

In May 2021, I was privileged to be elected as Deputy Mayor of Bexhill. So far, I have loved the role, discovering that the life of a Deputy Mayor is always enjoyable, sometimes challenging, but never dull. One of the most rewarding aspects is the opportunity to meet so many different and interesting people. The schedule is very varied even though events do not always turn out as anticipated. Cake sales can turn into food markets, garden parties into dance classes, thank you speeches into historical research!

And so it was that, as part of my duties, I arrived at the Colonnade on Bexhill seafront in September 2021 dressed in full regalia, ready to give a surprise speech of thanks to a lady whose organisation of a social group in East Sussex has brought about friendship for many and helped to avoid isolation during the lockdowns.



The tide was out, the weather was sunny, and we all immersed ourselves in the joy of living in such a beautiful coastal town. Once I had completed my deputy mayoral duties, I took the opportunity to chat to everyone present and enjoy their company. A gentleman cautiously approached me and asked if I was the Mayor. “No” I joked “I am not that important. I am just the Deputy Mayor” “I’m only asking” he said “Because my great uncle was a mayor of Bexhill in the 50s. His name was Claude Pycroft. Have you heard of him?”

I turned my Deputy Mayor badge round and showed the man the inscription on the back. “You mean this Claude Pycroft?” I asked.



We were both silenced by the co-incidence.

I now know that the gentleman who had approached me was Nigel Perry, great nephew of Claude Pycroft. He and his wife live in Yorkshire, but had travelled to Bexhill for a short break. If I had not, on that occasion, chosen to wear my robes and hat for my Deputy Mayor duties, I doubt he would have spotted me.

On his return to Yorkshire Nigel very kindly emailed me with some details about his great uncle, and with the help of some other people interested in local history, including the current Town Mayor, Paul Plim, I began to find out a few more details about Dr Claude Pycroft, known at the time as the 'medical mayor'. Here is a brief history of the man whose name is engraved on the back of my badge.

Claude Pycroft was born on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1881 in Surrey but grew up in Rochdale. The family which included his mother and father and sisters emigrated to South Africa in 1893. His father was a dentist. Claude wanted to study medicine and matriculated at the South African College School in 1901. His younger sister, Nigel's grandmother, Edith Gertrude decided to study medicine as well. Claude was a bright student and was awarded five medals. He was also awarded the Conan Doyle prize for the most distinguished South African student graduating in medicine at Edinburgh.

Both Claude and Gertrude qualified in 1906. Gertrude returned to South Africa in 1906 but Claude remained in Britain. Claude received his Freedom of the Borough of Bexhill in 1962.

After qualifying Claude entered general practice in Hertfordshire and then moved in about 1913 to South Elmsall in Yorkshire where he was involved with the Warde-Aldam Hospital as resident surgeon. He worked there for 23 years.

Claude married Marian Yates from Cleckheaton in West Yorkshire in 1907.

1907. Marriage solemnized at <u>S<sup>t</sup>. John's Church, Cleckheaton</u> in the parish of <u>Cleckheaton</u> in the County of <u>York</u>								
Columns. No.	1 When Married.	2 Name and Surname.	3 Age.	4 Condition.	5 Rank or Profession.	6 Residence at the time of Marriage.	7 Father's Name and Surname.	8 Rank or Profession of Father.
2	February 12 <sup>th</sup> 1907	Claude Sylvanus Pycroft	25	Bachelor	Physician & Surgeon	23 Hokeride Street Bishops Stortford	James Thomas Pycroft	Dental Surgeon
		Marian Yates	31	Spinster	—	Brook House Cleckheaton	Henry Yates	Card Manufacturer

Married in the above Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England or after burns by me,  
 This Marriage was solemnized between us, Claude Sylvanus Pycroft in the Presence of us, Henry Yates - William Burridge  
Marian Yates Mary Ellen Yates William Burridge  
 Vicar

It is believed that he and his wife moved to Bexhill in about 1936. He served as Mayor of Bexhill from 1949 until 1951.

Tragically Claude's wife, Marian was killed in a motor accident in 1959 while Claude was driving. This had a profound effect on him. He surrendered his driving licence and never drove again. His wife was commemorated on a plaque at a bus stop shelter near Glenleigh Park in Bexhill. You can still see the plaque today, tucked under the eaves of the wooden shelter which Claude Pycroft donated to the town.



I leave the final words to his great nephew, Nigel, who was obviously very fond of his great uncle.

*“Claude was a polymath and could have deep conversations on any subject from sport to music to politics. I knew him from his arrival in Cape Town until his death in Grootte Schuur Hospital in 1969 from a heart condition. I was very attached to him as I found him such a fund of information. I was interested in hi-fi and music at the time and aged 15 or 16 he took an interest in my endeavours. Claude was not one for small talk and regularly fell asleep at family gatherings when chat became too frivolous or reminiscent!  
He will always be remembered.”*



RIP Dr Claude Pycroft 1881-1969