

Sir William Price (1865-1938), pp 325-26 in Matthew, C. (Ed.)(2004) *New Dictionary of National Biography, volume 45* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Price, Sir William (1865-1938), milk retailer, was born in Llanwrtyd Wells, Brecknockshire, the sixth of at least nine children born to William Price, a farmer, and his wife, Magdalene. His origins were humble but, like many emigrants from south Wales he was able to turn his rural skills to good effect in the dairy industry of London. Energy and organizational ability hastened Price's promotion until eventually, as Sir William, he dominated the world of milk retailing and wholesaling.

Price first came to London in the early 1880s, and on 23 March 1886 married Sarah Harries (b. 1862), of Llanwrtyd, with whom he had two sons, Ivor and Tudor, and two daughters. Lacking the confidence to approach one of the large companies such as the Aylesbury Dairy Company for employment, he decided instead to set up a small business of his own. He purchased a retail dairy in west London and prospered sufficiently to add a wholesaling function, before joining John Hopkins as a partner in Great Western and Metropolitan Dairies. In 1915 Price was responsible for the formation of the United Dairies wholesale combine (comprising Wiltshire United Dairies, Dairy Supply Company, F. W. Gilbert Ltd, and others) which soon expanded into retailing and very substantially changed the face of the London milk trade.

Price was a networker with a very wide circle of friends and contacts. His confident and determined character, coupled with his remarkable communication skills made him quite formidable. Concerned first and foremost with the broad, strategic, and often controversial issues, he delegated the everyday details to assistants, earning the nickname of 'the General' in the trade. His courage and resourcefulness 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 overseas. Price's contribution was to organize the collection of liquid milk from an army of small producers all over the country who had hitherto been butter or farmhouse cheese makers, drawing them into the ambit of urban supply for the first time. The geography of dairying was fundamentally restructured as a result. Price was knighted in 1922 for services to the nation's milk industry.

Ironically the wartime shortages later turned to peacetime gluts and precipitated the crisis which eventually required legislation to create the Milk Marketing Board. This might have been avoided if Price's brainchild, the national scheme for the sale and purchase of milk, had been accepted in 1929. The smooth supply of milk to the capital was always Price's prime concern and during the national strike of 1926 he was a combative chairman of the London milk (emergency) committee and London's milk controller. He organized a milk pool in Hyde Park and kept the milk flowing.

Price played a prominent role in the various dairy trade organizations. He was president of the Metropolitan Dairymen's Benevolent Institution, a delegate at the foundation of the National Milk Publicity Council in 1920, an initiator of the United Dairies Benefit Society, president of the National Federation of Dairymen's Associations, and leader of

the distributors' side of the permanent joint milk committee. He was also a justice of the peace, treasurer of a small Christian mission in Notting Hill, and for a large part of his life deacon of a Welsh Presbyterian church in Paddington.

In the early 1930s ill health forced Sir William's retirement from active business. He died at the Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway, on 16 April 1938 aged seventy-three, after an operation for an inflamed appendix. He was survived by his wife and sons.

P. J. Atkins

Sources P. J. Atkins, 'Price, Sir William', *DBB* + B. Davies, 'Sir William Price', *The Milk Industry*, 18 (1938), 35-6 + *The Dairyman, the Cowkeeper and Dairyman's Journal*, 60 (1938), 312-13 + *The Times* (18 April 1938), 12 + *WWW* + B. Davies, 'Sir William Price', *Our Notebook* [house magazine of United Dairies Ltd], 18 (July 1938) + *Brecon and Radnor Express and County Times* (28 April 1938) + *Dairy World*, 47 (1938) + Burke, *Peerage* + A. G. Enock, *This milk business: a study from 1895 to 1943* (1943) + Kelly, *Handbk* + A. Jenkins, *Drinka pinta: the story of milk and the industry that serves it* (1970) + B. Morgan, *Express journey, 1864-1964* (1964) + P. J. Atkins, 'The milk trade of London, c.1790-1914', PhD diss., U. Cam., 1977 + d. cert. + m. cert.

Likenesses photograph, repro. in Davies, 'Sir William Price', 35 Wealth at death £48,055 18s. 3d.: resworn probate, 27 May 1938, CGPLA Eng. & Wales