

CRAWSHAY, Sir GEOFFREY CARTLAND HUGH (1892 - 1954), soldier and social benefactor

Name: Geoffrey Cartland Hugh Crawshay
Date of birth: 1892
Date of death: 1954
Parent: Codrington Fraser Crawshay
Gender: Male
Occupation: soldier and social benefactor
Area of activity: Military; Philanthropy
Author: L. N. Hopper

Born 20 June 1892, son of Codrington Fraser Crawshay, Llanfair Grange, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, and great-great-grandson of the ironmaster [William Crawshay I](#). He was educated at Wellington College and spent a year at University College of South Wales, Cardiff. There followed a short apprenticeship at Cwmbran Ironworks and a period with a contracting firm. In 1914 he joined the 3rd Welch Regiment and was later commissioned to the new Welsh Guards, attaining the rank of captain. At the battle of Loos he was severely wounded and began a lifelong struggle against ill-health. Remaining with the Regiment until 1924, he founded both the Welsh Guards Choir and their rugby team which he captained. His enthusiasm for that game was evidenced by the sponsoring and promotion of Crawshay's XV which toured the west country every year and served as a nursery for young Welsh players and by his presidency of the London Welsh Rugby Club from 1924 onwards. His next interest was in politics: Liberal summer schools, the League of Nations, and several unsuccessful forays as a Liberal candidate for south Wales parliamentary constituencies. After 1930, however, he turned from active politics to social work.

Mounting unemployment in south Wales had led, through dispersed local initiatives, to a rapid growth of occupational centres and clubs for unemployed men. To provide a co-ordinated regional machinery for the guidance and encouragement of these scattered units, the South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Service was set up in February 1934. Its first Annual Report recorded 'The heavy task of establishing the machinery of the Council devolved upon Captain Crawshay, who gave practically full-time service as honorary secretary and chairman of the governing committee. These offices had to be given up in December 1934, when he became district commissioner for the special areas in south Wales, representing in the coalfield areas the national commissioners charged by Parliament with the 'initiation, organisation, prosecution, and assistance of measures designed to facilitate the economic development and social improvement' of areas 'specially affected by industrial depression'. Most important of the economic measures was the provision of new factories for renting through the agency of Wales and Monmouthshire Industrial Estates, Ltd., of which Crawshay was director, 1936-45. As district commissioner, he continued a sympathetic interest in the Social Service Council, acting as a government representative thereon. Through his influence, generous grants were made from the Special Areas Fund to extend the Council's work into new fields, including a women's club movement, more district nursing, adult education, and library rehabilitation. A keen horticulturalist, he made available Government resources for two highly successful experiments in co-operative farming which enabled a number of ex-miners to return to the land. These were managed by the Welsh Land Settlement Society, Ltd., of which he was chairman. He also chaired the rural industries committee of the Monmouthshire Rural Community Council.

Special areas activities ceased with the outbreak of war in 1939, and 1940-45 Geoffrey Crawshay served as regional controller (Wales) of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, linking central government to firms in Wales making aircraft components and equipment. In 1945 he became chairman of the Welsh Board of Health, then embarking on vital post-war reconstruction tasks, including a new health service, a large housing programme, improved water supplies, extended social services, and local government supervision. He retired from this office on medical advice in January 1952.

His educational interests, included membership of the Courts of the University College of South Wales, Cardiff, and of both the National Museum of Wales and the National Library of Wales. He gave enthusiastic attention to the National Eisteddfod and its reform, was a member of the Gorsedd under the bardic title 'Sieffre o Gyfarthfa' and until 1947 he was an impressive mounted herald bard. The University of Wales in 1953 conferred on him the honorary degree of LL.D. He was High Sheriff of Monmouthshire in 1939, a deputy Lieutenant and J.P. for the county, and a knight of the Order of St. John.

After his involuntary retirement he continued for another two years a losing battle with illness and died suddenly at a Cardiff hotel on 8 November 1954. The funeral was at Llanfair Kilgeddin church, Abergavenny. He was unmarried.

Geoffrey Crawshay touched Welsh life at many points, but to his contemporaries he was perhaps best known and most highly regarded for his generous support and encouragement of the youngster of promise in every field of interest.

Author

L. N. Hopper

Sources

Private research

Who's who?, 1947 and 1953

Western Mail, 9 November 1954

Margaret S. Taylor, *The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa Castle a family history* (London 1967)(1967)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Geoffrey Crawshay](#)

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