

## **‘The Future of Local Government’: a speech by Mr E. B. Barnard M P at the Shaftesbury Hall, Sawbridgeworth on 14 November 1907**

*Note Edmund Broughton Barnard OBE JP DL (16 February 1856 to 27 January 1930) according to Wikipedia, was a British Liberal politician, landowner and sportsman. He was an original member of Hertfordshire County Council from 1888, serving on and chairing many different committees and becoming its chairman in 1920 and an Alderman. He was chairman of the County Council's Education Committee and took a strong stand in favour of the retention of village schools, emphasising their importance to the preservation of village life. Barnard also served on Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council and was its chairman between 1905 and 1907. He died suddenly, aged 73, during a meeting of the Hertfordshire County Council, which he was chairing, on 27 January 1930 in London in the Law Society's hall.*

### **Parallels with today**

There are so many striking parallels with the way things are now, roughly 120 years on: for example, attitudes to local government and being a part of it; national versus local interests (local people know best what they need); the influence of London; ratepayers versus taxpayers; the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ syndrome; privatisation of health services; school meals; preventative medicine; construction quality of public buildings; qualities of Council candidates, etc. What interests me too, as a linguist, is the use of language, hence the numerous quotations (also to summarise his arguments).

### **Context of the speech**

According to their website, the Sawbridgeworth & District United Services Club (<https://www.sawbridgeworthusc.com/history>) was offered free use of the Shaftesbury Hall by the then Sir Edmund B. Barnard in 1921<sup>1</sup>, and it is still the home of the club to this day; though little else remains, other than the name.

It is not my purpose here to offer judgements about Barnard or his motivations. Readers can judge for themselves. Having been in local government now for six years or so, a lot of what he says resonates with me. Ostensibly, the aim of Barnard’s speech is to explain, ‘in a brief and conversational manner’, the ‘position of local government’, something the ‘average man’ has little idea of, he maintains. However, some 16 pages on, he admits that the main point of his speech is to propose who he thinks is the right man for the Urban District Council vacancy.

He writes that it is more usual to find people ‘sneering and jeering at, and rather inclined to belittle, people who take part in the parochial matters of the neighbourhood in which they live’. He doesn’t expect the ‘generally well-dressed people we meet in railway trains caring to devote time to the management of local affairs’. The sort of people who ‘require all the conveniences and everything in apple-pie order and object at the same time to the rates, obviously required, to carry out those duties’.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Peter E. Reed, *Sir Arthur Edwin Cutforth, 2019, p. 75ff.*

He poses the question: 'What is Local Government?' It mainly concerns, he says, 'the health of the people'. He divides the 'portions of Government' into three: matters of an 'essentially Imperial nature', then national and local. He makes the point that 'in the place where one happens to live the local people must know best what is essential and what is desired'. Education and the police are national matters: 'the ratepayer ought not to be called upon to pay for any of the services which essentially belongs [sic] to the nation.' Sawbridgeworth is situated very near a 'great neighbour' and the proximity of London cannot be forgotten and the 'consequences of neighbourships' must be considered always. He refers to the sale of the control of the River Lee to London companies in 1850 and 'the matter of milk'. 'London seeks to get powers to come outside London and come inside our district and police our county, a thing we are well able to do ourselves'. Boundary extension proposals mean unwelcome pressure from 'the great enormous octopus stretching out', pursuing its own interests, what is to its advantage, but not necessary locally.

He goes on to detail the substantial list of 'governing authorities' in the district, plus 198 related Acts of Parliament (he carries around with him a collation of the main Acts bound together in one book so he can quote/counter misquoted Acts) :

- County Council
- Urban Council (High Wych has a Rural District Council and Parish Council)
- Education Authority for the County of Hertford
- Local Education Committees
- Joint Hospital Committee
- Joint Police Committee
- Board of Guardians
- Assessment Committee (controls asylums)
- Quarter Sessions and Petty Sessions
- Licensing and Compensation Authority
- Conservancy Board
- Water Board
- (Many places also have a) Burial Board
- New body to carry out 'Mr Haldane's territorial scheme'<sup>2</sup>

He refers to two dangers: one of inaction if no specific act is found to justify an action (he prefers to act in the interests of the neighbourhood unless an Act expressly forbids it) and one of the limitations imposed by Parliament on what local Councils can do as administrators. A further danger comes from those who try to recall what they did five or ten years before so that they can do the same thing 'today'. Barnard prefers to tackle things as they arise and on their merits.

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia explains: The Haldane Reforms were a series of reforms of the British Army from 1906 to 1912, and named after the Secretary of State for War, Richard Burdon Haldane. The major element was the creation of an expeditionary force, specifically prepared and trained for intervening in a major war. At the same time, the reserve forces were restructured and expanded so as to ensure that overseas forces could be expanded, supplied with new recruits and to provide for home defence. The Volunteer Force and the Yeomanry were reorganised into a new Territorial Force and the Militia was formed into the Special Reserve; these latter two reforms were grouped together in the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act 1907.

Accusations against the Board of Guardians of being 'Socialistic' are made, for example providing nurses for hospitals, rather than by 'voluntary contribution'. He takes the view that the rates should bear the cost of something that is beneficial and likely to 'humanise humanity'. He is against 'Municipal trading'<sup>3</sup> and refers to 'a great and enormous company with a capital of millions and owned by a German Jew'<sup>4</sup>. He says that anything to do with health, including water, gas, 'general conveniences of life' should not be exposed to the 'temptation of profit' and should be community controlled. Regarding school meals, he believes that since the law is that 'you are to send these poor little things to schools', and attendance officers make sure they do, 'it is no good to have them sitting cold and starving and unable to take advantage of what you see to teach them inside'.

While it is good to build hospitals, he points out that it is better 'to have looked after the people, so that there is no need for them to go into hospitals or infirmaries to be cured'. The priorities should be sanitation and drainage, as the 'first condition of life' in Sawbridgeworth and elsewhere. Without these no community can be 'properly controlled or governed'.

He is for Councillors or Guardians who have a 'sympathetic belief' in their work and against the 'passive resisters' to applying the laws the Board is responding to. He goes on to talk about the County Council: created by 'the greatest Hertfordshire man that ever has been', the Marquis of Salisbury, in 1888 when he ended the system of County Magistrates. He lists a few of the County Council's responsibilities:

- County Buildings and the Police Stations
- Licenses for 'places of music and dancing'
- 'The maintenance and all the rest of it to do with lunatics'; provide lunatic asylums
- Reformatories and industrial schools
- Bridges and main roads
- Disease and Animals Act
- Riot Act
- River Pollution Acts
- Housing the Working Classes Act (pending)
- Small Holdings Act(pending)
- Isolation Hospital Acts
- Light railways, Land Transfer, Tramways, Agricultural Holdings Act
- Polling districts and voting
- Appointment of coroners

Sawbridgeworth had a County Councillor and Barnard himself was an Alderman.

He moves on to the question of funding: the Exchequer Contributions, which Disraeli consolidated under one Act, whereas in the past the town and Exchequer might split

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<sup>3</sup> There is a book called 'The Dangers of Municipal Trading by Robert P. Porter, published in 1907. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015063039336&view=1up&seq=25>; written originally as part of an intended publication with George Bernard Shaw, whose work was published as *The Common Sense of Municipal Trading* (1908).

<sup>4</sup> I'm not sure who he is referring to here in this (from our perspective now) unfortunate reference.

the costs of, for example, main roads, police pay and support for 'pauper lunatics'. The County Council received some £24,700 out of a national total of £2,880,000 (about 9 per cent); this ratio was maintained despite population changes and additional 'burdens and duties'. Accordingly, Barnard argues for a revision to the method of calculation and the amount of money passed onto the County. There follows a detailed discussion of the receipt and use of licence duties (for a carriage, gun or public house, for example) and the Agricultural Rate Grant, plus the impact of Asquith budgets.

He passes on to the Urban Council, which 'has to do with drainage, or ought or have do with it'; it looks after the water supply, supervises milk supply, looks after 'the sanitation of the neighbourhood; through its medical officer; 'the highways, scavenging, the bye-laws and all that sort of thing'. The bye-laws, he says, are 'always a great trouble'; people think they should not be too 'stringent' but he quotes the example of an asylum in London which burned down with many people still in it. It was built 'of a substance undesirable...of a substance which was altogether wrong'.

He complains about the Education Rate of 9d in the £ and quotes as an example a County School Board District which produced 1800 scholars over 10 years, 1450 of whom left the county, it being a 'monstrous thing' for that 'little community' to 'have a charge upon its rates and upon itself for that which undoubtedly tended to be for the benefit of and other part of the community'. He mentions the Hospital Board and the lack of the 'best building and up-to-date hospital', while having a 'first-rate disinfecting apparatus' (unclear what that means). He criticises the Joint Police Committee, which regulates police matters, in conjunction with the Home Office, from the point of view of 'public policy and principle'; it lacks appropriate representation as a body spending ratepayers' money.

He goes on to mention the Board of Guardians and the Assessment Committee, as a member of both, plus the adoption of the Bishop's Stortford Union principle of assessment. He concludes that what is needed is a 'wholesale revision of the question on rating and taxation'; to get rid of the various assessment authorities in Hertfordshire. There could be five different values on a single house: Poor Law valuation, Borough Rate valuation, County rate valuation, Tax or Inhabited House Duty Valuation and Land Tax valuation. Further, he wants to see the consolidation of all the 'other grand monuments of sanitation and all the conditions of the people' into one Public Health Act; and the 'combination and consolidation 'of the Poor Law Acts and Orders to bring them in line with the present day.

Finally, he comes to the point of his speech: namely to settle on the right man for the Urban District Council vacancy, while accepting that 'there are as good fish in the seas as ever came out of it'. We need to go to the fishmongers and see 'what the goods are that are offered and contemplate our own particular tastes'. There are three candidates: Mr Bunten, he says, would be the right man for 'a 'licensed victuallers' meeting' or a 'smoking concert'; however, he believes the electors 'can do their own smoking and drinking'. Mr Grant would be ideal if 'it was a question of sending some one to dine with the German Emperor or to attend the King's Levee or the Queen's Drawing Room'. He would be good for 'a great financial transaction involving large sums of money'. However, it is a question, rather, of managing 'the affairs of a little

community which does not want any risks or speculation'; someone who 'knows the requirements and necessities of the neighbourhood'.

In that context he goes on to talk about the work of the Board of Guardians: according to the Inspector of the Local Government Board, the Bishop's Stortford's Union Workhouse compares favourably with any in the country. This has been achieved by the Assessment Committee's management, using their 'business knowledge' to keep 'our poor and give them inside that place better accommodation and treatment'. The Bishop's Stortford Assessment Committee's system of assessment had, he says, saved the County Council 'many thousands of pounds'.

He refers to the 'Blue Book' published by the Local Government Board, which published details of the Unions in Herts and Essex, i.e. Ware, Hertford, Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford. Bishop's Stortford had the lowest rate of 1s 2d. Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council separated from Hadham District Council seven years before, because they thought their interests were 'more of town and more urban in tendencies' and they thought it 'was not suitable to have little rural parishes' controlling them. An application for 'urban powers' was made in 1901 and Barnard made a speech in support of it. At the time they estimated the District Council rate at 2s in the £; in fact, it went from 1s 11d in 1902 to 2s for 1908. Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council had the lowest rate in the county. or in Essex. He points out that this was no accident. but the result of a 'general policy' and 'carefully thought out methods'. He links this to the case for appointing Mr Riches, the third Council candidate. While he is not 'especially distinguished or brilliant' he is 'something a great deal better-he is an honest man'.

Thus the proposal is: 'That this meeting of electors of Sawbridgeworth heartily supports the candidature of Mr Ralph Riches for the vacancy on the Urban District Council, and pledges itself to do everything in its power to return him at the top of the poll. (Applause). '

*Source: 16-page booklet found with a box of issues of the Congregational Church 'Courier' magazine. The full booklet is to be found on our website in the Archive section. See also Douglas Coe's article on the Barnard family: <https://www.sbwhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Meet-the-barnards-douglas-coe.pdf>*