



The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

RAB BUTLER (1902 - 1982)



Richard Austen Butler, 1st Baron Butler of Saffron Walden, was generally known as Rab. He was possibly the most experienced UK government minister never to have become Prime Minister.

Butler was born in India into a distinguished upper middle class Essex family, the son of a career civil servant. In 1926 he married Sydney Courtauld, a member of the Essex textile family. Following Sydney's death in 1954, he married Mollie Courtauld, the widow of Sydney's cousin.

Butler became involved in politics whilst a student and then a don at Cambridge University, being elected as Member of Parliament for Saffron Walden in 1929. He

served as MP from 1929 to 1965 for this constituency which covers around half of the Hundred Parishes. Rab Butler was a senior member of several Conservative governments. He was responsible for the 1944 Education Act which reformed the state school system and university admission. He went on to serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1951 to 1955 under Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden, Home Secretary from 1957 to 1962 under Harold MacMillan, Deputy Prime Minister from 1962 to 1963 under MacMillan, and Foreign Secretary from 1963 to 1964 under Alec Douglas-Home.

After retiring from Parliament in 1965, Butler declined the offer of an hereditary peerage but accepted a life peerage as Baron Butler of Saffron Walden. He was appointed Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, a role he actively enjoyed for 13 years. He also served as Chancellor of the University of Essex from 1966 until his death.

Rab Butler generally lived outside his constituency, although for a while he lived at Church Hall, Broxton which in more recent times functioned as Whitehall Hotel before conversion to residential accommodation. Baron Butler is buried in Saffron Walden in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin. The nearby Lord Butler Leisure Centre was opened in 1984 and named in his honour.

Further information:

Rab: Life of R.A. Butler, Anthony Howard

The Art of the Possible - Memoirs, RA Butler

Rab Butler, A Short Life of Lord Butler of Saffron Walden, Jeremy Collingwood

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