

Philip Baudins

(1884-1896, 1899 - 1905)



1900's
Silver Gelatin Print
31 x 47cm

Mr Baudains' political career began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He stood unsuccessfully as a St Helier Deputy in 1879 but this failure did not thwart his political ambitions. In 1881 he was unopposed in the election for Constable and proved so popular he was later elected for a further four terms. As Constable his responsibilities were to the people of the parish, he had to administer parish finance, poor relief, approve street improvements and act as the head of the police force. Earlier in the twentieth century the Constable's Court was held every morning at the Town Hall, Mr Baudains had the power to send people to be prosecuted or to let them off with a warning, and for this reason his legal knowledge was highly valued. In his time he personally interviewed over 2000 arrested people to decide whether or not they should be sent to court, or released with a caution. Through all of these duties and responsibilities he earned the reputation of "the people's friend" because of his approachable, sympathetic and kindly nature, especially his attitude to the poor.

Many of Philippe Baudains' achievements were established in his earlier time in office towards the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless he was the man responsible for the introduction of ballot voting to the States (in 1891), opening the 'new' markets in Halkett Place, planning the dredging of the harbour, limiting imprisonment for debt to a year, helping launch the railway service from St Helier to Corbiere and opening the Public Library and the States Chamber. The brass tablets at the head of the Assembly room in the Town Hall, showing past Constables and the dates they were sworn in to office, were also the idea of Mr Baudains.

In his first term in office he boldly attacked the Seigniorial rights that still presided in the Island, but his attempt failed, meeting with strong opposition from opponents with vested interests in the status quo. Mr Baudains was actually a Seigneur himself, of the Fief de Boutevillion, a title he ultimately relinquished and gave the benefit to the poor.

In 1886, a year after re-election, Mr Baudains resigned as Constable due to ill health. Possibly under the assumption that his political life was over, the Island commissioned a bronze bust to commemorate his services. It was unveiled on September 23, 1897 and as G.R. Balleine points out, this was rather "unusually" constructed within Mr. Baudains' own lifetime.

The ceremony to unveil the statue was attended by several Island dignitaries, including the Bailiff, as well as many wellwishing parishioners. The service included a thirteen verse poem entitled 'A Philippe Baudains, Pour L'inauguration de son Buste' by A. D. Chamard which celebrated Mr Baudains' career and the pride the Town felt in giving him such a tribute.

Following the presentation a seven course banquet was held at the Royal Hotel in Mr. Baudains' honour.

After his (first) retirement, the Bailiff spoke of the Constable's "*indelible mark on the records of the States*" and he said that "*several of the most important laws had been due to his untiring energy*". (23/09/1897)

Three years later Mr. Baudains' health had recovered. By March 1899 he was elected Deputy of St Helier and by June of the same year had regained his old position of Constable. Newspapers at the time of the Constablenesship election prove interesting reading. The Jersey Weekly Press was supporting Mr Baudains' opponent, Edmund Toumlin Nicolle, who was seen as young, new and innovative. It wrote;

"We had supposed that when a remarkable work of art had been placed on the Parade, Mr Baudains had bidden adieu once and for all to municipal life; but it seems that his farewell performance was like unto that of many a public singer who makes a final bow on the stage as a prelude only to making another one at some future period" (June 17, 1899)

However the voters did not agree. Apparently wanting to have some continuity into the next century Mr Baudains received 770 votes, with a majority of 327, to Mr Nicolle's 443.

In 1902 Mr Baudains' leadership was contested by Dr. A.C. Godfray who was proposed by previous constable candidate E. T. Nicolle. The Jersey Times (2/7/1902) records that the main argument against the Constable was the fact that he "*had persistently opposed the introduction of the English language*" at a time when the other British colonies were "*manifesting in every possible manner their loyalty and devotion to the crown of England*". Also the controversial issue of the Wharfage Bill which had been proposed by the Constable a year before as an alternative to harbour dues was raised. It was seen as an unfair tax on visitors and despite the concerns of his constituents at the time Mr. Baudains abstained from voting when it was raised in the States.

The Evening Post (c. April 1901) published an eight verse poem that was an adaption of Lewis Carroll's 'Through the Looking Glass'. The first verse read;

The Jurat and the Constable were walking hand in hand

They wept like anything to see the tourists come to land

"If we could make them pay" they said, "it would be grand"

The poem goes on to discuss the unfairness of the tax, describing how public opinion was greatly against it, the efforts of two Deputies who were futilely trying to stop it and how the Constable was, unwittingly, scared all of the tourist away.

The Constable defended his actions with regards to the Wharfage Bill. He had been the proposer in the first place and claimed that his vote against it would not have made a difference. In the same speech Mr Baudains told how he was the member who had proposed the Married Woman's Property Act and if he were re-elected he would push it through the States. He also hoped the electorate would remember that he had been heavily involved in the development of the quarrying industry in the Island.

In this 1902 election, Mr Baudains received 725 votes and Dr. Godfray achieved 577, giving Mr Baudains a majority of 151.

“Dr Godfray therefore under the circumstances need not regard himself as disgraced, for that 577 voters out of a total of 1300 should have declared themselves dissatisfied with Mr Baudains’ former methods of conducting public business is matter for renewed and confident hope that the principles of progress will eventually prevail even against strongly entrenched personal interests” – Jersey Times (c. 5/6 August 1902).

The adaption from ‘Through the Looking Glass’ was certainly not a unique case of altering literature from popular culture to fit into local political life. An eleven verse poem entitled ‘The Story of the Dauntless (?) Three’ was published in the Evening Post, June 20, 1902 from a poet calling himself ‘The Bard’. It included the characters “Old Phil” (P. Baudains), his opponent “The Doctor” (A.C. Godfray) and the dauntless three “Toulminius” (E. T. Nicolle), “Ted Binetius” and Bass Lemestrius (deputy J. Le B. Le Maistre).

Also an amusing read (although rather unflattering to Mr Baudains) is *“The Chronicles of St. Hilarius”* which was presented in three editions of the Evening Post at the end of June and early July 1902. The tale begins;

“It was some 20 years ago that a certain Sir Philip de Baldwin was summoned by the people of St. Hilary to be their chief; and being a man of great subtlety and persuasiveness of speech he ruled for many years doing many eccentric things”.

The other characters included “Sir Henry Le Vavas seur”, “Sir Nicolas de Toulmine” and “Sir Alfred de Godefroi”, all of whom are depicted as knight-like heroes of the Town.

An interesting link to the local art world is that it was Mr Baudains who helped a fourteen year old Edmund Blampied get a job at the Town Hall. Whilst Blampied worked in this position, as an apprentice to the Town Architect, it was the Constable who suggested that he take lessons in drawing. It is said that a caricature of Mr Baudains drawn by Blampied (around the 1902 election) helped get the artist noticed by a local businessman who offered help getting him into an art school in London.

The Jersey Museum Archive holds several other particularly funny political satire cartoons from c.1902 (by Edmund Blampied) all of which are slightly more sympathetic to Mr Baudains. These include a drawing that depicts Dr Godfray trying to remove the bust of Mr Baudains in the Parade and replace it with one of himself. Another picture shows the great Mr Baudains, with three of his rivals, “Wraynouf”, “Nicoal” and “Godfray” as tiny moles.

In 1905 Mr Baudains celebrated being Constable of St Helier for 21 years and the Parish workers had decorated the Town Hall for the occasion. On the corner of the Town Hall, between Seale Street and York Street, there was a large portrait of Mr Baudains draped in flags and rosettes in the town colours (which were then red and white). The Paid Police force presented him with an engraved cup as a token of gratitude for his actions as ‘Mayor’.

Mr Baudains remained in office until his defeat in the 1905 election where he lost to Mr. Percy Aubin. He is often remembered as one of the great Constables the Parish of St. Helier has had despite, at times, the hostility of the press. Nevertheless after his defeat the newspaper wrote;

“To have filled a public office, and especially one so onerous as that of Mayor of a town of some 30,000 inhabitants, for 21 years, speaks volumes for the popularity of our esteemed constable”.

To mark his (second) retirement Mr Baudains was given a large retiring banquet and presented with an autograph book of all those men who were present.

The memorial constructed for Philippe Baudains in 1887 still stands in the Parade gardens. The four inscriptions on the granite pedestal are in English and French, celebrating Mr Baudains’ services to his country. The statue records just fifteen years of service as “Mayor of St. Helier”, but by the time he finally left office, Philippe Baudains had been head of the Parish for twenty one years.