

= Hugh Mason =

Hugh Mason ( 30 January 1817 ? 2 February 1886 ) was an English mill owner , social reformer and Liberal politician . He was born in Stalybridge and brought up in Stalybridge and Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne until he entered the family cotton business in 1838 after a seven year period working in a bank . Having originally opposed trade unions , Mason became a paternalistic mill owner , creating a colony for his workers with associated facilities and ensuring that they experienced good conditions . During the Lancashire Cotton Famine of the 1860s he refused to cut workers ' wages although it was common practice .

Mason became the first Liberal to be elected councillor for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne in 1856 . He was mayor of the council from 1857 to 1860 and retired from local politics in 1874 due to conflict with his own party . Mason returned to the Liberals in 1878 when he stood for election as Member of Parliament for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne . He was voted in and supported progressive policies , which included women 's suffrage , making him unpopular within his own party . He was MP from 1880 to 1885 . When he died in 1886 , aged 69 , Hugh Mason had amassed £ 290 @,@ 933 ( now about £ 17 million ) .

= = Early life and business career = =

Hugh Mason was born in Stalybridge , Cheshire , on 11 May 1817 and christened there . He was the youngest of four children of Thomas Mason , a former textile manager , and Mary , the daughter of John Holden , Esq . The family had moved to Stalybridge from Derbyshire in 1776 . After working as the manager of a mill in Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne , Thomas established his own business in 1815 in partnership with James Booth and Edward Hulton at Currier Slacks Mill in the town . Rapid growth in their enterprise saw them expand into the Bank Mill and Royal George Mills in the 1820s and Albion Mill in the 1830s . At the age of 10 , Hugh was working in the mill , and his education consisted of attending Methodist Sunday schools in Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne and Stalybridge and spending three years at a private school in Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne .

After leaving school at the age of 14 , Mason got a job with the district bank while he attended night school in his spare time . He worked there until 1838 , when he left at the age of 21 to join the family 's cotton business . He became the driving force behind the business . The business thrived : by the early 1850s the Mason family had built two state @-@ of @-@ the @-@ art cotton mills in the Ryecroft area of Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne , known as the Oxford Mills . He was able to purchase Groby Hall , in Ashton , the ancestral seat of the former Lord Greys of Groby .

In 1845 , to house the workers for the mills , Mason began construction of a " workers ' colony " . The colony not only provided 150 terrace houses ( housing an estimated 691 people in 1872 ) but also leisure facilities such as a library , a swimming pool , a gymnasium , and a reading room . Mason built up what he saw as a model industrial community , and according to Mason himself , the annual death rate was significantly lower than in the rest of Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne . Residents were expected to adhere to his strict moral code and he discouraged the use of public houses . He estimated that establishing the settlement cost him around £ 10 @,@ 000 and a further £ 1 @,@ 000 per year to maintain ( about £ 600 @,@ 000 today and a further £ 60 @,@ 000 to maintain ) .

Under Hugh Mason 's leadership , the company prospered . The number of mule spindles in use at the mills increased from 20 @,@ 000 in 1846 to 75 @,@ 000 in 1887 . His two brothers , Henry and Booth , also worked in the company until retired in 1848 and 1853 respectively . Their father remained active in the company until 1860 when he retired , leaving Hugh as the sole owner . The Manchester Cotton Company was set up in 1860 and Mason 's success in the cotton industry led him to become its chairman from the beginning until its winding up , which began in 1864 , but was not concluded until 1867 . The purpose of the company was to increase the number of producers of cotton ; this was important as the American market was closed off during the American Civil War , causing the Lancashire Cotton Famine . Mason served as President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce from 1871 to 1874 , and came to hold interests in the Bridgewater Canal Navigation

Company , the Midland Railway Company , the Mersey Dock Board , and various other coal and iron companies .

Having initially opposed trade unions and factory legislation , Mason changed his mind around the 1850s regarding how workers should be treated , believing that the welfare of the employees impacted on the welfare of the employer . He became popular among workers for such things as becoming the first local employer to give his workers Saturday afternoons off . During the Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1861 ? 1865 he refused to cut workers ' wages as was common during the period . He stated :

I will keep my work people employed , and if there is no work , lend them money from my own pocket rather than have them apply for relief . The poor rate is only 1s 6d in the pound . I will pay as high a poor rate as the Poor Law Guardians deem necessary .

As well as this , he contributed £ 500 ( about the equivalent of £ 30 @,@ 000 today ) to the Ashton borough cotton famine relief . During the tumultuous 1870s and 1880s , Mason kept his workforce fully employed and continued to invest in his mills . By 1884 , wages in his mills were 25 % higher than they had been in 1870 even though his employees were working fewer hours . The Manchester Guardian noted :

Hugh Mason is one of the first amongst those wealthy manufacturers of Lancashire who devote the hours which are not occupied by business to the service of their fellow men . He has been accustomed to take a leading part in the various public improvements , and he has long been a political chief . At Ashton he is unpopular : the ruggedness which mars his virtues , and the self assertion which stamps his conduct , do not invite the affection of his fellow . Although he has done more than any other millowner on securing the physical and social well @-@ being of his employees , he is not highly esteemed . He has built for his workpeople admirable cottages , swimming baths , gymnasiums and lecture halls , but beneficent acts do not suffice to secure popularity unless there is a suavity of manner and sympathy of nature in the benefactor , and these are qualities which Mr Mason lacks . Mr Mason is a staunch liberal , and is reckoned to be one of the oracles of the local party . His figure is a familiar one at free trade meetings where the citizens of Manchester never fail to receive him with the utmost enthusiasm . The working men hail his appearance with tempestuous applause , and invariable reward his rhetorical efforts with frequent and deafening cheers .

= = Political career = =

= = = Local = = =

Hugh Mason was influenced by his father 's Liberal politics and strongly opposed to injustice and prejudice . Thomas Mason was a supporter of political representation for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne and supported the repeal of the Corn Laws . In the early 19th century , the area was poorly represented in Parliament . The major urban centres of Manchester , Salford , Bolton , Blackburn , Rochdale , Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne , Oldham and Stockport ? with a combined population of almost one million ? were represented by either the two county MPs for Lancashire ( or the two for Cheshire in the case of Stockport ) . By comparison , more than half of all MPs were elected by a total of just 154 voters . These inequalities in political representation led to calls for reform and eventually the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 . Hugh said of his father that " To his life of honest industry , to his example of commercial probity , to his high Christian character , to his training , of me in my early years , to his wise counsels , I owe under God my position in society . "

Although he claimed he was reluctant to enter politics , Hugh Mason became the first Liberal elected councillor for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne in November 1856 . He represented the Portland Place ward from 1856 until his retirement from politics in 1874 . Mason quickly made an impression and was elected mayor for three consecutive years between 1857 and 1860 , which had never happened before . He supported progressive measures such as opening a public park , providing public libraries , and addressing unsanitary conditions in parts of Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne .

Mason 's policies led him to come into constant clashes with the Conservative members of the council . He was not always popular within his own party either and he even financed his own newspaper , the Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne News , to convey his views and provide competition for the pro @-@ Liberal Ashton Reporter . Conflict with the Liberals drove Mason into early retirement from local politics in 1874 at the age of 57 .

As well as being a councillor , Mason was also elected a local magistrate for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne in 1857 . During his time in office he had to deal with the bread riots of 21 ? 22 March 1863 ( caused by the cotton famine ) and the Murphy Riots in May 1868 . The Murphy Riots were anti @-@ Catholic demonstrations , fueled by Fenianism ( an Irish nationalist organisation ) , across Lancashire led by William Murphy . He personally went to one mob during the Murphy Riots to read them the riot act face @-@ to @-@ face . He was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of the County Palatine of Lancaster on 21 June 1862 . Such was his significance in Manchester he was appointed President of the Chamber of Commerce for two years from 1871 . At the same time he was a Governor of Owen 's College in the city . Mason was appointed a member of the Board of the Mersey Docks and Harbour .

= = = National = = =

Mason , along with a group of other Advanced Liberals supporting John Morley , the gladstonian , was one of the founding members of the Reform Club in Manchester , a political club founded in 1867 for Liberals and their supporters . Despite retiring from local politics because of conflict with the Liberals , by 1878 he was back in favour and Liberal councillors were encouraging Mason to stand for parliamentary election . Although he was a popular candidate , he was initially reluctant to put himself forward . However , he stood for Parliament in the 1880 General Elections . His campaign in March and April 1880 involved vitriolic attacks on the local Conservative Party and on 3 April 1880 he was elected MP for Ashton @-@ under @-@ Lyne , beating his opponent , John Ross Coulthart , by 2 @,@ 966 votes to 2 @,@ 586 .

As an MP he lived at 33 Onslow Square , Kensington , and was a member of the Reform Club . Mason supported many reformist bills and became a spokesman of the Women 's Suffrage Association in 1881 . He proposed motions for women 's suffrage in 1881 and again in 1883 but was defeated on both occasions . He led the women 's suffrage movement until 1883 when illness forced him to retreat from public life temporarily . His defeat in the 1885 General Elections was ascribed to his support of William Ewart Gladstone over the issue of Irish Home Rule and to his illness . He lost to the Conservative John Wentworth Addison by 3 @,@ 152 votes to 3 @,@ 104 . Mason demanded a recount , but this increased the majority by one vote ; he succumbed to illness and died before the result was announced .

= = Personal life = =

In 1846 Hugh Mason married Sarah Buckley , the daughter of Abel Buckley , Esq , who was also the father of Abel Buckley Businessman and MP , another cotton mill owner who went on to be a millionaire businessman and landowner . They had one child , Arnold , who was born in 1851 . Sarah died in 1852 at the age of 29 . Mason next married Sarah 's sister , Betsy , though it was illegal to marry one 's sister @-@ in @-@ law in England at the time . To overcome this problem they married in Denmark on 7 June 1854 . Their marriage was approved by special licence from the King of Denmark and was held at the Evangellic Reform Church , Altona in the Duchy of Holstein . They had four children : Bertha , born in 1855 , Edith in 1857 , Rupert in 1859 and Sydney in 1861 . Betsy died after the birth of Sydney and Mason then married for a third time Annie , daughter of George Ashworth , Esq , of Rochdale in 1864 .

Hugh Mason died three days after his 69th birthday on 2 February 1886 at his home , Groby Hall . At his death , he had amassed a fortune worth £ 290 @,@ 933 ( now worth about £ 17M ) . He was the first person to have a statue ( now protected as a Grade II listed building ) erected in his honour in Tameside ; it was financed by public subscription immediately after Mason 's death .

