

Alderman Paul Harriott

1933-2024

Biography

Paul Harriott was born on the Isle of Sheppey in 1933, before moving to Medway in 1939

He performed his National Service as a sapper with the Royal Engineers and upon leaving joined Chatham Dockyard as a professional and technical officer¹ with the M.O.D².

He was the longest-serving councillor in Medway,³ having first been elected in 1962 before standing down in 2015⁴.

He was described as a highly-respected veteran socialist and former Labour group leader.

He represented the people of Twydall for 52 years, fighting their corner on a range of issues and in particular, housing needs in what was a deprived area.

As chairman of the housing committee, he oversaw the building of hundreds of homes, the construction of sheltered accommodation and the refurbishment of properties to meet decent homes standards.⁵

In April 2021, during Covid, he wrote to Prince Charles asking for frontline workers to receive medals in recognition for their efforts during the pandemic.⁶

Extract from the report to Council 15 October 2015

Special Council 15 October 2015 Ted Baker and Paul Harriott –
Conferment of Title of Honorary Aldermen Of The Borough

Personal history of Paul Harriott and contribution to Medway Council

Born on the Isle of Sheppey, Paul has lived in the Medway since 1939, coming out of National Service as a Sapper with the Royal Engineers and joining Chatham Dockyard as a technological officer.

First elected to Gillingham Borough Council in 1962, Paul has represented the Twydall community continuously since 1973.

¹ Evening Post - 16 March 1973, p.3

² <https://rft.org.uk/2024/in-memory-of-paul-harriott/>

³ Medway News, 24 April 1998, p. 40

⁴ <https://www.kentononline.co.uk/medway/news/calling-it-a-day---34534/>

⁵ <https://www.kentononline.co.uk/medway/news/former-mayor-and-community-stalwart-dies-aged-91-306325/>

⁶ <https://www.kentononline.co.uk/medway/news/amp/prince-charles-asked-to-support-covid-medal-245159/>

When the news of the closure of Chatham Dockyard was announced, the political parties came together and Paul was part of a delegation to see the Defence Secretary, John Nott.

Housing issues have always been at the heart of Paul's interests, and during his 50 years in local government, he served as Chairman of the Gillingham housing committee where he oversaw the building of hundreds of homes, the construction of sheltered homes and the refurbishment of properties to decent standards.

Paul has served as a governor of Danecourt School and continues to be a governor at St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School – both the schools being located in Twydall.

Paul also served as Mayor of Gillingham Council for the period 1974-1975 and as Labour Group leader on that Council during the 1980s, as Vice-Chairman of Medway Towns Council between 1997-98 and on a variety of committees. Notable among these are his time as Chairman of the Housing Sub-Committee between 1999 and 2000 and as Vice Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee between 2001 and 2003. Paul has also been the Labour Group Spokesperson on the Licensing and Safety Committee and the Licensing Sub Committee continuously from 2001. He has also served as a member of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 2007 to 2015. Paul has also served for 30 years on the Rochester Bridge Wardens Trust, serving as Junior, Senior and Assistant Warden, representing the interests of the community which he continues to do.⁷

Public roles

- Labour councillor for Twydall (first elected 1962)
- Vice-Chairman of Gillingham Labour Party (1973-
- Chairman of the Labour Club (1973-
- Mayor of Gillingham - 1974-1975
- Labour group Leader of Gillingham council (1980s)
- Junior Warden of the Rochester Bridge Wardens Trust (1988-89) serving as Junior, Senior Warden of the Rochester Bridge Wardens Trust (1989-90)
- He also served as an Assistant Warden of the Rochester Bridge Wardens Trust.
- Vice-chairman of Medway Towns Council (1997-98)
- Chairman of the Housing Sub-Committee (1999-2000)⁸
- Labour Group spokesperson on the Licensing and Safety Committee and the Licensing Sub Committee (2001-2015)
- Vice-chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (2001-2003)
- Member of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee (2007-2015)
- Governor of Danecourt School in Gillingham

⁷ <https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=28636>

⁸ <https://www.kentononline.co.uk/medway/news/former-mayor-and-community-stalwart-dies-aged-91-306325/>

- Governor at St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School in Twydall.
- Made an Alderman in 2015 after standing down

Notable contributions to Medway and its communities

Campaigning to keep green spaces for his constituents

- In 1968 he campaigned, in support of a petition of 100 signatories, to keep green space at Cornwallis Avenue used as a play area from being handed to the golf club, depriving children of a play area he described it as *“an act of vandalism”*.⁹
- In 1969 he campaigned to keep the green space in what was then the pedestrian precinct from becoming a car park; *“The green area down there is irreplaceable – it is basically a question of money versus amenity. It would be an act of vandalism to continue with this plan.”*¹⁰

Campaigning on housing

- In a 1970 Election Briefing he stated that *“No family council houses have been built in Gillingham for three years, and there's a complete lack of facilities — shops, medical, health. It took fifteen years to get a child welfare centre for Twydall estate. How long will other areas have to wait?”*¹¹
- In 1971 Gillingham agreed a *“£1 million plan to modernise 217 council houses... when the Mayor, Councillor Paul Harriott, used his casting vote to support the scheme.”*¹²

Constituency safety

- In 1973 he arranged a night-time “moonlight patrol” to check the safety of streetlights at night, passing on a survey of faulty lights to the Borough Surveyor¹³
- In 1976 he supported resident’s concerns about the dangers of traffic conditions on Beeching’s Way following fatalities¹⁴
- In 1977 these protests continued for a pelican crossing on Beechings Way, *“This is only a skirmish. We have lost only a battle, not necessarily the war.”*

Young people

- In 1977 he expressed concern that *“...the cost of hiring pitches these days is pricing some youngsters out”*, following representation from Twydall Tornadoes football team.

Community

- Helped found The Nye Bevan Memorial Hall in Twydall

⁹ Kent Messenger, 19 April 1968, p.13

¹⁰ Kent Messenger, 5 September 1969, p.3

¹¹ Evening Post, 6 May 1970, p.6

¹² Evening Post, 18 December 1974, p.7

¹³ Evening Post, 22 November 1973, p.31

¹⁴ Evening Post, 12 July 1976, p.4

- The Rochester Bridge Trust set up the Harriott Engineering Scholarship in his name to support local people at the start of their engineering education to honour his 40 years' service as a Trustee.
- He was an active member of the Korean Veteran's Association
- He advised the Rochester Bridge Trust on the Rochester Bridge Refurbishment Project - 2019-20

Criticism of Council

- The aldermanic system is wrong. *"It's the biggest barrier to progress,"* Mr. Harriott said. *"Some aldermen have never been on the doorstep to find out what the voters want for years and years. They sit with godlike authority on their shoulders, but they haven't been chosen by the people and they're out of touch."*¹⁵

¹⁵ Evening Post, 6 May 1970, p.6