

Christopher Head

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea News

April 1998

A former Mayor of Chelsea was among the 1,523 lost in the Titanic disaster of April 1912. Christopher Head served as Mayor between 1909 and 1911 and had been a Conservative councillor since 1906.

According to contemporary accounts, Head was a man of unusual energy who was happy to meet anyone and 'thought nothing' of putting in hours at the Town Hall both before and after work.

He was certainly an outstandingly generous man and gave many gifts to the Chelsea Library. He was also something of a patron of the arts and is said to have used his influence to ensure an 'original' scheme for the decoration of Chelsea Town Hall to mark the Coronation of George V.

The scheme reflected his taste for the modern and attracted a good deal of criticism. However, the local paper of the day described the critics as people 'whose qualification as judges of artistic merit were of the slightest.'

Head had also been closely involved in the King Edward Memorial Fund.

Thought by many as a genial soul there is nevertheless a suggestion that from time to time He had ruffled feathers. In his obituary the local paper said that he 'would have gladly governed all Chelsea in the spirit of the benevolent despot' and went on to describe his ideas as sometime 'impractical or even quixotic.'

Interesting, one of his ideas was for a Chelsea Market.

During his time on the Council, Mr. Head is credited with improving insurance's for workmen while reducing the Borough's overall insurance bill. He also campaigned for the development of vacant land owned by the great estates which was one of the great issues of the day in the Metropolitan Borough of Chelsea.

Outside the Council, he was reported as being vigorous in his efforts to 'awaken public spirit on behalf of the country's defensive forces.'

Educated at Lancing and Trinity College, Cambridge, he practised as a barrister for a time before entering the family firm at Lloyds, where he specialised in shipping insurance.

It was business in New York that took him aboard the doomed ship. He was only 43 and had married just 18 months previously. The paper reported that as he was insured against 'ocean accidents' his wife had been left financially secure.

Money for a memorial portrait of the ex-mayor was quickly raised amongst his colleagues on the Council and the work was commissioned from his friend, the well-known artist Miss N. Labouchere. The Council still has the portrait today. It can be viewed on request at the Central Library, Hornton Street.

Courtesy of Brian Ticehurst

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