

COUNCIL
22 NOVEMBER 2017
(7.15 pm - 7.41 pm)

PRESENT The Mayor, Councillor Marsie Skeete,
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Judy Saunders,

Councillors Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Mike Brunt, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Tobin Byers, Charlie Chirico, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, Stephen Crowe, Mary Curtin, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Ross Garrod, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Edith Macauley MBE, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Oonagh Moulton, Ian Munn BSc, MRTPI(Rtd), Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, David Simpson CBE, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Gregory Patrick Udeh, Jill West, Martin Whelton and David Williams

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kelly Braund, Fidelis Gadzama, Jerome Neil and Linda Taylor OBE.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH (Agenda Item 3)

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition to speak on the Motion.

Councillor Alambritis-

Thank you Madam Mayor

It gives me great pleasure to move accordingly

That, by virtue of the power vested in it by Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council does admit the late Reverend Andrew Wakefield as Freeman of the London Borough of Merton in recognition of the substantial contribution that he

made over many years to the borough's religious and spiritual life; and for his extensive civic service and charitable work.

This honour is bestowed on the late Reverend Andrew Wakefield in recognition of his role in Civic Life to the South London Industrial mission and the key part he played in the formation of the GLA Civic Forum which he himself chaired. The Reverend Wakefield also chaired Merton Chamber of Commerce and he played a critical part in setting up the London Inter-Faith Forum. He was also chair of the Safer Neighbourhood Board and actively involved in the Police's advisory body. These roles led to a request that he chair the Merton Partnership Community Plan for Merton. Recently, the Reverend Wakefield served as Borough Dean and Roehampton University awarded him an honorary doctorate of divinity for his 30 years of service to Merton.

We are joined today at this special meeting by the right Reverend Doctor Richard Cheetham, the Bishop of Kingston. Bishop Richard knew Andrew from school; they were in the same year at Kingston Grammar School. Bishop Richard worked very closely with Andrew's ministry. The Bishop of Kingston is responsible for supporting the Church of England's work across South-West London, from Kingston to Waterloo, an area which includes this borough, our borough of Merton. The Archdeacon of Lambeth Simon Gates and the Area Dean of Merton Bruce Rickards are also here tonight, testament to the high regard Andrew was held in by all his colleagues in the Church. Bishop Richard makes this tribute to Andrew: "Andrew's ministry exemplified a vital part of the ethos of the Church of England, namely a deep commitment to serve the whole of the Community for the common good. From the basis of his profound belief in the justice of the love of god and his regular prayers at St Andrew's Church he developed an extraordinary ministry supporting many different community groups and causes". Bishop Richard continues "the depth of the impact of his ministry was evidenced by the large number of people and organisations attending his funeral. He was a real one-off character who did things in his own unique way. He combined a sharp intellect and a sense of humour with a deep Christian faith and passion for justice and really did care deeply about the community, especially in the borough of Merton". Bishop Richard concludes "He was a fine example of the love and deep tradition in the Church of England of working tirelessly for social justice and the common good".

One cannot help but be moved by that tribute.

There are of course other tributes to Andrew Wakefield from the Order of Service. With your indulgence I would like to read out a few of them.

Wimbledon CND: "Andrew Wakefield was a loyal supporter of our efforts to secure a world without war and an end to weapons of Mass Destruction."

Christian Muslim Forum: "Andrew was a pioneer of enduring friendship between priests and imams, churches and Islamic centres over many years in Merton he modelled new ways of sharing Civic leadership".

Andy Fairburn, Faith in Action: “Andrew Wakefield was involved in the setting up of Faith In Action, using his innovative skills to get the drop in for homeless people started.”

Audrey King, Humanists UK: “Over the years it was a pleasure working with Andrew on the Faith Community Forum and on the preparation and taking part in the Holocaust Memorial Day event”.

Diana Sterck, Merton Chamber of Commerce: “Andrew used his powerful combination of intellect and influence to make changes in our community. He leaves a lasting legacy in the business, faith and community sectors that make us proud that he was our chair.”

Steve Wallace, Borough Commander: “Andrew was a passionate and long term supporter of Merton Police and always keen to improve the Borough’s partnership approach to community safety and reducing crime.”

The tributes and the records show this outstanding contribution by Andrew Wakefield to the life of this Borough and a richly deserved admission to the role of the freeman of the London Borough of Merton. I know Andrew would be delighted with the company he is joining as freeman of this Borough. On the political front he is with and Danny Connellan and Alan Jones both spanning the political spectrum. On the sporting front, he is with Virginia Wade and Andy Murray, at the top of his game, which is of course not the case for Crystal Palace, I’m sad to say, and I know Andrew would have enjoyed that joke.

Finally, I so move that the Late Reverend Andrew Wakefield follow in the footsteps of the aforementioned and is made Freeman of the London Borough of Merton.

Councillor Mouton-

I’m very proud to have the opportunity to second this motion and I know I speak for many of us in saying that I’m just saddened that we are conferring this honour on the late Reverend Doctor Andrew Wakefield posthumously. But we all know how much he loved Merton and the Freedom of the Borough would have meant a lot to him. How honoured he would have been, if he had been here in person to receive it and I know his friends and family are here to do that on his behalf.

I’ve led tributes to Andrew on previous occasions and there is so much to say about such an all-encompassing character. Many of us have known Andrew for years and I was always impressed by his boundless energy and enthusiasm for everything that he did for our community and his devotion to improving the lives of Merton residents by making the voluntary sector in Merton, the very best that it possibly can be. The list of organisations that he has been involved with and represented, both in tributes and here tonight is extraordinary and there’s a huge number in this public gallery led by Bishop Richard and that’s testament to his dedication and hard work.

I probably got to know him best in my mayoral year in 2010/11 when he was omnipresent across the borough, attending Mayoral and charitable events, chairing

meetings and wearing so many hats that the fact that he was a vicar seemed secondary to all his other commitments and I know that others felt the same and at times indeed he appeared more mayoral sometimes than our actual mayor.

He took to social media with gusto and I know I'm not alone in missing his tweets and the friendly banter on Twitter and Facebook; his updates on his dog Darcy and his musings on a plethora of topics from the sports which he loved and to favourite brands and of course his favourites; Bruce Springsteen and his favourite football club.

To this day, he leaves a gap in our Borough that remains extraordinarily hard to fill. There is indeed no more fitting an award to bestow on the late Reverend Doctor Andrew Wakefield than the Freedom of the London Borough of Merton. It gives me great pleasure to second this motion.

The Mayor then invited the following Members to speak on the Motion.

Councillor Southgate-

It's entirely fitting that we are meeting tonight to award the title of honorary freeman of the Borough of Merton to Reverend Doctor Andrew Wakefield a year after his sad and untimely death, because for all practical purposes he exercised that freedom during his life, with his involvement in so many aspects of our boroughs life and activities to the great advantage and benefit of us all. He played a leading role in so many bodies that I won't attempt to list them. What that meant in practice though, was that it was difficult to attend a meeting without finding Andrew there! If he was there he didn't just nod along with the consensus. His contributions could be challenging, sometimes provocative, but they brought a different perspective to there that was always worth considering. His verbal style was an integral part of his larger than life personality. In my life as a ward councillor I learned to be grateful to Andrew for his active role in promoting the Inter-Faith forums, building good relations with the two muslim communities in my ward; the Ahmadiyya Mosque and the Morden Islamic Community Centre. He was also instrumental in setting up Faith in Action, a practical effort to support growing numbers of homeless to which all faiths contribute.

I last saw Andrew when I met him coming out of his home in Hartfield Road. He was very excited to have been awarded the honorary doctorate of divinity by Roehampton University, chiefly for the splendid robes he would be wearing for the ceremony and we have that picture here tonight. He richly deserved that accolade and if it came with added glee, then so much the better. Making him an honorary freeman of the Borough after his death is no more than he deserves after all he did during his active life amongst us here in Merton.

Councillor Kirby-

In 1998 when I was Mayor, I held a conference on homelessness, an topic the faith groups had suggested was a big issue for them. I set up a steering committee and Andrew agreed to be on it. From that Merton Faith-in-action homelessness project was developed. Andrew was Chair for a while. The project is thriving and operates a

drop-in two days a week in Merton for large number of homeless people with volunteers from many different faith groups as well as no faith.

When Andrew died one of his charities that received donations from his funeral attenders was Faith in Action – a project that was very dear to his heart.

Andrew and MVSC's Chris Frost (late) were a tour de force in Merton. An amazing team making a real difference to people's lives.

Andrew, for me, was Mr Merton, with his finger in so many pies. No-one deserves the honour more than him for his massive commitment to this borough and the many groups he supported in his time here.

Councillor Williams-

Freedom of the Borough has usually been for long serving councillors or MPs. Andrew was none of the above which makes this award so special. He was a special member of our community, and he gave his life, quite literally, to the welfare of others. He joked about his Bishop would be surprised how he found time to attend his parish duties, but the Bishop as we know was an old friend from school days. Andrew's personality and drive were as well known to Bishop Richard as to each of us and we all have our own special memory of how he touched our lives and that of the community he served in so many different capacities. Like the Holy Spirit he believed in, he was everywhere. Only perhaps when I was privileged to lead the Council, and subsequently as Mayor, did it really dawn on me just how many times Andrew turned up in different guises, even occasionally in a suit and tie, or a dinner jacket and black tie. If there were introductions he sometimes mentioned that he was there in more than one role and we all laughed. But when he bought a home to retire to just behind the Civic Centre, it seemed evident to me that conventional retirement would never beckon. It was not foresight just a hunch, but few of us would have thought his service would end as suddenly and as sadly as it did. This award is the highest honour we can bestow to mark exceptional service to the Borough, but Andrew was an exceptional man, and even in death he deserves this accolade in his memory.

Councillor Makin-

Andrew had so many hats I was constantly surprised how he managed to juggle them all. I worked with Andrew in turning around the fortunes of the credit union. There was no direction at board meetings so I recruited Andrew to the board where he saw for himself the disorganisation, bullying, intimidation and power struggles which were going on. After a few months Andrew and I got the board moving in the right direction. Once Andrew became chair, another hat, things started to move forward. There were a number of problems; relationships between the board and the manager, financial stability of the credit union, in fact the credit union needed £10,000 immediately to stave off bankruptcy and a further £100,000 in reserves. Andrew and I provided the 10k as a loan and Andrew told the PRA where the £100k was going to come from. The PRA were quite sceptical but said "good luck, you've got six weeks". Much to the surprise of the PRA, Croydon Council stumped up

£100,000 as a loan. There were conditions imposed by Croydon. A new manager was recruited by Andrew and I, the name was changed to but Andrew was to remain as chair of the board. The credit union is now on a sound financial footing and going from strength to strength. This is just one example of Andrew's tireless work on behalf of the community. He didn't want to see the credit union go to the wall so he put his hand in his own pocket. I can't think of anyone more qualified to become Freeman of the Borough.

Councillor Holmes-

If you and the public gallery will forgive me I'm going to talk a little bit more personally about my experiences of Andrew and I would ask those of you who knew him better than me and that will be many of you, bear with me for the first few comments and wait for the second few comments. I first met Andrew at Wimbledon Community Forum about six years ago and I walked through the door and this man approached me and he was shouting. At first I thought he was shouting at me and that I'd done something wrong then I realised he wasn't actually shouting at me, he was shouting at Darcy his dog and after a little while I realised after a few years I realised why Darcy might have been trying to scarper and have a few moments peace from Andrew. That evening a fatal mistake occurred early in the meeting which is that Henry Nelless who many of you will know and who was chairing the meeting, gave the microphone to Andrew, and I don't think he got it back again for the whole meeting and woe betide anybody who tried to speak before Andrew had brought the microphone to them but what was then funny was after someone asked a question, Andrew would proceed to answer the question, normally by explaining which Committee it is that he chaired which panel he chaired that empowered him to answer this question, and this was my first introduction to Andrew.

More recently, we at my church St Marys, Wimbledon, we had been without a vicar and Andrew came and took several of the services. For those of you who don't know what the eight o'clock service at St Marys Wimbledon is like, I can tell you that I started going there at 17 with my grandparents and I was the youngest member of the congregation by far and I'm now 44 and I'm the youngest member of the congregation by far! So, the eight o'clock service at St Marys, they're not used to being shouted at, they're not used to a vicar who refuses to use a microphone and who stands at the altar and shouts. The only time he didn't stand at the altar and shout was when he came forward and stood at the lectern and shouted but it was certainly a shock to the eight o'clock parishioners at St Marys Church.

The reason I'm saying these things is because Andrew had an incredible impact on my life and I try to be, as we all do, a good person, in my case I try to be a good Christian, but it's a journey and it's not a very easy journey and with apologies in advance to the Bishops and the vicars who are here this evening, their role is to set us an example as to how we should lead our lives. What I found amazing about Andrew was the example he set me and I can't speak for anyone else, but the example he set me is of a normal person. By embracing his eccentricities and all his foibles and all the things that made Andrew Andrew, he set me an amazing example and he showed me that the God I believe in and that he believes in, can actually love us all and it doesn't really matter what we're like, and it doesn't really matter where

we come from and it doesn't really matter what our faults are and I'm certainly full of faults. Andrew showed me in the way he lived his life that actually anybody can aspire to be a bit better and anybody can hope that God loves them. I've waited for some time to be able to pay my personal tribute to Andrew and I just wanted to share with everyone what an impact he had on my life. Eccentric in his own way, argumentative – we always had something to argue about; anytime I met him he would listen to what I said and then immediately take the opposite view, regardless of whether he believed it or not. But I do want to pay my tribute to him and to thank him because by being Andrew, by being so normal, by being one of us, by being like the rest of us, he certainly showed me the way and I'm very grateful for that and I'm surprised but I will say this too; it's a year later and I still miss him, and that's the effect that he had certainly on my life.

Councillor Draper-

At Andrew's funeral the most poignant things I think that were said about him was that Andrew didn't feel he was loved or even that he was loveable, because nothing could be further from the truth. We all know that Andrew could be pretty annoying at times, but he got things done across the board and without any expectation of personal recognition. Wherever things needed sorting out or propping up; secular or religious, Andrew was there, making sure things worked, taking the initiative and acting as a spokesperson for Merton. My biggest dealing with Andrew were around a tiny part of his huge portfolio; The Wandle Industrial Museum and I know that the loss of his dynamism as well as his pragmatism has made a giant hole in that small group of immensely dedicated people who keep the museum going and who count themselves as his friends, as well as for the officers who deal with them, and for me, because I miss him, I really do. Merton is a poorer place for his loss. For a man who always wanted to be right, and lets face it who usually was, in this at least he was wrong. He was loveable, he was loved and he truly deserves this honour.

The Mayor then called for a vote on the Motion and reminded the Council that under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, it requires more than a two thirds majority of Members passing the motion for the Honorary Freeman to be bestowed.

The vote was carried, unanimously.

The substantive resolution was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That, by virtue of the power vested in it by Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council does admit the late Reverend Andrew Wakefield as Freeman of the London Borough of Merton.

This honour is bestowed on the late Reverend Andrew Wakefield in recognition of the substantial contribution that he made over many years to the borough's religious and spiritual life; and for his extensive civic service and charitable work.

In particular, Reverend Wakefield was an active member of the South London Industrial Mission and he chaired a number of bodies including the Greater London Authority's Civic Forum, Merton Chamber of Commerce, Merton Partnership's Community Plan and the Safer Neighbourhood Board. He played a critical part in setting up the London Inter Faith Forum and was actively involved in the police's advisory body. Recently, the Reverend Wakefield served as Borough Dean and Roehampton University awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Divinity for his 30 years of service to Merton.