T. Barnes, Stockton; Mr Hewitson, Newcastle; Mr J. Ritson, Newcastle; Mr E. Keene, Bishop Auckland; Mr T. Crawford, Ashington; Mr C.C. McColvin, Chopwell; Mr H. Curry Wood, Burnopfield; Mr D. Elliott, Washington; Mr Hepple, Langley Park; representing Messrs Hepworth's, Mr Joseph Hepworth, Mr W. Hall, Mr T. Barron (Chester), Mr J.W. Orr, Edinburgh; representing the Norman Lodge of Freemasons, of which the deceased was a member – Brothers J.C. Moore, Prov. G.S. (Sunderland), D. Whitehead, E.H. Diamond, J. Hine, W. Heslop, J. Davison, and R. Shadforth; other Durham friends – County Alderman John Wilson, M.P., County Alderman Jonathan Samuel, County Alderman S. Galbraith, Ald. R. Charlton, J.P., Councillor H.A. Raine, J.P., Councillor J.G. Gradon, J.P., Mr J.G. Burrell, Mr Lilico, Mr W. Gray, J.P., Mr N. Gott, Mr Joseph Mawson, Dr. A.M. Vann, Mr C. Smith, Rev. P. Campbell, Ald. R.T. Herring, Mr A. Brown, Mr J. Richardson, Mr G. Best, Mr J. Stout, Mr Carraline, Mr T. Butterfield, Mr W. Hall, Mr J. Bartle, Mr J. Oliver, Mr Seed, Mr P. Binnie, Mr W.A. Dobson, Mr J. Gibson, Mr J. Stoker, Mr Heslop, Mr T. Lamb, Mr R. Stokoe, Mr Rutherford, Mr C. Hoskins, Mr B. Hoskins, Mr Dodds, Mr Blackburn (Shincliffe), Mr R. Coleman, Mr Jacob Harrison, West Hartlepool, and Mr Latimer, Darlington.

As the cortege entered the church the organist played "O Rest in the Lord". A hymn and the 90th Psalm, read by the Rev. Mr Davison, followed, and the Rev. E. Phillipson then made an announcement. They had in connexion with that gathering representatives from all parts of the country, representing a variety of institutions and associations that their departed friend had been connected with. He was requested to say it would be quite impossible to read all the letters that had come to hand. It would take more than a day to read them. Some of them were of a very remarkable character, and revealed to them the sides of life and the whole of the life, and showing how he had been doing good in ways as though by stealth, and there were many people that day who had received great kindnesses of which only himself and God and the folks that had received it knew. And a circumstance like the present had to arise in order that his nearest friends might know. However, a large number of friends had written letters of sympathy, and in some instances they had expressed the wish that he should announce in that gathering how very much they regretted their inability to be there, and saying in almost every case that they would be there in spirit. Having announced the names of many who had sent letters and telegrams, Mr Phillipson said he could say a good deal, but he did not want to do so. There was a time when one felt one ought to be silent, but, humanly speaking, this was a great calamity.

The Rev. George Armstrong afterwards spoke, and reminded the crowded congregation that Mr Bell had filled the highest office in the church open to a layman. When they heard of his death they were filled with a great bewilderment; they were all stunned, and felt a great deal more than they were able to say. Mr Bell was president of their Missionary Society in the

district, and representative also on the General Committee. The district had appointed himself and Mr William Glass and Mr Morton, of Newcastle, to represent the district on that occasion, and his mournful duty was discharged therefore when he simply conveyed on behalf of the district their deep sympathy with the ministers of that station, the officials of that station, and to the widow and orphan and other relatives of their friend. They would never forget him. Their friend had made an impression on their hearts that would remain with them. One of the most beautiful things about him was his attachment to his old friends. He never forgot any of them whatever station in life they were in, and although he was now gone his memory would live.

The Rev. H. Hind said he was sent by the General Committee of the Conference to convey to the widow and family and to the church the sympathy of the whole of the Primitive Methodist Church with them in the serious loss they had sustained on account of the death of their dear friend and brother. Their church had been losing very heavily recently in its leading laymen. One of the most striking notes of the life and character of Mr Bell was the exceeding graciousness and sweetness and gentleness of his disposition. There was a whole world of revelation in the statement that had been made regarding the unknown acts of kindness that he performed during his life – things that had not been manifest to the general public until that day. He always thought that Mr Bell was one of those men who were constantly waiting for an opportunity to do one of those little courtesies and kindnesses of life to those that needed them that, as they knew, contributed so greatly to the joy of life, and were so productive of Christian feeling. He had his own battle to fight, as those who knew him intimately understood, and he had seen him in very difficult and trying circumstances. But he always met those circumstances with a smile, and his friends had the consolation of knowing that he had as brave and as heroic a spirit as throbbed in human bosom.

The Rev. Mr Parkin, president of the Conference, spoke in sympathetic terms, and reminded the relatives of the greater joy of the life to which the deceased had gone.

Afterwards a move was made to the burial ground, St. Margaret's Cemetery, where the last brief rites were performed, the Rev. W. French offering the final prayer. The grave was lined with laurel and white chrysanthemums by Mr T. Stewart. A number of wreaths were sent as follows:- "With deepest sympathy from his wife Isabel", "With deepest sorrow and regret from his daughter and son-in-law, Florrie and Chris.", "With deepest regret from John and Allie", "In loving memory, from his brother and sister, J. and M. Gilchrist", "With deepest sympathy from the employees of J. Hepworth and Son, Ltd., Durham Branch", "From the directors of J. Hepworth and Son, Ltd., Leeds, who mourn the loss of an honoured colleague", "From the Scotch managers, with deepest sympathy", "With deepest sympathy from the North of England branch managers of Messrs. J. Hepworth and Son, Ltd." "With deepest sympathy from the Sunday School and Christian Endeavour, Durham", "A token of affectionate regard from the trustees of the Central P.M. Church, Bishop Auckland", "With deepest sympathy from the members of the P.M. Church, Durham", "With Mr and Mrs John Burrell's sincere sympathy", "Mr and Mrs W. Oliver Hall, with deep and affectionate sympathy", "Deepest sympathy from one of his colleagues, Nathan Thompson, Bristol", "Mr and Mrs Heslop and Jim", "With loving sympathy from Mr and Mrs James Orr", "With deep sympathy and love from Mr and Mrs Ballan, Chester".