

SIR ALFRED BAKEWELL HOWITT (1879-1954). C.V.O., M.A., M.D. (Cantab.), M.Ch. (Cantab.), M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Eng.), M.P. - Chairman of the Parliamentary Medical Committee.

“He was interested for many years in the ancillary services attaching to hospital care. The profession of hospital almoners had no better friend.”

British Medical Journal (1954).

Alfred ('Dutch') Bakewell Howitt (1879-1954) [Epsom College 1894-1898] was the son of Dr Francis Howitt, of Heanor, Derbyshire. At Epsom College, he was head prefect, captain of the Rugby XV, a member of both the Cricket and Hockey XIs, and winner of the Wakley Prize. He went on to Clare College, Cambridge, where he took the natural science tripos in 1901, and then to St Thomas's Hospital, as an Entrance Scholar, where he completed his medical training. He qualified M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. (Eng.) in 1905, graduated M.B., B.Ch in 1906, proceeding M.D. (Cantab) in 1912. Alfred Howitt held the appointments of senior casualty officer and resident medical officer at St Thomas's and later was resident medical officer at the West London Hospital. During the First World War he served in France as a captain in the R.A.M.C. from 1916-1919 and, on his return to England established himself as a physician in Belgrave Square.

At the age of 50 Alfred Howitt turned to political life and, in 1929, twice unsuccessfully contested Preston for the Conservative Party at the general election and a subsequent by-election, receiving each time about 30,000 votes. At the general election in 1931 he was returned as Member of Parliament for Reading, where he displaced the sitting member, Mr Somerville Hastings, previously aural surgeon at the Middlesex Hospital, by a nearly two-to-one majority. He retained his seat at the next election in 1935, but retired just before the general election in 1945. It was said of him that: "he was a strong Conservative but he worked well with the little group of medical members of all parties, and was Chairman of the Parliamentary Medical Committee (1943)."

In spite of all his political activities he pursued the work of his profession with ardour and distinction. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, and a frequent participator at the meetings of the Medical, Clinical, and Therapeutic Sections. He was the author of a thesis on Grave's Disease and a number of important papers in the medical journals. The organisation of hospital almoners claimed his special interest. He was Chairman of the executive committee of the original institute, and after its amalgamation with the Hospital Almoners Association he became President of the Institute of Hospital Almoners, as it became known. In his obituary it was said: "His addresses at its annual meetings were models of presidential utterances." In 1928 he was made a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, and knighted in the New Years Honours in 1945, for political and public services. He was also an Esquire of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. In 1911, he married the Hon. Dorothy, daughter of the first Lord Marchamley.