

People Who Made Walthamstow

Frederick Ross Wyld (1895-1963)

Although he was named Frederick Ross Wyld when he was born, he was always known as Ross Wyld and from the 1930's to the 1960's his name was widely known in Walthamstow. He had been a local Councillor, an Alderman, the Mayor, a JP and was awarded the OBE. And during WWII he was in charge of the Civil Defence of the Borough.

Sadly, today, apart from in the memories of some older Walthamstow residents he is hardly known. Although some will know him as the author of *War Over Walthamstow*, the school that once bore his name is now the Walthamstow Academy and all that physically remains in the Borough is a privately run Care Home named for him and a small community hall that is better known as the Koala Bear Nursery.

Birth Family

Frederick Ross Wyld was born in 1895 in West Hartlepool, County Durham. His father was also called Frederick Ross Wyld (Which is probably the reason that he was always known as Ross) and was an Assistant School Master who had been born in the Cape Colony, South Africa. His mother Julia and younger sister Doreen, like Ross were born in West Hartlepool.

Sometime between 1901 and 1911, the family moved to 20, Roslyn Road, Walthamstow where Frederick Wyld worked as an assistant schoolmaster for Walthamstow Urban District Council. Sixteen year old Ross Wyld obtained a job with the Civil Service and worked as a Boy Clerk in the Land Registry department. In 1912, he had progressed to working as a Post Office Assistant Abstractor Clerk

Trade Unionist

Ross Wyld was to work for many years in the Civil Service and was an active member of the Civil Service Union. By 1934, he had risen to become the President of the Civil Service Confederation. This was a umbrella organisation that was formed in 1921 by the Civil Service Federation, the Civil Service Alliance and Post Office workers' associations. At that stage the CSC represented 87 associations with a total membership of 66,209.

In 1935, Ross Wyld presided over the Civil Service Confederation's AGM at Livingstone Hall, Westminster with an attendance of 65 representatives of 38 constituent organizations. It was reported to the meeting that the affiliated membership of the Confederation now exceeds 84,000, this being the highest membership yet recorded in the history of the Confederation.

Equal Rights Advocate

In the early 1930's Ross Wyld became an active campaigner on the issue of equal pay for women. His support was particularly valuable as the Equal Pay Campaigners correctly believed that, if equal pay was adopted by the Civil Service, it would create a national domino effect of adoption by major companies.

At the 1936 Civil Service Confederation AGM, Ross Wyld introduced a resolution endorsing the protest made by the National Staff Side at the action of the Government in over-riding the vote given in the House of Commons on the 1st April in favour of Equal Pay and declining to carry out the declared wishes of the House of Commons. This was enforced unanimously by the meeting and the importance of utilising every available opportunity to bring pressure to bear upon the Government in this matter and push forward the Equal Pay campaign, was strongly emphasised.

WWI

Age 19 years, Ross Wyld enlisted in the army at Finsbury, in 1914 and joined the 'Shiny' 7th Battalion of the London Regiment. Thanks to army records we have a physical description of Ross Wyld. He was 5ft 8½" tall, with a pale complexion, blue eyes and fair hair.



On March 18th 1915, the regiment was sent to France and together with 4th London Brigade, 2nd London Division the 1/7th landed at Le Havre.

The Battle Of Festubert

Their first battle was at Festubert in the Pas de Calais region of Northern France where, on the 17th May, Ross Wyld was injured in the thigh. Fortunately this wasn't too serious and a few weeks later he was discharged to duty. Unfortunately, a few months later, he developed rheumatic fever and later chronic bronchitis together with and pains in his joints.



Festubert Village in WWI

War Service Discharge Through Injury



		Embarked.	Southampton	17.3.15	
		Disembarked.	Le Havre	18.5.15	
23.5.15	O.C Unit	Wounded in Action	In the field	17.5.15	15 213
20.5.15	12 Gun Co.	SPR. R. THIGH - Admitted	Honew	20.5.15	N. 3034
27.5.15	do	DISCHARGED TO DUTY	do	27.5.15	W. 3034
27.7.15	6. Stal. Ho.	Admitted. RHEUMATIC FEVER	Havre	18.7.15	W. 3034 H. 3443
14.8.15	"	Discharged.	Havre	5.8.15	W. 3034 H. 681
16.8.15	"	Admitted. N.Y.D.	"	7.8.15	H. 742 W. 3034
26.8.15	"	To ENGLAND, per H.S.	Southampton	16.8.15	H. 891
		BRONCHITIS CHRONIC			

As a result of persistent ailments, in April 1917 he was given a discharge and a small limited pension, In recognition of his war service he received an award of a Silver War Badge. The Silver War Badge was issued on 12th September 1916 and was originally issued to officers and men who were discharged or retired from the military forces as a result of sickness or injury caused by their war service. Around the rim of the badge was inscribed "For King and Empire; Services Rendered.

World Events 1916-1939

He was now 22 years of age and after he left the army Ross Wyld returned to his job with the Civil Service and like many ex-servicemen he became an enthusiastic member of his local Labour Party. The post war election of 1918 had returned a Coalition Unionist candidate Louis (Stanley) Johnson as the MP for the Walthamstow East Constituency where Ross Wyld lived.

His future political career has to be seen against the background of national and international events that took place toward the end of WWI in 1918 and the beginning of WWII in 1939.

Overview



Above: 1926 General Strike Breakers

Effectively, the entire period between the wars was a time of economic depression that became exceptionally severe after the US Wall Street crash in 1929. Earlier, in 1926, this created the situation of the British 1926 general strike. It was the support of Walthamstow people for the strikers that caused a vindictive British government to delay agreement of Walthamstow's application to become a Borough until 1929.



In Ireland there had been the Easter Rising of 1916 that was to lead to Home Rule in Ireland, with the creation of the Irish Free State and the Province of Ulster in 1925. There had been a socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 that



created a revolutionary wave of events until 1923. In 1918,

As a result of suffragette agitation and their co-operation with the government during war, women over the age of 30 years had been given the vote and in 1928 this was



extended to women over 21 years. In 1924 and 1929-31 the Labour Party formed minority governments under Ramsay MacDonald .

In Italy, the Fascist Party led by Benito Mussolini, came to



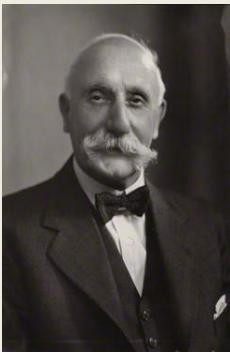
power in 1922 and invaded Ethiopia in 1933. Their atrocities were a precursor for the forthcoming Spanish Civil War where Spanish fascists fought to overturn the democratically elected government and socialists from all over the world went to Spain to oppose the fascists. In 1933, Trade Unions were abolished

in Germany and in 1934, The German Chancellor, Adolph Hitler seized absolute power and became the Fuhrer.

Walthamstow East Labour Party

In 1918, the old Walthamstow Constituency was split into two with the creation of the East and West Walthamstow Constituencies. This situation continued until 1974 when a single Walthamstow Constituency was reinstated.

In the East Walthamstow constituency during this 56 year period, Conservatives under different names were in Parliamentary power for 44 years and Labour for 12 years.



In the same period in the West Walthamstow constituency, Labour were in power for 44 years and the Conservatives and Liberals for 12 years and there were three Labour Party MP's. Two of them, Valentine McEntee and Ted Redhead, came out of the local political structure. The third



Above: Valentine McEntee

Above: Clement Attlee at Priory Court

was Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who was parachuted in to a 'safe' seat after Val McEntee was made a Baron and 'kicked upstairs' to the House of Lords to provide Clement Attlee with a 'safe' parliamentary seat.

In the period between the wars, Ross Wyld served Walthamstow as a Councillor and Alderman and he was the Borough Mayor in 1935-6 and served as a Justice of the Peace.

Some People Who Made Walthamstow

During this period he would have known and worked with a host of Labour Party Councillors who, with Ross Wyld, were people instrumental in the making of Walthamstow. These include: Jenny Hammond, William (Bill) McGuffie, Daniel Quinn, Ernie & Eliza Richard, Arthur & Bessie Bottomley, (Arthur was later an MP for Chatham and after Macclesfield)), Sidney Chaplin, Dorothy Wrigley, Edward (Ted) Redhead and Valentine

McEntee (Later both MP's for West Walthamstow), Catherine McEntee, Wally Savill, Bert & Winnie Palethorpe, Terry Child and many others.

Many local readers will recognize the names of William McGuffie, Sidney Chaplin, Edward Redhead and Valentine McEntee who all had schools named after them.

Head of Walthamstow's Civil Defence In WWII

In September 1937, Alderman Ross Wyld, Justice of the Peace, succeeded Ted Redhead to one of the most important posts in the Borough Council as the Chairman of the Finance Committee (It's interesting to note that, at that time, Sidney Burnell, who also had a school named after him) was the Director of Education and Chief Executive Officer of the Borough

Preparations For War

After Adolph Hitler had come to power in Germany in 1933, many people knew that a war with Germany was almost inevitable. In 1935, the Government gave Local Authorities (LA's) a skeleton scheme for essential measures to be taken in the advent of a war. The Local Authorities were required to develop schemes to meet their local needs.

The circular referred in broad outline to the various types of services likely to be required and stated that the Government recognised that the services would essentially have to be organised on a local basis and they invited each County Council and County Borough Council to prepare schemes, District Councils were to be consulted but were not to be scheme-making authorities.

Walthamstow's Emergency Committee



Walthamstow set up an Emergency Committee to do this work under the Chairmanship of Arthur Bottomley. During 1936 various reports were prepared by Officers of the Borough Council and in December the Council appointed its A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) Committee.

Left: Arthur George Bottomley MP (Later Baron Bottomley ex Gamuel & Praetoria Road Schools)

In 1937, the first A.R.P. Act was passed and in March 1938 the Council appointed an Honorary A.R.P. Officer from among their members. The first public meeting to recruit volunteers was held in April 1938 and by the end of June the organisation had been set up

in skeleton form and District Officers had been chosen. Following the Munich crisis, ten First Aid Posts were ordered and respirators (Gas masks) were issued to the public.

In April 1938, the W.V.S. (Women's Voluntary Service) came into being and in May mothers were registered for evacuation and arrangements were approved for the protection of rooms at certain schools which would subsequently be used as A.R.P. District Centres. In 1939, in recognition of the excellent work carried out in Walthamstow, Arthur Bottomley was appointed as the Deputy Regional Commissioner for South East England and Coordinator for emergency services and Ross Wyld was appointed as the Chairman of Civil Services and Air Raid Precautions in Walthamstow.

The War Over Walthamstow

In Ross Wyld's own words in his superb history of WWII (*The War Over Walthamstow*)

"During 1936 various reports were prepared by Officers of the Borough Council and in December the Council appointed its A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) Committee. In 1937 the first A.R.P. Act was passed and in March 1938 the Council appointed an Honorary A.R.P. Officer from among their members.

The first public meeting to recruit volunteers was held in April 1938 and by the end of June the organisation had been set up in skeleton form and District Officers had been chosen.

The end of August brought us to the Munich Crisis and on the night that the Crisis reached its peak, the Emergency Committee (without waiting for London Region) approved the placing of an order for ten First Aid Posts and these were proceeded with as quickly as possible.

The Munich Crisis passed, respirators were issued to the public and the remainder of 1938 was spent in further recruitment and in commencing training, for we had no faith that the results of Munich would be lasting. As evidence of this we declined to scrap the material already accumulated for trench shelters.

During 1939 we pressed on with our training and with all other preparatory work open to us.

In April the W.V.S. (Womens Voluntary Service) came into being and in May mothers were registered for evacuation and arrangements were approved for the protection of rooms at certain schools which would subsequently be used as A.R.P. District Centres. A local A.R.P. Demonstration of all Services was held on the 10th June and a National A.R.P. demonstration was held at Hyde Park on the 2nd July, Walthamstow being represented by 30 volunteers.

The Government announced on the 30th August that millions of sandbags required to be filled and the public were invited to volunteer to do the job, if possible, on an unpaid basis; if not as an ordinary job or work. The Government having refused permission to Local Authorities to lay in stocks of sand beforehand, now had to arrange in a hurry for provision of excavating machines at various points, these machines bringing up earth, sand, gravel and stones in a manner which subsequently and speedily ruined the sandbags which they were used to fill.

On the last day of the month authority was given to mobilise a proportion of whole-time Wardens (to be paid £3 per week for men, £2 for women), and to open Warden Posts where they could be made available.

On the 1st September, personnel for First Aid Posts were mobilised in part, together with Ambulance personnel and Stretcher Bearers and the Emergency Committee commenced to sit daily. On the 2nd of the month, all District Centres and First Aid Posts now being in full operation were issued with general and detailed instructions as to personnel establishments, etc.

On 3rd September, War began at 11 a.m. and at 11.15 we had our first Warning Siren”

Walthamstow's Civil Defence

At the beginning of the war in 1939, the Civil Defence headquarters for Walthamstow was based at the old George Monoux School in the High Street. However, the building didn't provide much security against bombing and was limited in space. Fortunately, the new Town Hall building in Forest Road was in an advanced state of development and although the main building didn't have a steel frame, the sub-basement did and would serve as an air raid shelter during bombing raids. As a consequence, although not formally opened until 1942, the Town Hall became the new Civil Defence headquarters.

Although Arthur Bottomley was in charge because of his commitments elsewhere as the London organiser of the National Union of Public Employees and Chairman of the London Emergency Committee and Air Raid Precautions Controller, the bulk of the work was undertaken by his deputy - Ross Wyld. In 1941 Arthur Bottomley was appointed to the post of Deputy Regional Commissioner for the South-East of England and Ross Wyld formally became the Walthamstow Civil Defence Controller.

In the space of this article it is impossible for me to describe the scope of work and organisation undertaken by Ross Wyld during this period (Read his book!) although I must pay tribute to the work of his sister Doreen in supporting him and for her work with the Womens Voluntary service (WVS) Although Ross Wyld was later awarded the OBE in recognition of his work as the Walthamstow Civil Defence Controller this doesn't in any way reflect the debt that the people of Walthamstow owe him.

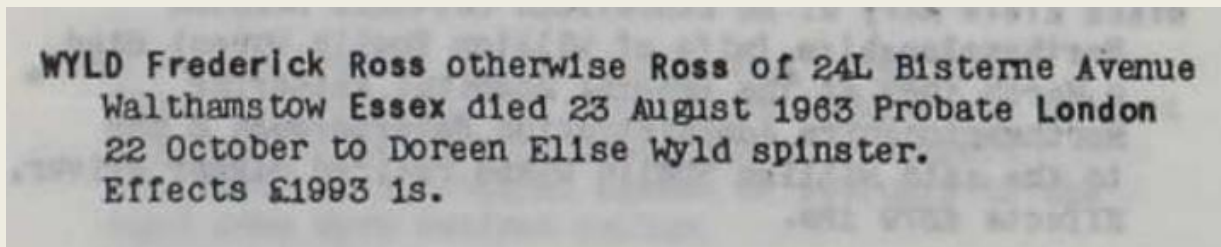
Post WWII

Ross Wyld, like a number of his colleagues served Walthamstow for many years as an elected Councillor and as a Councillor elected Alderman. (From old English - Elderman)The latter was a position of Council member seniority that was attained by the vote of fellow elected Councillors and was for the term of six years. These appointments allowed the Council to keep the services of experienced Councillors for longer than they would serve as Councillors and helped to provide a continuity of work.

After the war in 1945, Harry Wallace was elected the Labour Party MP for Walthamstow East and Val McEntee for Walthamstow West. The Labour Party was in control of the

Local Council and the most pressing work of the Council was in the reconstruction of infrastructure and services that had been damaged by the war. In this process the organisational experience of Alderman Ross Wyld (Chairman of the Borough Finance Committee) was critical in achieving this objective. As an Alderman he did not have to be involved in the day to day cut and thrust of local politics and with his fellow Alderman colleagues he was able to oversee and expedite the necessary work.

He remained committed to the Labour Party and Walthamstow and died still 'in harness' as the Chairman of Walthamstow's Finance Committee in 1963. He lived with his sister in a flat at Bisterne Avenue, Walthamstow. Neither he nor his younger sister, Doreen ever married and she died in 1969.



Bill Bayliss

May 2015

Some Resources Used In This Article

Ancestry.UK

BT Residential Telephone Books

Supplement to the January 6th 1946 London Gazette

<http://www.hm-waterguard.org.uk/Customs%20Journal%20-%201938%20-%2018%20June%20-%20Vol%2035%20No%20878.pdf>

<http://www.hm-waterguard.org.uk/Customs%20Journal%20-%201936%20-%2020%20June%20-%20Vol%2033%20-%20No%20826.pdf>

<http://www.hm-waterguard.org.uk/Customs%20Journal%20-%201935%20-%2022%20June%20-%20No%20800.pdf>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09612029600200102>

Ross Wyld, Civil Service Clerical Association

Trade Unionism in the Civil Service: Ross Wyld's Letter

The War Over Walthamstow, The Story Of Civil Defence by Ross Wyld

http://www.rainbowcircle.f2s.com/Walthamstow/1_2%20civildefence.html

Various internet images