

CHARLES EDWARD LEATHERLAND

Charles Edward Leatherland was born in Smethwick Warwickshire on 18th April 1898, and he died in Epping Essex on 18th December 1992. He married Mary Elizabeth Morgan on 3rd July 1922 in Macclesfield.

First World War

During the First World War he joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment - Regimental number 1073 - 16th Battalion later as Warrant Officer II - Private – Acting Company Sergeant Major.

When the First World War began in 1914, Charles was only sixteen. You were supposed to be eighteen or over to join the Army. But along with many other boys who were anxious to serve their country, Charles persuaded the Recruiting Officer that he was Eighteen. He served in the Army for five years in Belgium, France and Germany. He trained as an Infantryman and Gunner.

In 1977 he wrote his recollections of the War for the Peter Liddle "Personal Experience War Archives" and the following as one excerpt from the early years in which he describes the trip to France.

"Before 1915 was out, shilling-a-day Private Leatherland and the rest of the 16th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment went out to France. We went from Folkestone to Boulogne in an old cattle steamer, which still contained evidence of its previous use.

From Boulogne we were packed into French Railway Cattle Trucks, bearing the usual painted signs "10 Chevaux, 40 Hommes (10 Horses and 40 men) and we drew up at the little town or village of Longpre, North of Amiens. Cattle haunted us again here, for it was the cowsheds that most of us were billeted."

"The support trenches, running in wriggly patterns from west to east, were a credit to the engineers who had built them out of wide expanses of farm fields. They were deep, well over seven feet. Their walls were vertical and there were duckboards on the floor. A hundred yards or so forward, however, things had changed. Sides had fallen in, Duckboards were often missing. We had to wade, rather than walk, for much of the way."



In early 1916, he was transferred from the 16th Battalion to Xth Corps headquarters as a clerk where his clerical skills were needed. The Corps was an intermediate level in the Army command chain. The Xth Corps remained in the Ypres area and Flanders for most of the war.

In 1917 Leatherland became Quarter Master Sergeant, in charge of Stores. By 1918 he had been promoted to Acting Company Sergeant Major. He was only 20 and later claimed to have been the youngest Company Sergeant Major in the First World War. For a time he acted as Chief Clerk to the Camp Commandant.

"In 1916, I left the Battalion and moved to various stations. Abeele, just behind Poperinghe, where many of my colleagues lived and worked in a Convent and where King George V came to review is. Toutencourt, somewhere north of Amiens, where my old Colonel was killed by a stray shell. He was buried in the parish church there at the top of the hill. The village of Long, where the River Somme ran along the south side and where I had to put two of my men "on the peg" for taking bread from the stores and using it as an inducement to secure favours of two young women who lived to the north of the village. I was by this time a Company Quarter Master Sergeant, and soon afterwards became Company Sergeant Major."

"The great flu epidemic of 1917 played havoc with our troops. I was then stationed somewhere behind Arras. I remember one of our Captains a physically perfect tough Australian died within hours of being stricken by the disease. Like many others I caught it myself, but after the second day my unit had to move fifty miles away. I was not fit to move, so I was left alone in the Quartermaster's stores, all alone, the sole Briton in the village without the locals knowing I was there. I had to feed myself Army biscuits. I saw not a soul for a week. I was alone with my thoughts and they were far from pleasant."



Company Sergeant Major Leatherland (Middle row far right)

Leatherland's War memoirs include the tale of when he had to guard a German Prisoner of War who was ordered to drive a steam train. Would the prisoner seize control of the train? Or would he push Charles off the train to his death? How would Charles drive the train if the prisoner broke free and jumped off the train? It was an adventure he often told his grandchildren.



Leatherland

The Kaiser's Sister

Another story he told, took place in 1919 after the end of the war:

"One more matter, while we were in Bonn, is perhaps worth mentioning. The Kaiser's Sister, Princess Viktoria of Schaumburg-Lippe, had a Chateau on the borders of the town. I had to find some stabling for my colonel's two horses, which had been sent out from his home in Luton.

I was told by the German liaison office that Princess Viktoria had some excellent stables. So I asked him to go and see her and ask her if my colonel's horse could be put in her stables.

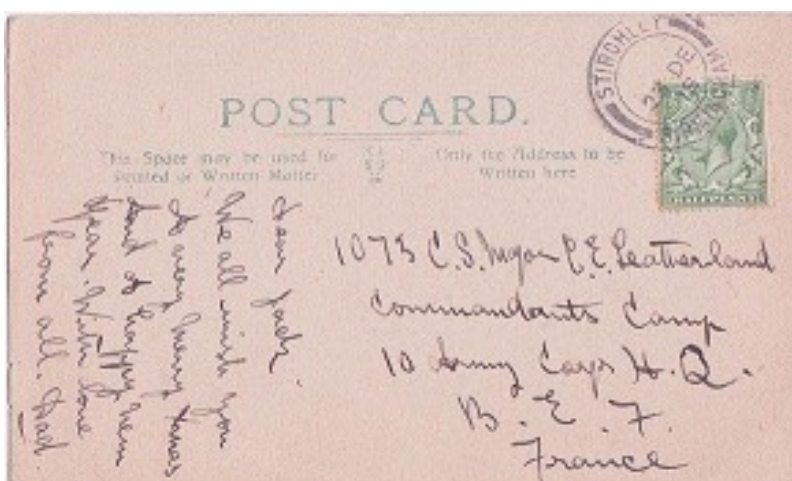
He came back to me and told me that the Princess absolutely refused to agree. I said to myself "We had won the War. She had lost it – and our way is going to prevail!"

So I went and told her that if we did not get use of the stables, I would have the whole mansion commandeered. So she gave way."

"And so when I went to see her, on the day I was to come back to England on demobilisation, to thank her for what she had done and to say goodbye, she gave me a portrait of herself, which is perhaps somewhere in the house. She had been inviting me round to tea every Wednesday afternoon, when she had the Aristocrats of Bonn as her guests."

My Colonel was Harold P. Green, who was Chairman of the Harold Green Brewery at Luton.

When I left him at Bonn, he said "If you ever



want a job, come round to the brewery" so I had to tell him my pre-war job with the Birmingham Corporation was awaiting me.

I often wonder, whether I would have become a brewery owner if I had answered him differently. "Despite being technically on the German side in World War One, Viktoria was very sympathetic to the British cause. After the war she met her cousin, George V, King of Great Britain and expressed the wish that they would all be friends again soon. George told her he did not think this would be possible for a great many years".

Although as a German citizen, Princess Viktoria was clearly on the German side, she was known to be very sympathetic to the British cause during the War, perhaps because of her links to British royalty (she was the grand-daughter of Queen Victoria and thus a cousin of King George V)."

After he left the army, Charles returned to civilian life and his job as a clerk with Birmingham Corporation. He joined the Labour party on his first day of demobilisation and soon became involved with several socialist organisations.

"I remember standing in front of a coal-cart in Birmingham Bull-Ring one Sunday night in February 1919. It was the day after I left the Army. One of my worlds – the world of war – had just ended. Another was just beginning. I was a little nervous of this new world. It all seemed so strange. There were no signposts to show which way to go. I listened to the man on the cart who was speaking. He was thinking of this new world too. He was saying how it would be a better world, a happier world, a healthier world. I joined the Labour Party before the meeting had ended. I had been a good soldier. I wanted to become a good citizen. I felt that in joining the Labour Party I had become one." (Daily Herald 1949).

(S. 17.5) W9338-GD1882 2,000,000 10/18 HMV(P222) Army Form Z. 18.

CERTIFICATE OF EMPLOYMENT DURING THE WAR.

(To be completed for, and handed to, each soldier).

A soldier is advised to send a copy rather than the original when corresponding with a prospective employer.

It is particularly important that an apprentice whose apprenticeship has been interrupted by Military Service should have recorded on this form any employment in a trade similar to his own on which he has been engaged during such Military Service.

Regt. No. 1073 Rank S.S.M.

Surname LEATHERLAND
(Back letters)

Christian Names in full CHARLES EDWARD

Regt. 16th R. Warwick Unit and 44th 2 Corps

1. Regimental Employment.

Nature of.	Period.
(a) <u>Infantryman</u>	From <u>19-12-14</u> To <u>15-2-16</u>
(b) <u>S.S.M.</u>	<u>16-2-16</u> " <u>2-7-18</u>
(c) <u>S.S.M.</u>	<u>3-7-18</u> " <u>5-2-19</u>
(d)	" "

*2. Trade or calling before Enlistment (as shown in A. B. 61).

Local Government Official

3. Courses of Instruction and Courses in Active Service Army Schools, and certificates, if any.

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

(d) _____

**The trade or calling must be filled in by the O.C. Unit from the Appendix to Special Army Order No. 6, of 21st October, 1918 (329 of November, 1918).*



Charles Leatherland – bottom left in Bow Tie at a meeting of the National Union of Ex-servicemen in 1919.

Leatherland began campaigning for better treatment for soldiers who had returned from the war. Many ex-soldiers felt betrayed by the way they were treated by the Government. He became one of the founder members of the National Union of Ex-Servicemen and stood for the Presidency of the Union.

He wrote a weekly column in the Birmingham Town Crier newspaper on ex-servicemen's issues, and often spoke at political meetings and rallies in the Birmingham and Wolverhampton area. For example on 22 April 1920 he spoke at a meeting of the Birmingham City

Independent Labour Party on "Armed Force and the Coming of Socialism".

The National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUX) was formed in early 1919 as a socialist association for former soldiers. Within six months it had over 100 branches and claimed to have nearly 100,000 members. But by the end of 1920

it was almost defunct. In the words of its only historian, the late Dr David Englander of the Open University, "its records were lost, its achievements forgotten, its objects misunderstood".

Dr Englander points out that the socialist left in Britain regarded the army "with a mixture of fear and contempt". Armies had no trades unions and no tradition of working class culture even though most soldiers who fought in WW1 were from the working classes. The labour movement in England found it very hard to portray itself as the 'soldier's friend' during the First World War and after.

Militant ex-servicemen's organisations such as the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors (1916) were formed. Another organisation, Comrades of the Great War, was formed in 1917. Soldiers returning from the war, many wounded in action, many shell-shocked, many unable to find work were often regarded as a threat to society. Many ex-servicemen felt angry and betrayed. Army pensions were inadequate, compensation for soldiers disabled during the war was poor. The atmosphere of fear which many people felt was sharpened by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. Could Britain be next?

The National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUX) had several leading figures who later became famous in other ways: John Beckett who later became a Labour MP and a member of the British Union of Fascists
Ernest Mander who became a writer and academic in New Zealand.

John Beckett was a former army corporal who was invalided out of the army in 1916. In the 1920s he shared a house with future Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. He achieved notoriety in 1930 when he seized the mace during an angry debate in the House of Commons.

The NUX was a campaigning organisation. NUX branches tried to get justice for disabled soldiers and their dependants. The Birmingham NUX took up the grievances of street traders - many of whom were ex-servicemen trying to make a living. According to Dr David Englander
"In the eighteen months after its formation, the NUX had conducted a vigorous propaganda campaign across the length and breadth of the land: an estimated 47,000 meetings had been held and a vast quantity of literature distributed".

Leatherland was not a militant agitator and there is no evidence that he ever flirted with Communism. But I did find him quoted in a secret Home Office Directorate of Intelligence Report to the Cabinet on Revolutionary Organisations in January 1920 (released by The National Archives). The report examined amongst other things the extent of revolutionary feelings among ex-service men. The writer of the report said that:

"Ex-Colour Sergeant Major C. E. Leatherland, Chairman of the Central Branch, who has been nominated for the office of General President of the Union, told my correspondent recently that the Union was determined to obtain its demands by fair means or foul, and added "We are going to the Government with a whip in our hands".

Despite this apparently dramatic statement, the report concluded that there was little revolutionary sentiment in the country, and there is no evidence that Leatherland was involved in provoking revolutionary ideals, although clearly the security services were keeping tabs on the National Union of Ex-Servicemen. However, many members of the NUX did end up joining the Communist Party.

At the NUX Easter Conference in 1920 Leatherland, who was by then the Midlands Organiser, stood for General Secretary of the NUX, although John Beckett was elected. By 1921 the National Union of Ex-Servicemen had fizzled out, although at its peak it claimed a membership of over 100,000 former soldiers. The British Legion later took over as the leading ex-servicemen's organisation.

Leatherland's experiences in the National Union of Ex-Servicemen gave him an apprenticeship in journalism, together with experience in public speaking and contacts in the Labour movement, all of which were to prove useful in his future career in national journalism, local government and politics.

Charles Leatherland (top centre) with two of his brothers and wives (c1930)

In 1921 Leatherland moved to Macclesfield, Cheshire renting a council house in Brocklehurst Avenue. Where their daughter Irene Leatherland was born

Leatherland moved to Macclesfield because he had a new job, his first full time post as a journalist. He was Chief Reporter and Sub-Editor on a local newspaper, the Macclesfield Courier.





A year later he married Mollie Morgan, who came from Shareshill, Staffordshire. In 1923 they had their first child, a daughter, Irene.



The wedding picture of Charles Leatherland and Mary Morgan in 1922

The Macclesfield Courier was founded in the early years of the nineteenth century. Leatherland soon became a distinctive figure at the Courier. The editor was often away, and Charles was left to run the paper, which gave him a good grounding in journalism.

In an article in the Macclesfield Express in 1964, when Leatherland was given his peerage, a former colleague Clifford Rathbone, wrote about him :

"with his thick mop of red hair he was a familiar figure in Macclesfield district ... he would return from a meeting and with a packet of mint creams on one side and Turkish cigarettes on the other, he would set to work and simply pour out his copy"

King Edward Street. Macclesfield - the Courier's offices were in one of these buildings



Clifford Rathbone, who still worked as a journalist in Macclesfield, also wrote to Leatherland in 1972 - having read about a speech he made in the House of Lords. His letter conjures up some of the atmosphere of those times :

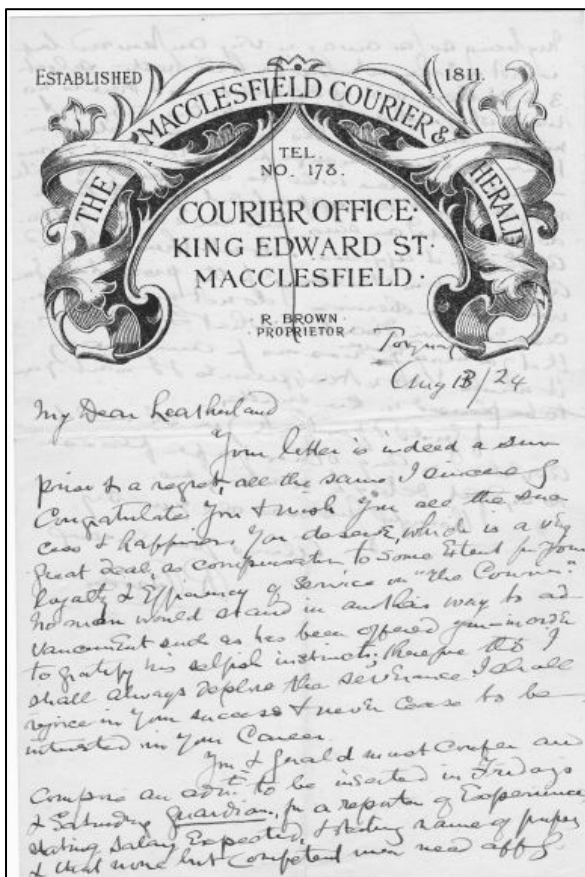
Dear Lord Leatherland.

Reading your speech in support of Lord Vernon's motion to keep Poynton in Cheshire, brought back many happy memories, especially when you talk about reporting the meetings of the Macclesfield Rural District Council, which in those days were in the Board room at the old Workhouse in Prestbury Road.

You will have forgotten the young boy, Clifford Rathbone at the Courier who you used to send

out to Twemlow's in Chestergate for your Turkish cigarettes and peppermint creams. That was in the good old days of Bob Brown, the editor of the Courier. I shall never forget the early training I received under your good self. You once told me to go to a meeting of the Band of Hope and I recall saying that it would be a waste of time for there would be no news in such a meeting and you replied : No matter what the meeting, or the event, any journalist worth his salt will be able to find a story. When I handed in my copy, you replied "What did I tell you". I have often used that story to young reporters.

Remember the day when you left Macclesfield and the Salvation Army was asked to collect the old magazines etc from your house at Hurdsfield. What a pile they had. You seemed to read everything in those days. I can still see you standing at the counter of WH Smiths in the Market Place reading the magazines. I used to envy the respect people had for you. Then came that proud day in the Courier office when you won two medals in an international essay writing competition."



In addition to his work on the Courier, he continued to write articles and short stories for other newspapers and journals, ranging from the Cotton Factory Times to a Cinema trade journal. He also wrote for the Daily Herald.

One of his more unusual jobs was writing the lyrics for the prologue to a silent film called "The Loves of a Pharaoh". The film was shown at the Macclesfield Premier Picture House in 1924.

GOLD MEDALS

In 1923, and again in 1924, Leatherland won gold medals in a national essay writing competition organised by the London Chamber of Commerce. The medals were presented by the Prince of Wales at a special award ceremony in London. He was very proud of this achievement. The British gallantry and bravery awards of the Great War

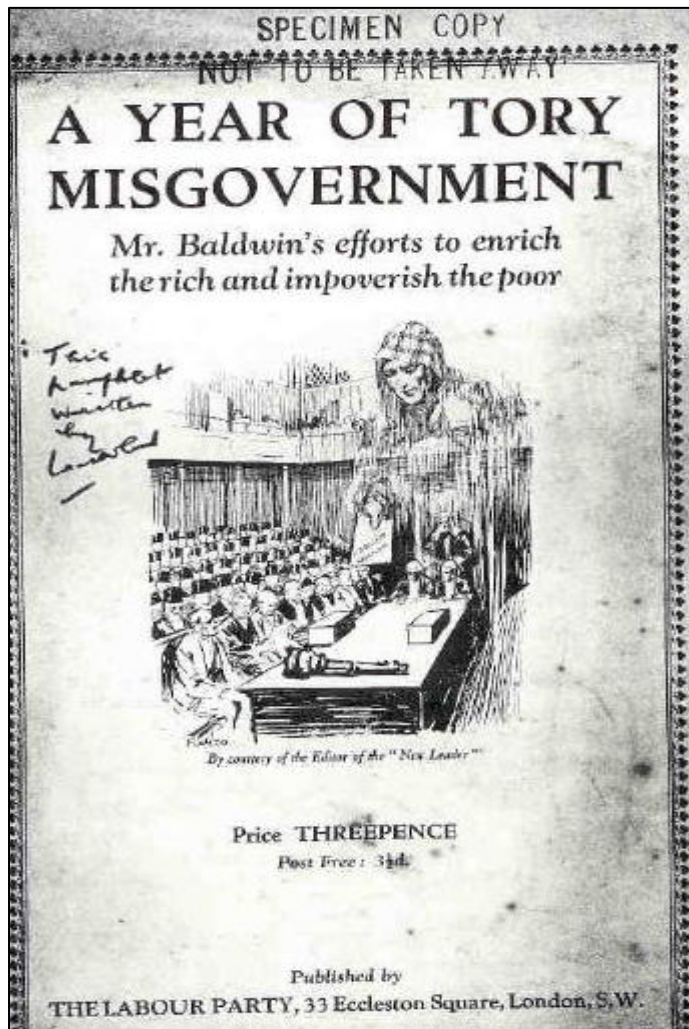
Charles Leatherland in the 1920's

LABOUR PARTY PRESS & PUBLICITY DEPT

In 1924 Charles moved to London with his wife Mollie and one year old daughter, Irene. He had a new job as Parliamentary Correspondent in the Labour Party's Press and Publicity Department based in Ecclestone Square, Victoria. The building

in Ecclestone Square used to be the home of Winston Churchill and his family.

He worked there for five years becoming the second in command to the Party's press officer, Will Henderson, whose father was leader of the Labour Party for several years. His job included writing Labour Party pamphlets and leaflets, drafting speaker's notes for Labour MPs, and reporting the proceedings of Parliament as a lobby correspondent in the House of Commons. His Parliamentary reports were syndicated to local and regional newspapers all over the country as the Labour Press Service.



THE BOOK OF THE LABOUR PARTY

In 1925 he wrote eleven chapters of "The Book of the Labour Party", a three volume guide to the history of the Party, its policies and its personalities. This book was the first major history of the Labour Party and the Labour movement. He was paid £75 and 12 shillings by the publishers for his contributions.

In 1925 he moved from Clapham Common to Hooking Green in Harrow, Middlesex.

1917 CLUB

Leatherland became a member of the 1917 Club, a socialist meeting society which met in Gerrard Street, Soho. The 1917 Club became one of the haunts of the Bloomsbury Group. Its members included Ramsay MacDonald (later Prime Minister), Leonard Woolf (husband of Virginia Woolf), and C.E.M. Joad a left-wing philosopher who later became famous as a panellist on the Brains Trust, a BBC radio discussion

programme.

SHORTHAND REPORTER

Leatherland was a talented verbatim shorthand reporter (an essential talent for a journalist in those days). He was awarded a certificate showing he could write 120 words per minute at the age of 16. In the 1920s he took shorthand notes at several public enquiries, including a 200,000-word record of the Board of Trade enquiry into the silk industry.

In Christopher Andrew's history of MI5 "The Defence of the Realm : The Authorised History of MI5", Professor Andrew explains that the Conservative Party had a spy inside Labour Party headquarters in the later 1920s. He quotes Conservative Party Chairman J.C.C. Davidson (later Viscount Davidson) who admitted in his "Memoirs of a Conservative" (1969) that, in 1927, he recruited a Major Joseph Ball 'to help run a little intelligence service of our own' distinct from Conservative Party Central Office. Ball was a former Scotland Yard police officer – and a barrister - who joined MI5 in 1915 but left the service in 1926.

Davidson said : "We had agents in certain key centres and we also had agents actually in the Labour Party Headquarters, with the result that we got their reports on political feeling in the country, as well as our own. We also got advance "pulls" of their literature. This we arranged with Odhams Press, who did most of the Labour

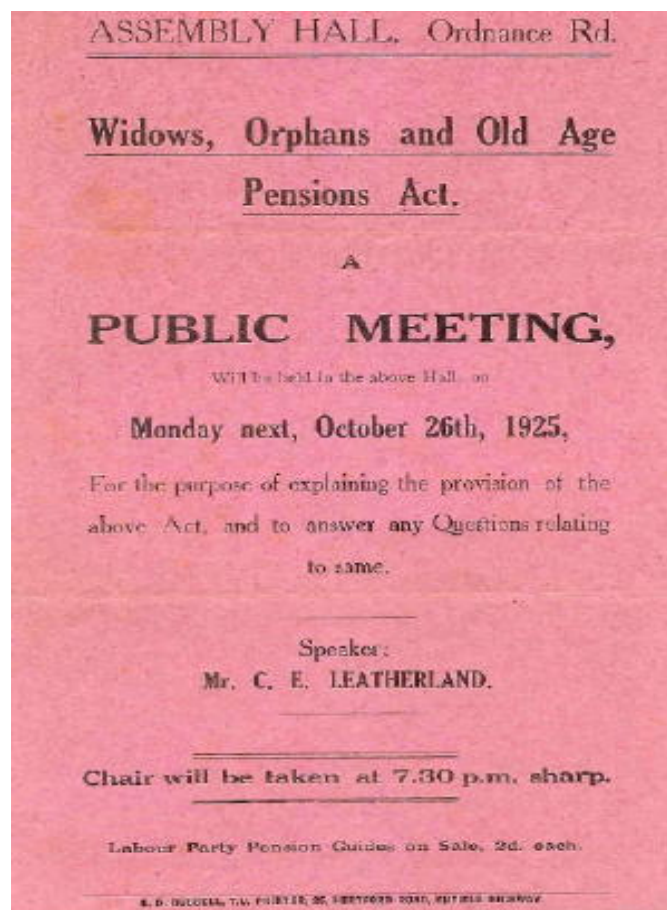
Party printing , with the result that we frequently received copies of their leaflets and publications before they reached Transport House. This was of enormous value to us because we were able to study the Labour Party policy in advance, and in the case of leaflets we could produce a reply to appear simultaneously with their production."

Three years later in 1930 Joseph Ball was appointed as the first director of the new Conservative Party Research Department. Leatherland played a significant behind the scenes role in the General Strike. The Labour Party Press Department also acted as the Trade Union Congress Press Office, sharing the same building in Ecclestone Square.

During the General Strike in 1926, Leatherland wrote much of the contents of The British Worker, the TUC's strike newspaper, including the TUC's famous "Message to All Workers" which appeared on the front cover of every issue. He also wrote the TUC General Council's reply to the Prime Minister's message to the nation

THE INKY WAY : DAILY HERALD

In 1929
Charles



Leatherland became a journalist on the Daily Herald. The Daily Herald was different from other Fleet Street daily newspapers. It had no commercial aims and loyally supported the Labour Party. As if to emphasise this difference, the paper was based in Endell Street / Long Acre in Covent Garden, rather than in Fleet Street.

History of the Daily Herald

The Daily Herald was launched in 1911 as a strike sheet for the London printing unions, who were involved in an industrial dispute, to support their pleas for improved pay and conditions. In 1912 it was launched as a daily newspaper in support of the socialist cause. The paper's early days were beset by lack of money, even though the Trades Union Congress (TUC) took it over in 1922. The paper suffered from continual financial crises until, in 1929, Odhams Press publishing group stepped in to save it and inject money into the paper.

Odhams Press owned 51% of the shares, with the remainder owned by the TUC. The immediate priorities of the new owners were to increase the circulation, to broaden the socialist profile of the paper and to ensure its financial viability. In 1929 there was a massive drive to achieve these aims. The size of the paper was doubled from ten to twenty pages; rallies and events promoting the new Herald were held across the country; members of the Labour Party were recruited to promote the paper, and a prize incentive scheme was implemented where premium cameras and free gifts were given away on purchase of the paper. These initiatives resulted in a steep increase in the Herald's circulation from 250,000 to a million. This trend continued until, in 1933, the Herald briefly became the bestselling popular daily newspaper in the world, with sales of 2 million. The sharp increase in circulation spurred the Herald's competitors into action and the more conservative Beaverbrook owned newspapers (e.g. the Daily Express) began to solicit support for their publications. A circulation war began, and the Herald's circulation declined.

CHARLES LEATHERLAND answers questions raised by angry householders

YOUR rates are going up. They will go up again next year. And they will keep going up regularly for years unless the Government find the courage to reform the whole local government financial system.

Only a minority of the councils have yet announced their rates for the coming year, which begins on April 1. But 19 out of every 20 of these have decided to put up the rates. In only very exceptional cases are they going down.

Assessments

This is the year when the new property assessments—the basis on which rates are levied—come into operation.

The valuation is roughly based on the estimated rent which could be charged if a house or business premises were let. The last re-valuation was six years ago.

Roughly speaking, property values for rating purposes go up to three times their pre-

vious level. So if the rate of your rate bill is to remain unchanged, the council should bring down the rate in the £ from 20s. to 6s. 8d.; from 15s. to 5s., or in proportion.

That is not happening. The new rates are well above one-third of the old ones.

And on the old basis of assessments, increase of one, two, three, four shillings and more are common.

Here are some of the ques-

tions many ratepayers are asking, and the answers:

Q Is it true that councils have used the revaluation as an opportunity to bump up rates excessively?

A It is, as yet, early to say. So far as can be seen, there is no such general tendency. The increases many councils are announcing are broadly in line with the



● More pay for police, teachers, firemen.

THIS IS THE WAY TO CUT THE RATES

increases they have imposed in the last few years. But the rises of three and four shillings which some are declaring will certainly need to be explained to their ratepayers.

Q We are not worried about assessments being trebled, if the rate poundage is reduced to one-third. But will it stay there?

A The last general revaluation was in 1926, and the average general rate went down then with a third, from 22s. 10d. to 15s. 6d.

But since then it has crept up year by year to 22s. 6d., within 4d. of what it was before the previous revaluation.

And this year's increase will push it well above that level.

Q During the next 10 or 15 years are the rates likely

to go up again to more than 20 shillings in the pound?

A That may well be so. Every local authority is facing increased expenditure. This is not because of waste. Here and there little examples of extravagance may arise. True to Home by councilors. A House-Holder instead of a Dancer for the Mayor. A new Town Hall on rather lavish lines.

But there are really peccol problems.

What is far more important is that increased wages and salaries are having to be paid to all the staffs that councils employ.

Police-men, firemen, teachers, architects, clerical staffs and manual workers have all had rises recently. They are going to have more.

The prices of all the things that councils buy have gone up. The building contracts

they place are dearer than ever, and this means an added burden on the rates for every new school, clinic or fire station that is built.

Prices of land have gone up enormously. And interest charges on loans—though they are showing signs of coming down at last—are still much higher than when the Labour Government provided cheap money for councils.

These are some of the reasons why council expenditure is going up, and will continue to go up.

Many councils have called in expert consultants, or set up their own organisations, to make savings, to cut out dead wood and save money. But these savings, compared with the increased responsibilities of local government, are only trifles when viewed against the picture as a whole.

Q Must council expenditure continue to rise at rates continue to go up, for after years? Can anything be done to stop this?

A Something can be done. But councils alone can not do it. The Government must.

Increased Government grants are needed to cover some of the public services which are really national, as not merely local in character and which are now being

WONDERFUL 12-PAGE EXTRA

Throughout this period, and for many years afterwards, the Herald continued to espouse Labour policies, defined by the Labour Party and at TUC conferences. However, whilst its appeal had broadened, Odhams Press felt that the political ties were hampering its growth. Nevertheless, the increasingly uneasy TUC - Odhams relationship managed to last for about thirty years until finally, in 1960, faced with diminishing sales and the loss of advertising revenue, Odhams persuaded the TUC to relinquish their shares. But the paper's slide had become irreversible and, in March 1961, Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN\IPC) took over the paper and Odhams publishing.

The company began a massive drive to revive the ailing Herald. After an initial period of assessment, MGN/IPC decided to enliven the image of the paper in order to broaden its appeal. In September 1964 the paper was relaunched as The Sun. Despite this change of image, the paper's format remained stale and uninspiring. After an initial upsurge in circulation, sales again declined. MGN/IPC cut their losses and in 1969 sold the Sun to Rupert Murdoch's News International, whereupon its content and message completely altered.

Leatherland worked for the Daily Herald for thirty-four years. He began as Political Sub-Editor, knocking reporters' stories into shape.



The Daily Herald sub-editors' room in 1928 from their archive.

In 1938 he became Assistant News



Editor. By 1941 he was News Editor.

Daily Herald telegraphy office in 1931

In the 1950s he acted as Night Editor responsible for "putting the paper to bed" to ensure that the first editions came out the following morning. He then became an Assistant Editor, which he combined with the duties of Political Editor.



He retired in 1963 – The paper closed the following year.

THE INKY WAY

In 1947 Leatherland wrote about his experiences as News Editor for the Inky Way Annual, a book about working in Fleet Street. The article provides an interesting and entertaining insight into a typical day in the life of a news editor on a daily newspaper :

"News editors go bald early, go to bed very late, and sleep with a telephone by their beds. The telephone is for the night staff to ring them five minutes after they have gone to sleep ... News editors have wide circles of friends. Cabinet ministers lunch with them. MPs sometimes naively address them as "sir". Master crooks often crave an audience. Very Important Persons say "come round and see me some time."

In a letter to The Independent from David Nathan following my grandfather's obituary, he said:

"Those of us who were reporters on the Daily Herald when Charlie Leatherland was news editor will never forget the task he set us after he had met the Queen in the course of his official duties with Essex County Council in the late Fifties.

"As I was bending over the Queen's hand,' he told us, 'I noticed a slight plumpness. The Queen is pregnant. Confirm it and we have a world exclusive.'



'The Labour Party newspaper, the Daily Herald, did not have many royal contacts nor did our reporters possess the high esteem and confidence that the royal reporters of today enjoy. But we did our best.

'We rang the Palace Press Office to be met with denials; we rang bemused ladies-in-waiting and all kinds of aides and equerries who had hardly, if at all, heard of the Daily Herald, would not have known of the Queen's condition if she were pregnant and would not have told us if they had. We rang the royal doctors and chatted up as many of the royal grooms as we could find in the vicinity of the Royal Mews. All to no avail.

'But Charlie himself would tell of the great pregnancy scoop years later, adding, 'Of course I was right. Within two years Prince Andrew was born.'

FREELANCE JOURNALIST.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Leatherland wrote for other newspapers and magazines. His freelance work included a weekly political gossip column for the Sunday Dispatch and a weekly article in the popular John Blunt magazine. He used to rent a tiny studio room in the Russell Hotel in Bloomsbury hotel on a Friday evening and stay there all night writing these articles.

My mother told that he sometimes wrote under the pseudonym of "Charles Morgan" so that his employers at the Daily Herald would not find out that he was also writing for rival papers, although I have not found evidence of this.

DUNTON DAYS

After moving to London, Leatherland and his family lived in a rented house at Elms Road, Clapham. In 1925 they moved to Hooking Green in Harrow. Three years later in 1928 they moved to a house near the sea in Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex where his son, John, was born the following year.



"Brocklehurst" Esplanade Gardens Westcliff on Sea, Essex.

OLD RECTORY, DUNTON

The Old Rectory Dunton from 1934 to

1948.

In the early



1930s, he bought an Old Rectory in the Essex village of Dunton Wayletts. The Old Rectory was a large house with six bedrooms, three attic rooms, a kitchen, scullery, lounge, dining room, plus an attached cottage and 16 acres of land. The house also had stables and a pond.

Charles and his family loved this house, and they lived there for fourteen years. Relatives often came to stay at the Old Rectory, and Charles' father lived there after his retirement from Cadburys.

FOX HUNTER

Leatherland was unusual among Labour supporters in enjoying the sport of fox-hunting.

" For many years I kept two or three hunters. I rode them every day. I took Tuesday off work every week to ride with the local hounds in my part of the county. I really do like horses" (speech in House of Lords. 16 March 1965)



Leatherland out riding his horse.

WORLD WAR TWO

During the Second World War, Charles remained at the Old Rectory commuting to work in London by train and car, despite regular bombing raids. His wife Mollie and children Irene and John moved to Macclesfield during the Battle of Britain.

Leatherland chaired the local Parish Invasion Committee, which made preparations for the possibility of an invasion by German troops.

Leatherland made several brief radio broadcasts for the BBC during WW2 :

A two-minute talk on 'The 18B Debate' on Radio Newsreel on 21 July 1942.

A one-and-a-half-minute talk on Gas Masks for Radio Newsreel on 31 July 1942

A two-to-three-minute talk on London Invasion Arrangements on 6 August 1942

A two-and-a-half-minute talk on the Order of Merit for Radio Newsreel on 1 January 1943.

The telegram pictured above (possibly from Cecil King) complimented Leatherland on his "pleasant broadcasting voice".

Charles and Mollie with daughter Irene and son John

STARLING CLOSE, BUCKHURST HILL

In the late 1940s, Mollie Leatherland became ill, and her doctor recommended moving to a smaller house. They found a nice house on the edge of Epping Forest in Starling Close, Buckhurst Hill, on the Essex borders of north-east London. They remained there for the rest of their lives.



MR ESSEX

Leatherland lived in Essex for 60 years. He was a leading figure in the political and social life of the county.

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

After spells as a district councillor in Laindon and Billericay, Leatherland became an Alderman on Essex County Council in 1946. An alderman was a county councillor elected by his fellow councillors, rather than by electors.

Billericay Urban District Council Election
Polling Day: **SATURDAY, MARCH 30th** 1947.
8 A.M. TO 9 P.M.

**Ward 6 – LAINDON, DUNTON,
and LITTLE BURSTEAD**

**VOTE FOR
LEATHERLAND
AND
WEBSTER**

THE OFFICIAL LABOUR CANDIDATES
(Both Local Men)

Councillor CHARLES LEATHERLAND, J.P. :

News Editor, Daily Herald.
Justice of the Peace, County of Essex.
Fellow of the Royal Economic Society.
Ex-Company Sergt. Major, R. Warwicks
Regt. (served 1914-19, awarded M.S.M. and mentioned in Despatches).
12 years resident in the Ward, at the Old Rectory, Dunton.
President, South East Essex Labour Party.
Winner of 4 National Gold Medals for Economic and Social Essays.
Chairman of Laindon and District Joint Invasion Committee.
Co-opted on Billericay Council during war, Chairman of Council's
Finance and Valuation Committees.

JOHN WEBSTER :

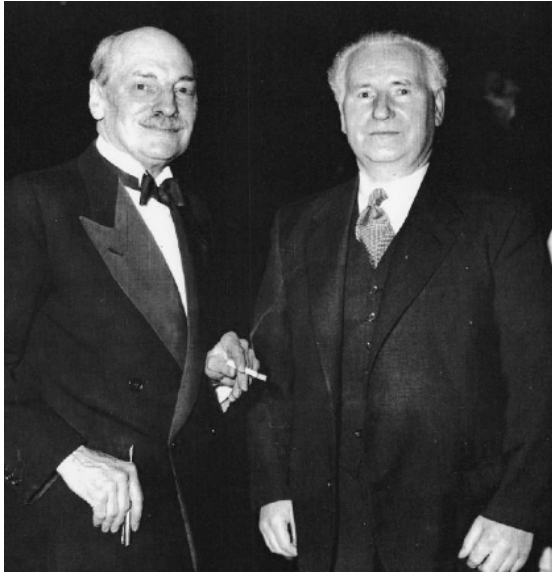
24 years resident in the Ward. Now lives
at "Braeside," Wash Road, Laindon.
Trade Unionist 37 years—National Society of House and Ship Painters.
Chairman of Shop Stewards Works Committee of Harland and Wolff,
shipbuilders and ship repairers, in London Docks, 1939-1943.
Served during first world War in Merchant Navy, and fought in France and
Belgium with the Royal Naval Division.

He was a member of the County Council for twenty-two years, fifteen of which as leader of the Labour group. He chaired the Finance Committee for several years. He was Vice-Chairman for six years and Chairman of the Council in 1960-61. He also spent 15 years as Chairman of the Eastern Regional Council of the Labour Party.

ORDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE (OBE)

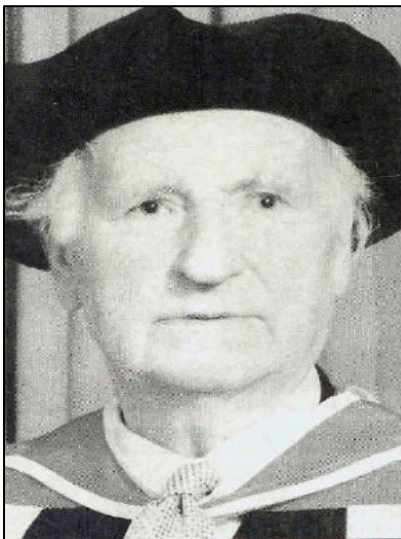
In 1951 he was awarded an OBE for political and public service.

Leatherland with Labour Party Leader and former Prime Minister Clement Atlee.



In the early 1960s the Government decided to build more universities. Leatherland campaigned energetically for Essex to be the location of one of these new universities, and he played a leading role in the foundation of Essex University. Plans for a University to be based in Essex originally began in the late 1950s. However, it was not until 1961 that the Government decided to establish a university in the county. Wivenhoe Park, on the outskirts of Colchester, was selected as a suitable site. The 200-acre park dated back to the eighteenth century.

In 1962 Dr Albert Sloman was appointed as the first Vice-Chancellor. Two years later it opened its doors to students for the first time. The first intake consisted of just 122 students studying in three schools: Comparative Studies, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences. The University's first Departments were Chemistry, Physics, Government, Sociology, Literature, Mathematics, Economics, the Language Centre and the Computing Centre. Teaching took place in the historic Wivenhoe House and in temporary huts while construction of the main campus began.



The first officers of the University were :

Lord Butler (Chancellor)

Sir John Ruggles-Brise (Pro-Chancellor)

Charles Leatherland (Treasurer)

He remained in the role as Treasurer for 11 years.

In 1973 the University awarded him an honorary doctorate.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT JOURNALISM

Leatherland wrote a weekly column in the Municipal Journal for over ten years. As a result of this, he became a well-known national figure in local

government circles.

He also wrote a series of articles on local government themes for NALGO, the local government trade union. The Leatherland series of articles were widely used by schools and colleges in the teaching of civics, and NALGO proposed to turn them into a school and college textbook, although this idea never came to fruition.

MAGISTRATE, TERRITORIAL ARMY, BASILDON, DEPUTY LIEUTENANT

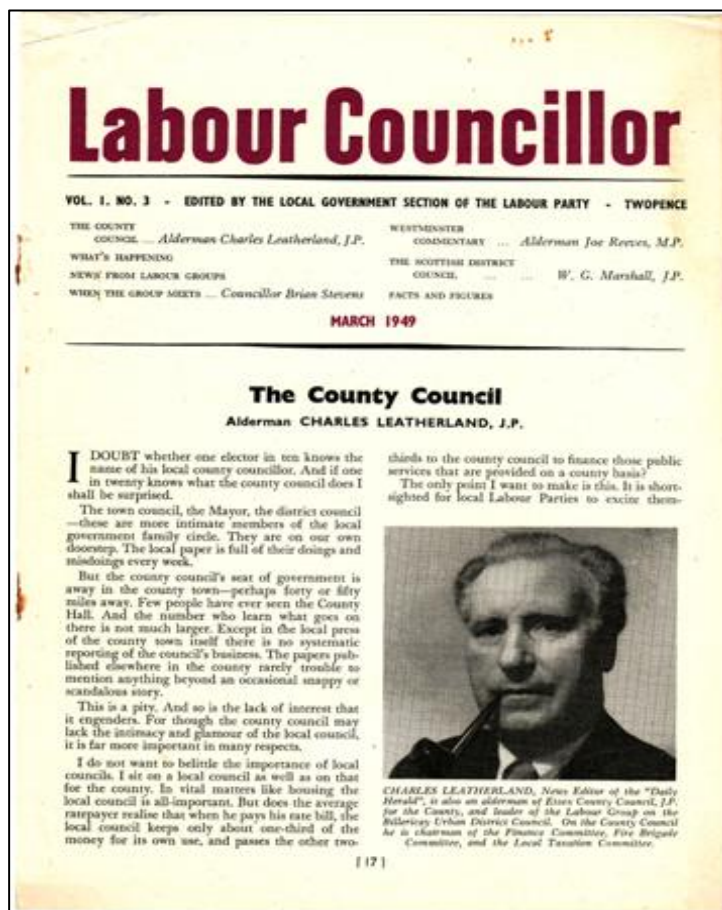
Leatherland served as a magistrate for 26 years. He became deputy chairman of the magistrates bench in Epping. He played a prominent part in the establishment of Basildon as a New Town and served as a member of Basildon Development Corporation.

He also served on the Essex Territorial Army Association for many years. He became a Deputy Lieutenant of Essex in 1963.

Charles Leatherland did more than anyone else to ensure that Essex benefitted from the creation of a new university in the 1960s. University publications describe him as its founder. He dispensed justice as a magistrate for over 30 years, and chaired the local Parish Invasion Committee during the Second World War.



At Buckingham Palace
(with Mollie and son John) for his OBE



Lord leatherheads Coat of Arms

A RETROSPECT

Sources of information

Gallantry and bravery medals and other awards are comparative rarities, and they are well documented. If the soldier you are researching won such an award, your chances of finding something about his service from the announcements are very good.

The London Gazette is the official newspaper of the State, which has existed since 1665 and is still published today. An invaluable resource for WW1 researchers, as it carried information concerning officer's commissions, honours and awards, Commanding Officers despatches and much more. An extensive index to the Gazette, as well as microfilmed copies of each publication, can be found at the National Archives. The gallantry awards were often recorded in the man's unit war diary. Local newspapers carried stories of men receiving everything from the MM upwards. Post-war, many books were published that gave whole lists of men who had received such honours. Modern researchers have added to the list in their great work on, for example, the Pals battalions – but overall the coverage is still only for a relatively few units.

A general note

While many gallantry and bravery awards were made to recognise a specific act and were granted as an “immediate” award, large numbers were granted in the New Year’s Honours and King’s Birthday Honours lists. These awards tended to be in recognition of a period of sustained gallant performance rather than a single act, and many went to those men who were not in a position to carry out spectacular acts – the unsung men of the transport, artillery, medical and veterinary services, ordnance and engineering, for example. The New Year’s Honours were listed on 31 December or 1 January, and the King’s Birthday Honours at 3 June each year. Those gazetted on 3 June 1919 are said to have been in the “Peace Gazette”, as this issue approximately coincided with the conclusion of the Peace Conference at Versailles.

These are the British gallantry awards, in increasing seniority:

The Meritorious Service Medal

This award was originally for long service or acts of particular merit; from 1916 it was also for gallantry or meritorious service when not in face of the enemy. The latter awards (“Immediate MSM’s”) were announced in the London Gazette. The recipient was allowed to use the letters MSM after their name.



16th (Service) Battalion (3rd Birmingham)

Formed at Birmingham in September 1914 by the Lord Mayor and a local committee.

26 June 1915 : came under command of 95th Brigade, 32nd Division.

Landed at Boulogne 21 November 1915.

26 December 1915 : transferred to 15th Brigade, 5th Division. Moved to Italy with the Division in November 1917 but returned to France April 1918.

4 October 1918: transferred to 13th Brigade in same Division.

16th (3rd Birmingham) Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment

16th (3rd Birmingham Pals) Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment was raised in Birmingham in September 1914 by the Lord Mayor and a local committee. After training they joined 95th Brigade, 32nd Division on the 26th of June 1915.

They proceeded to France, landing at Boulogne on the 21st of November 1915. On the 26th of December they transferred to 15th Brigade, 5th Division as part of an exchange to stiffen the inexperienced 32nd Division with regular army troops. In March 1916 5th Division took over a section of front line between St Laurent Blangy and the southern edge of Vimy Ridge, near Arras.

They moved south in July to reinforce The Somme and were in action at, High Wood, The Battle of Guillemont, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval and The Battle of Le Transloy. In October they moved to Festubert and remained there until March 1917 when they moved in preparation for the Battles of Arras.

On 7 September 1917 the 5th Division moved out of the line for a period of rest before, being sent to Flanders where they were in action during the Third Battle of Ypres. 5th Division was sent to Italy and took up positions in the line along the River Piave in late January 1918. They were recalled to France to assist with the German Advance in late March 1918 and were in action during the Battles of the Lys.

On the 14th of August 1918 the 5th Division was withdrawn for two weeks rest. Then moved to The Somme where they were more or less in continuous action over the old battlegrounds until late October 1918 and saw action in the Battles of the Hindenburg Line and the Final Advance in Picardy.

On the 4th of October 1918 they transferred to 13th Brigade still with 5th Division. At the Armistice they were in the area of Le Quesnoy and moved to Belgium to the area around Namur and Wavre in December and demobilization began.

Life Peerage On 16 December 1964 he was created a Labour Life Peer as Baron Leatherland, of Dunton in the County of Essex. He attended the House of Lords for twenty-five years and was a frequent speaker in debates. Charles Leatherland died in Epping, Essex

Charles Edward Leatherland was born in Aston, Birmingham. He was the eldest son of John Edward Leatherland, an Army bandmaster. His mother Elizabeth Leatherland (née Abbis), a blacksmith's daughter, died when he was 9 years old. He attended Harborne School, Birmingham and left school at the age of 14.

In 1914 at the start of the First World War he joined the 16th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. In 1916 he was transferred to Xth Corps headquarters where he remained for the rest of the war. He became an Acting Sergeant Major and served in France, Belgium and Germany. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. In 1919 he returned to Birmingham and worked for Birmingham Corporation. He was a founder member and Midlands Organiser of the National Union of Ex-Service Men.

In 1921 he moved to Macclesfield and became Chief Reporter and Sub-Editor on a local newspaper, the Macclesfield Courier. In 1923 and 1924 he won gold medals in an international essay writing competition organised by the London Chamber of Commerce.

Labour Party Press and Publicity Department

In 1924 he moved to London to work as Parliamentary Correspondent in the Labour Party Press and Publicity Department. He became second in command to the Labour Press Officer, William Henderson. In 1925 he wrote eleven chapters of *The Book of the Labour Party*, the first major history of the Labour Party and the Labour movement. In 1926 he played a significant behind the scenes role in the General Strike writing much of the contents of the *British Worker*, the TUC strike newspaper, including the TUC's "Message to All Workers" which appeared on the front cover of every issue.

Daily Herald

In 1929 Leatherland became a Political Sub-Editor on the *Daily Herald*. In 1938 he became Assistant News Editor. By 1941 he had been appointed News Editor. In the 1950s he acted as Night Editor and then Assistant Editor, which he combined with the duties of Political Editor. He retired from the Daily Herald in 1963.

Leatherland was also a freelance journalist. He wrote a weekly political gossip column for the *Sunday Dispatch* and weekly articles in the magazines *John Bull* and *The Passing Show*, both published by the *Daily Herald* owners Odhams Press. During the 1950s and 1960s he wrote a weekly column in the local government periodical the *Municipal Journal*. In the 1960s he wrote a series of articles on local government themes for the National and Local Government Officers' Association (NALGO), the local government trade union. These articles were widely used by schools and colleges in the teaching of civics.

Essex County Council

Leatherland moved to the Old Rectory in Dunton Wayletts, Essex in 1934. He came to play a prominent role in Essex politics. He was Chairman of the Dunton Parish Invasion Committee and made radio broadcasts for the BBC during the Second World War. After spells as a district councillor in Laindon and Billericay, he became an Alderman on Essex County Council in 1946. He served as a Labour member of Essex County Council for 22 years. For 15 years he was Leader of the Labour group. He chaired the Finance Committee for several years, was vice-chairman for six years, and was County Council chairman in 1960–61. He also spent 15 years as Chairman of the Eastern Regional Council of the Labour Party. In 1951 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for political and public service. He lived latterly at Buckhurst Hill.

University of Essex

Whilst on Essex County Council, Leatherland campaigned for Essex to be the location of a new university. He played a leading role in the foundation of the University of Essex and became its first Treasurer serving in this role until 1972. In 1973 the University awarded him an honorary doctorate.

He also served as a magistrate for 26 years and became Deputy Chairman of the magistrates bench in Epping, Essex. He played a prominent part in the establishment of Basildon as a New Town and served as a member of Basildon Development Corporation. He also served on the Essex Territorial Army Association for many years. He was appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant of Essex in 1963.

Personal life

Irene Leatherland worked at Labour Party head office at Transport House from 1947 to 1962 becoming the Party's Conference Officer. John Leatherland served in the Army and then worked in advertising. Mollie Leatherland died in 1987 at the age of 87.

Basildon Borough Heritage Society
December 2024.