

**Atkins, P.J. (1985) Sir William Price (1865-1938) milk retailer and wholesaler, pp 769-71 in Jeremy, D.J. (Ed.) *Dictionary of Business Biography* vol. 4 London: Butterworths**

William Price was born in the parish of Llanwrtyd Wells, near Brecon in 1865, the sixth of at least nine children born to William Price, a farmer and his wife Magdalene. Little else is known of his background or early education. His migration to London in the early 1880s followed a well-worn path trodden by generations of other Welshmen of similarly humble rural origins. The milk trade was their introduction to the harsh realities of city life, but at least it was a familiar employment in an otherwise alien environment. When he first came to London (he and his wife, whom he married in 1885, became members of the Welsh Presbyterian Church in Shirland Road, Paddington, in 1886) William Price found himself staring at the premises of the famous Aylesbury Dairy Co in St Petersburg Place, but lacking the courage to go in and ask for a job. He later had the unusual experience of buying the Aylesbury for United Dairies, and using those same offices as his headquarters.

Rather than risk rebuff by the prestigious Aylesbury Dairy Co, Price decided to set up a business on his own. He bought a small retail dairy in West London and, helped by his wife, he was able to build up wholesale custom also. Eventually he joined John Hopkins as a partner in Great Western & Metropolitan Dairies, which in 1915 was one of the firms to join the new United Dairies combine. William Price was the moving spirit behind the subsequent merger of several large London retail milk companies with United Dairies, which in 1917 gave it a quasi-monopoly over London's milk trade.

William Price had a genius for friendship; he had friends in every walk of life, and his contacts and ability to communicate his ideas were of assistance throughout his career. He was confident, assured and determined, and acquired the nickname of 'the General' in the trade. His formidable organisational abilities were enhanced by the delegation of everyday details to his assistants and by his forthrightness in business dealings.

These various qualities of character and personality were tested to the limit during the First World War when the need to supply London with milk had to be balanced against the demand for milk products by the Forces in France. Price helped to organise collections of milk from small producers all over the country whose supplies had hitherto not been called upon for town consumption. In those years he was never far from the telephone and regularly worked a seventeen-hour day. During the General Strike of 1926 he repeated the exercise and, as chairman of the London Milk (Emergency) Committee and London's milk controller, was second in command to Wilfred Buckley (1873-1933) as Emergency Milk Commissioner at the Board of Trade. Price organised a milk pool in Hyde Park and kept the milk flowing at a time when it might otherwise have been thought that the intricate structure of the city's supply must inevitably break down.

He was knighted in 1922 for services to the nation's milk industry and in 1923 500 people attended a dinner to celebrate (he honour. His contribution to the various trade organisations was energetic. He was a president of the Metropolitan Dairymen's Benevolent Institution (Incorporated), a delegate at the foundation of the National Milk Publicity Council in 1920, an initiator of the United Dairies Benefit Society, a president of the National Federation of Dairymen's Associations, and a leader of the distributor's side of the Permanent Joint Milk Committee, formed in 1922. His bitter disappointment was the failure of his National Scheme for the Sale and Purchase of Milk, first recommended by the Permanent Joint Milk Committee

in June 1929. This scheme was never put into operation because of the opposition of vested interests in the trade.

He was a JP for London (1916). From 1901 he was an elder of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in Shirland Road, Paddington, and later its treasurer. In 1912 he was instrumental in clearing the debt of £42,000 burdening the denomination's churches in the London Association. He had residences in Cambridge Gardens, North Kensington, and Church End, Finchley, where he retired after ill-health forced him to leave active business after 1929. His work was continued by his sons Ivor and Tudor. Sir William Price died on 16 April 1938, leaving £48,165 gross.

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