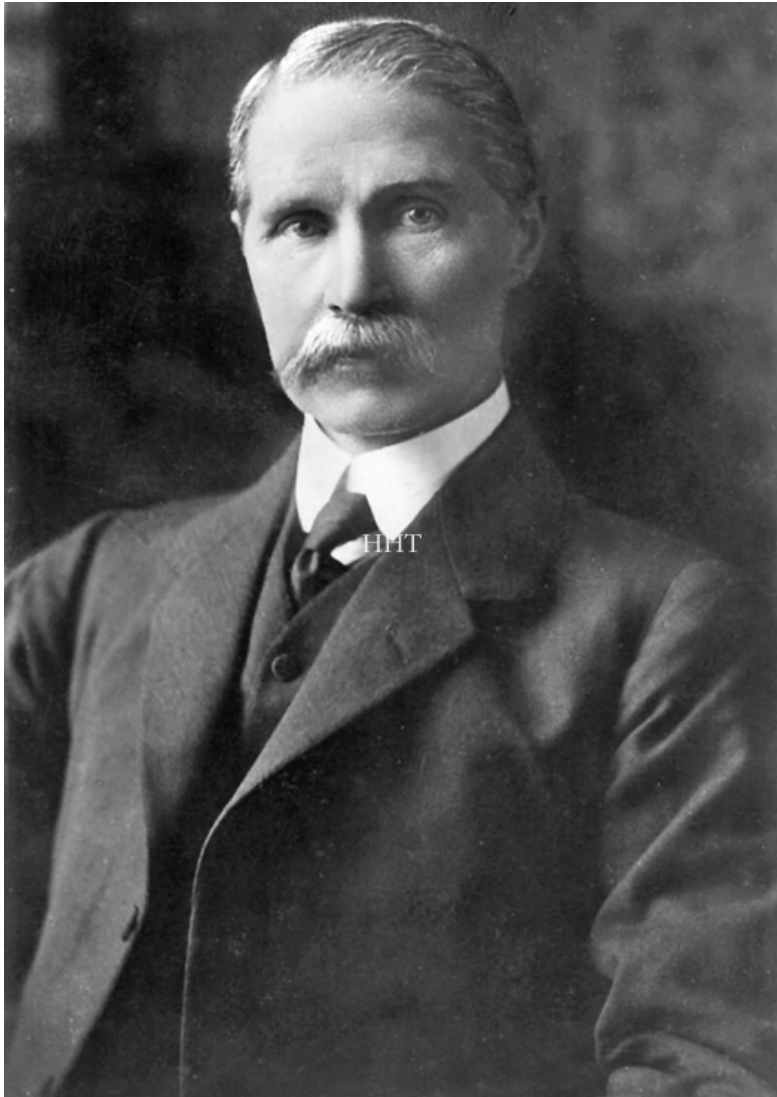


Helensburgh's Prime Minister

Written by Donald Fullarton - Last Updated Monday, 06 April 2015 17:52



HELENSBURGH has always prided itself that a Prime Minister came from the burgh, despite the fact that he is known as “The Unknown Prime Minister”.

A Conservative, the Rt Hon Andrew Bonar Law MP occupied 10 Downing Street for just 209 days in 1922-23, succeeding the much better known Liberal, David Lloyd George, who had served from 1916-22.

A man of endearing modesty — who once said “if I am a great man, then a good many great men of history are frauds” — he was a popular Prime Minister until ill health forced him to retire in May 1923, and he died six months later.

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The Andrew Bonar Law story began in Rexton, a small village in eastern New Brunswick, Canada, where he was born on 16th September 1858, the youngest of five children, and he also had two younger half-sisters.

His father, the Rev James Law, MA, was a Scottish Free Church minister, his mother Elizabeth a member of the Kidston family of rich merchant bankers which has played such an important part in Helensburgh's history.

Tragedy struck for the first of several times in his life when his mother died in childbirth when he was only two.

He worked as a boy on his father's smallholding until, at the age of 12, he went to live with his mother's Kidston cousins in Helensburgh, where their family home was the now demolished Ferniegair. The following year his father died, and around 1909 his son had a stained-glass window erected in memory of his father in Ballywillan Church, Portrush.

Educated at Gilbert Field School, Hamilton, and for three years at the High School of Glasgow, he left school at 16 and went to work at Messrs William Kidston & Sons, iron merchants, where he remained for 12 years, and also attended Glasgow University night classes which gave him an interest in politics and debating. He learnt debating skills at the Glasgow Parliamentary Debating Association.

At the age of 27 he was a man of simple tastes, a Sunday School teacher at the West Free Church and voracious reader who enjoyed tennis, golf, chess and those great pastimes of students, billiards and darts, and he served on the first committee of Helensburgh Golf Club and was one of the founding members of Helensburgh Lawn Tennis Club.

At the same time he was trying to make his fortune as a partner in a Glasgow firm of iron merchants, William Jacks & Co., Mr Jacks being a neighbour in Helensburgh.

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