

Henry Crundwell - First Chairman of Southborough Urban District Council.

By Maxwell Macfarlane

Location of plaque – 27 Holden Road, Southborough.



Henry Crundwell was born in 1819 at “Roseville”, now No. 27 Holden Road, Southborough. He was educated at Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks and, except for a period of apprenticeship at a large and celebrated tannery in London to qualify him to succeed his father, and his grandfather before that, in the family tannery business, he spent virtually his whole life in Southborough.

He became a successful farmer and hop-grower. He set up adult evening classes, and many tradesmen owed their first knowledge of reading and writing to this voluntary agency. For over 23 years he was a Sunday School teacher. He became secretary to the Reading Room and Library, in connection with which he started a music class. He also occupied the post of organist and, by dint of great energy, actually formed a brass band in about 1840, finding the money to buy the instruments.

He married his wife on 30 June 1842 and they had two daughters.

In 1863 he was appointed churchwarden of St Peter’s Church, Southborough, and continued to hold the post under no less than six vicars, until his death.



In 1871, Southborough adopted the Local Government Act, and Henry Crundwell was the Returning Officer at the election on 1 April. Five days later the first Local Board meeting was held. As Returning Officer, Henry Crundwell was not allowed to stand for election but a vacancy occurred and he was unanimously appointed a member of the Board on 12 April 1871. Sadly, the Board did not work well together and they resigned as a body after only three years.

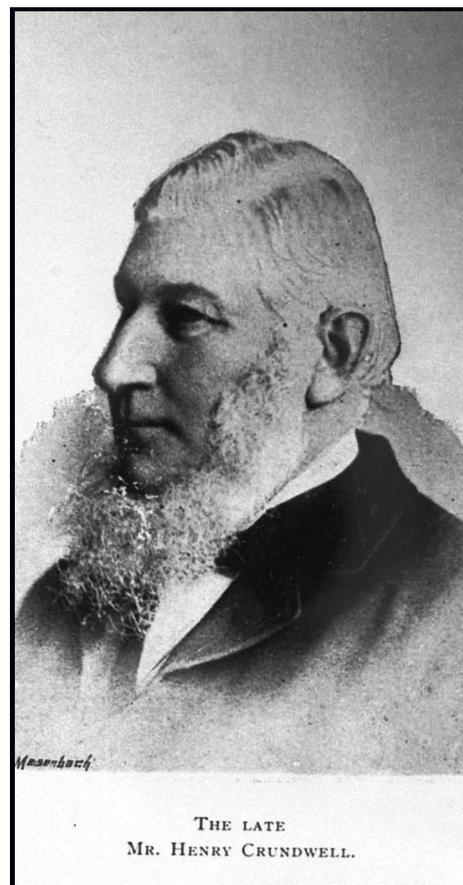
A new Board was formed on 16 April 1875 and Henry Crundwell was elected Chairman, a daunting post because there were six or seven actions pending against the Board and, as no rates had been collected for seven months, there was no money. Mr Crundwell generously provided funds to meet the demands on the Board. Land was bought for an irrigation (sewage) farm, and a new water supply was established, as a result of which the local death rate halved.. In 1887, Southborough embraced High Brooms, and an expansion of the Town saw the addition of 15 miles of new streets. A fever hospital was set up, a Fire Brigade was formed and the private gas works in Speldhurst Road were bought from Sir David Salomons.

For at least a generation Henry Crundwell was the unofficial Town Mayor and when the Southborough Urban District Council was formed in 1894, he served as its first Chairman until 1897.

Henry Crundwell established the Provident and Benefit Society, he was a member of the School Committee for nearly 30 years, chairman and treasurer of the Provident Coal and Clothing Society, a member of the Burial Board from its creation, a governor of the Holme Charity, a member of the committee of the Science and Art classes and of the committee of the Reading Room and Parochial Hall and a delegate for Rural Dean conferences. He was also *ex officio* a Justice of the Peace.

Eventually, as Council responsibilities grew, he decided that the time had come to withdraw from local government, and did so on 15 April 1897.

He died on 18 November 1899, aged 80 years, in the house where he was born and lived all his life. As someone said at the time of his funeral, he had borne the affairs of Southborough on his shoulders like a modern Atlas.



The current Mayor of Southborough, Cllr Nicholas Blackwell unveiled the Society's commemorative plaque at Henry Crundwell former home in November 2013.