

**Baron Citrine of Wembley**  
**Motto: *Pro recto labora* ('Strive for right')**



Not many people today will have heard of **Walter McLennan Citrine** (1887-1983), though he was one of the greatest trade union and Labour statesmen of the twentieth century and lived in Wembley Park from 1935 to 1973. Fewer still appreciate that in accepting a peerage in 1946 for his public work, he 'honoured the town in which he has lived for many years by assuming its name as his title'. This was how *The Wembley News* of July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1946 described it. So it is time that we honoured his memory.

Citrine was born in late Victorian Liverpool and grew up there, a city which was much disturbed by deep industrial unrest in Edwardian Britain (they had a general strike in 1911). It was probably this troubled environment which brought him into the Labour Party and trade unionism. After a decade of deep involvement in the tough industrial relations of Merseyside as the District Secretary of the Electrical Trade Union (ETU), he would go on to become the top union official in the country as General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress from 1926 to 1946. At the same time, he was President of the powerful International Federation of Trade Unions from 1928 to 1945. In these national and international capacities, he had dealings with five Prime Ministers— particularly Winston Churchill during the war and who regarded him as the most important union leader at the time. In the late 1920s and '30s, Citrine was one of those who through the unions got the Labour leadership to oppose appeasement and support rearmament to face the Fascist danger. With another former leading union colleague, Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour and National Service, they led the workers of Britain in giving their all for freedom and democracy. That was why the trade union movement emerged so strongly after 1945, that they were widely regarded as another 'estate of the realm'.

Sir Walter as he became known, (he was knighted in 1935 for his union public services), lived first in Harrow from 1926, then moved to Wembley Park in 1935 as his family grew up. With his childhood sweetheart Doris, who he married in 1913, they had two boys, Norman (b.1913) and Ronnie (b.1919).

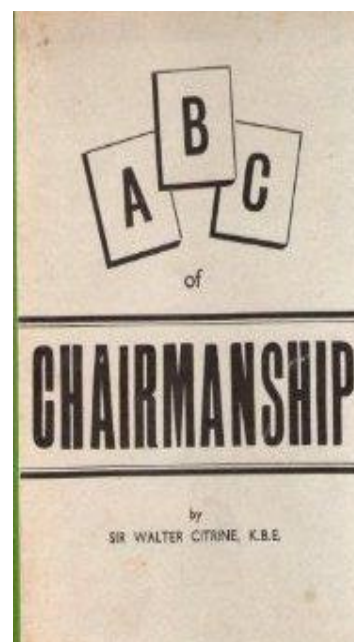
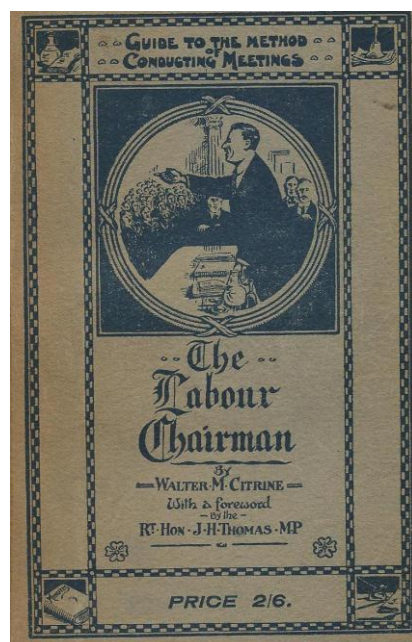
Walter left school at age twelve but his father, Arthur, a Mersey pilot and ships' rigger, got him an electrical apprenticeship at age fourteen. He worked as an electrician all around the Mersey and south Lancashire in his early manhood. At age nineteen, he became an active member of the very left-wing Independent Labour Party and joined the Electrical Trades Union in 1911. Educating himself at his local Wallasey library and through self-study, he became a keen student of electrical theory and practice. He learned shorthand, bookkeeping and economics at night classes also, subjects that would serve him well in his chosen career as a union official. He was elected District Secretary of the ETU in 1914, energetically serving their members in the shipyards, factories and power stations all round Merseyside from a small office in Liverpool during the war. As the carnage of the war devoured more and more of the workforce, even skilled electricians, older and married men previously exempt being called up, it was his job to represent those in appeals which the war machine would have swallowed up whatever their rights.

## Growing up on Merseyside



**View of Liverpool on the Mersey and Wallasey Town Hall in the Wirral**

He was then a local socialist activist and so opposed to the war on political grounds, but like most other unions, the ETU supported the patriotic appeal of the government. At the end of the war, he had already established a solid reputation as a local union leader, as well as being a keen socialist tutor for the Independent Labour Party. He was therefore persuaded to stand for Parliament in the 1918 General Election as the Labour candidate for Wallasey. He stood little chance in this safe Conservative seat, as the tide was flowing strongly for the victorious war-time Prime Minister, Lloyd George. But his heart was really in union affairs and so he soon gave up on party politics. One of his better known productions was a little book called *The ABC of Chairmanship*. Originally just notes for his Merseyside electricians' union meetings, in 1920 he revised them for a much wider labour movement audience into a book called, *The Labour Chairman*, for trade unionists generally, the Labour Party and the Cooperative Party activists. It was about the conduct of meetings – then the life-blood of all open air and indoor worker gatherings, which were always well attended. It was a well-organised practical guide with a valuable index to the arcane intricacies of how to conduct an orderly and effective meeting for officers. It put him 'on the map' of the wider trade union movement, being praised by leading TUC and Labour Party figures of the time. Reissued in the 1930s as *The ABC of Chairmanship*, it became 'the bible' of many union and Labour leaders for decades, usually being referred to simply as '*Citrine*', the authority on all points of procedure.



He left his beloved Merseyside in 1920, when he was elected as the Assistant General Secretary of the Electrical Trade Union, at their head office in Manchester and the family moved there just after his other son, Ronnie was born. Here he became one of the union's leading officers and helped to reform their branch administration and finances. This was during a period the deepest post-war depression and unemployment for their members and so the reforms he devised are credited with keeping the union solvent. His growing reputation came to the notice of the wider trade union movement and in 1924 he was encouraged to apply for a vacancy as the Assistant General

Secretary of the Trades Union Congress in faraway London. So, they were on the move again, until they settled in the Grimsdyke area of Hatch End, Harrow in 1926 and the boys attended local schools there, Norman going to Harrow County School until 1929. In 1935, they moved to Wembley Park ('Glenluce', 63 Kingsway), beside King Edward VII Park. He commuted to his office in Victoria before they moved to their new offices in Transport House, Smith Square, Westminster in 1928.

Wembley Park had been a very quiet rural area, but the coming of the Metropolitan line in the 1890s, made it a popular area to commute from to healthier and more pleasant suburbs with semi-detached gabled houses. By 1935 it was filling up rapidly as light industry and offices began to locate there due to the better roads created by the Empire Exhibition in 1924 and 1925. Its main attraction for Citrine was probably Wembley Park's good travel connections to central London. For the family, it also had the popular large King Edward VII Park nearby where Citrine was a regular walker round the Park with the children and their beloved dog, Rex.



Kingsway was also quite close to the major Empire Stadium and Pool complex which had grown up with the removal of the huge Empire Exhibition Pavilion complex after 1925. He became close friends with the Stadium developer and managing director, Arthur Elvin. A kiosk operator in the exhibition grounds, Elvin made his fortune by buying the Pavilions and selling them off all over the world. The proceeds and the lucrative copper and other materials contained enabled him to build an 'Empire Stadium'. This was where the FA Cup finals were staged in what became Wembley Stadium with its distinctive 'twin towers' until the 1990s.



He also built an indoor stadium designed as a swimming pool, known as 'the Pool', which could be converted into an ice rink and floored over to provide indoor sport. A generous local benefactor, Elvin also introduced greyhound racing at the Stadium and was the first to be knighted for sports' promotion in 1946. The Citrine's were regular attenders at many of these events. He was also friendly with local Wembley Borough councilors, such as Alderman F.P. Crook, who as Mayor of Wembley conferred the Freedom of the Borough on both Citrine and Elvin.

But the 1920s were turbulent times for someone in Citrine's line of work, as an official representative of the trades unions. Industrial warfare resumed as soon as the conflict in Europe ceased, as employers, like the notoriously backward coal-owners, sought to cut costs. They had made enormous profits during the war, yet failed to invest in the future of the industry. Now they simply imposed wage cuts and longer hours on their million or so mainly low paid miners to compete in tougher markets. The well-organised Miners Federation, had for long been seen as the 'vanguard' of the trade union movement with significant numbers of sponsored MPs and so they were able to involve the TUC in representations to the government, trying to avert the threatened lock-out. Citrine was originally engaged for a more backroom role, modernizing the administration and finances of the small TUC office in Victoria. But his boss's serious illness saw him drafted in to officer the mainstream Special Industrial Committee of the General Council on the coal dispute in 1925. He was still fairly junior in a committee where most of the key TUC leaders of the day held sway and his idea of better preparations for the real 'trial of strength' to come, was not well received. A threatened embargo and general strike by the miners' allies, the Rail and Road Transport unions the previous July, had persuaded the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin to continue with the coal industry subsidy for a while until a special inquiry examined its long-term future. Baldwin and the TUC leaders hoped matters could be resolved through this device, but they hadn't bargained with the

obduracy of the coal-owners or the miners' leaders' rigid stance (Arthur Cook's, 'not a penny off the pay, not a minute off the day'). Later that year, Fred Bramley died and Citrine became the acting General Secretary, officering these critical negotiations as the clock ticked away. The Samuel Report did seem to offer the basis of a compromise, recommending a drastic overhaul of the coal industry favourable to the men, but some lesser wage cuts also and no increase in hours. Both the government and the TUC almost concluded this compromise deal, expecting the miners to accept it. But on realizing what was afoot, the hardliners in the Conservative government blocked it as showing the government again giving way to industrial pressure. So the talks broke down in late April and an emotional conference of all unions' delegates pressed the TUC to call a general strike, which they did for May 4th.

Aged thirty-nine, Walter Citrine was the youngest General Secretary ever, though quite experienced in electrical, engineering and shipbuilding union affairs in the Mersey and Manchester/Lancashire areas. However, the scale of this looming dispute was a far more daunting challenge. He knew of the miners' conditions at first hand, having lodged with one during his electrical work in the South Lancashire coalfield and so had great sympathy for their plight in the face of the coal-owners' dictat. His other role was to service the TUC General Council's conduct of the strike through its series of committees with endless meetings. This he and his enthusiastic staff did well. He has left us a vivid diarised account of the events and personalities involved in the first volume of his autobiography, published in 1964, entitled *Men and Work*.

To judge by the tone and coverage of the local *Wembley News*, many of the suburban and 'white-collar' City office workers, supported the government with some City workers volunteering to strike-break driving buses and trams. However, there must have been also considerable support for the miners locally as evidenced by the Vicar of St John's Church, Wembley, providing the church school and hut for the unions' strike committees. (*The Wembley News*, May 7, 1926). The whole area stretching from Wembley to Willesden and down to Acton, (as well as along the Edgware Road from Cricklewood to Hendon), was then becoming a major centre of the new electric-powered industries of the time, and highly unionised and so likely to be involved in the 'Great Strike'. By the 1930s, it would be 'the greatest single concentration of manufacturing industry in southern England' (Len Snow, *Willesden Past*, p.106). This contrasted starkly with the depressed old industrial north.

The General Strike lasted nine days in glorious sunshine, bringing over four million workers from various industries out in support of the miners, but all in good humour. Although an amazingly unprecedented display of working class protest, the disruption caused all over the country was a trial of strength which the government inevitably treated as a constitutional challenge which they were determined to meet, by force if necessary. They had already activated a well-prepared national strike-breaking organization involving the police, the power stations were manned by naval specialists and troops were limbering up in the barracks. Seeing this, the TUC leadership, the rail, road, dock and construction union leaders, such as Ernest Bevin of the Transport & General

Workers Union, decided to call it off, rather than face the full force of the state. Because of their sympathy for the miners and fears of general wage-cutting that might follow, they had committed to the strike without thinking through where they were going. The strike was also the culmination of decades of woolly syndicalist dreaming by many union leaders and activists. They thought that such direct industrial, as opposed to Parliamentary action, was the best way to confront the deficiencies of capitalism.

But now these theories had been put to a real test and found wanting, their bluff had been called. It fell to Citrine as General Secretary and his President, Arthur Pugh of the Iron & Steelmakers Union, to deliver their climb-down to a much relieved Prime Minister. But the miners' union continued with their strike for many months after, rejecting any third party efforts to find a compromise. It would leave a bitter and morose taste throughout the trade union and Labour movement. Some, not just the miners, but many on the left, (egged on by the Communist Party's *Minority Movement*), would now blame the TUC leaders particularly for their deep frustration. Nonetheless, it would be a major turning point for the new TUC leader, causing him and the General Council to learn the lessons.

Another aspect of Citrine's 'education', was in his wider political sympathies. Like many at that time, he was also most supportive of the Russian revolution and what he saw as "the first workers' state". He had been particularly 'enthused by Lenin's vision of an Electric Republic', believing that the potential of electricity in a vast country like Russia with such huge water power resources, would enable the Soviet government to transform their very backward economy for the benefit of its people. The TUC leadership he joined in 1924, were doing a lot to assist the Russian unions by bringing them into the international mainstream, trying to overcome the mutual hostility between the communist-controlled Soviet unions and most social democratic west European Union leaders since the Bolsheviks took power. To this end, the 1925 Congress at Scarborough had overwhelmingly agreed to set up a joint advisory committee (known as ARJAC) with the TUC, to further this aim. Citrine became joint secretary and developed very friendly links with his Russian counterparts, being invited to visit that September. He was shown all round Moscow and Leningrad and had had frank discussions with all the senior union officials and some communist party leaders. Although critical of some aspects of the new socialist system there, (of which he was unafraid to tell his hosts, not least as to their lack of independence from the State), he was favourably disposed to what they were seeking to achieve.

So, it was galling for him on his return to find how hostile the Russian unions became over the decision to call off the strike. He found it difficult to fathom why they had turned so violently hostile. The Russian unions had offered considerable funds (£26,000, equivalent to £1.5m today) to the TUC to help finance it, but this was declined lest it be portrayed sinisterly as 'Moscow Gold'. The continuing miners' strike was heavily funded from that source. These decisions were greeted by a torrent of abuse from Moscow and union leaders were denounced by the communist-controlled *Minority Movement* in the trade unions as 'traitors, lackeys' and so on, not to be trusted by their

members. In fact, it seemed that the ferocity of their reaction showed how the Communist International's plans to exploit the General Strike for revolutionary purposes, had been thwarted. In 1927/8, as TUC General Secretary, he would publish evidence that the *Minority Movement* was controlled by the Red International of Labour Unions from Moscow. This would change his mind entirely about the nature of the communist challenge to bourgeois democracy.



**Citrine addresses a TUC demonstration at Hyde Park in the 1930s**

After the defeat of the General Strike, Citrine and his General Council had to set about restoring the organization and morale of their union members and to chart a new course. With his team of bright assistants he initiated a fundamental re-think about where they were going on the General Council and at Congress. Citrine has always majored on educational work for shop stewards and branch officials in the ETU. So, he devoted much time to speaking at week-end and summer courses at Ruskin College, Oxford. He was particularly keen to counter the influence of communist propaganda in the unions as they sought to exploit disputes to create 'class war' hostility rather than resolve workplace issues on their merits as most union leaderships did. They also had to face vindictive Conservative Party government legislation in 1927 curbing any future general or sympathetic strike action, curtailing the unions' political funding of the Labour Party and banning civil service and local government unions from affiliating to the TUC or that Party.

But the TUC's new approach drew a surprisingly positive response from leading industrialists in what became known as the Mond/Turner Talks of 1928/29. These created a better understanding and regular consultations for the future, 'without compromising either's principles', as Citrine put it. One of the industrialists concerned, Sir (later Lord) Hugo Hirst, the German-born Chairman and Managing Director of General Electric Company, became good friends. Hirst's Laboratory and a large electrical appliance GEC factory were

at East Lane, Wembley and Citrine may have visited there occasionally. While the abiding image of the 1930s is one of heavy unemployment in the old 'smokestack' industries of the North, this new 'electrical age' industry in the South East attracted many to the new housing of the area, equipped with all the modern electrical appliances made at places such as GEC. With his keen interest in all things electrical, Citrine must have marveled at how different things were from his beloved Merseyside at that time.

This union turning away from confrontational industrial action also benefitted the Labour Party. This was also a time when that union-created Party, was in the process of supplanting the old Liberal Party as a parliamentary force while developing a much more gradual social democratic approach to change than their socialist rhetoric suggested. They formed two governments in 1924 and 1929-1931, but in unlucky circumstances – the former was only for eight months while the latter in the midst of the Depression – of not having a majority in Parliament. Unfortunately, in their second period in office, the Labour leadership of Ramsay MacDonald and his Chancellor, Philip Snowden, infuriated the unions by abandoning their party to carry through severe austerity measures with the Conservatives and Liberals, (the 'National government'). These cuts in unemployment benefits at a time of deepest recession, impacted predominantly on the working class rather than the equal sacrifice which the TUC had sought for all sections of the community. In the vacuum created by MacDonald's defection, the TUC leadership now began to take a more active role in Labour Party affairs and Citrine became Secretary of the Joint Council of party and union leaders.

As the recovery from the Depression gathered pace after 1934, the unions' approach industrially was more measured. A report in the *Wembley News* about the death of King George V in January 1936, finds Citrine, (described as 'a Wembley man'), at Buckingham Palace with a letter of condolence on behalf of the unions and the Labour Party nationally.



His authority had grown enormously during the 1930s and he commanded respect from the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who rated him highly since their General Strike negotiations. Called to Chequers later that year by Baldwin to seek his views on the Abdication Crisis, Citrine told him that the trade unions would undoubtedly support his insistence that Edward VII should resign. The way he put it is interesting. He told Baldwin that though most socialists and trade unionists tended to be republican-minded, that in the circumstance prevailing in Europe, they were attached to the constitutional monarchy in Britain and regarded Edward VII and his proposed divorcee wife, Mrs Wallace, a Nazi sympathizer, as a threat to the State.

As joint secretary of the National Council of Labour and as President of the International Federation of Trade Unions, (which took him often to Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris), he became more actively involved in public affairs on behalf of the TUC, due to the perilous times they were faced with. In Berlin, where his IFTU Executive met between 1931 and 1933, he saw Hitler destroy the German trade union and socialist movement on his rise to power from 1933. This left a deep impression on the entire British trade union movement as Citrine brought home to them the scale of the Nazi assault. They tried to help the Austrian workers when they faced a similar fate. So, he was one of the first to alert everybody in Britain of the threat to democracy as well as to the unions and the Labour Party. The TUC was not involved directly in the Labour Party, but Ernest Bevin, a leading member of the General Council was. Many of the policies which he articulated there came from the TUC General Council (as well as Bevin's own extremely fertile working-man's brain), which Citrine and his high-calibre TUC staff had devised. So, it was the TUC leadership of Citrine and Bevin who initially led the campaign for rearmament to defend the country (and Empire). The Left in the Labour Party were initially pacifist or ideologically distrustful of the Conservative government, stances which found echoes in the Lansbury-Attlee leadership and much of the population so soon after the last war. Citrine and the TUC again gave the lead in opposing the appeasement policies of the Chamberlain government up to 1939. Citrine led the first organized attempt to undermine the Mosleyite British Union of Fascists at the popular level, with his 1934 pamphlet, *Fascism at Home and Abroad*. He chaired all-party anti-Nazi League platforms in huge meetings at the Albert Hall and elsewhere, where Winston Churchill was a prominent speaker. Unsurprisingly, he was one of those on the Gestapo's list of 2,300 prominent citizens to be arrested and detained immediately had the expected invasion of Britain occurred in 1940.

When the second world war came, the unions immediately rallied to the defence of the country, agreeing to a ban on all strikes for the duration and the lifting all restrictive practices to assist the war production effort. In return the TUC insisted that they be fully consulted. The National Joint Council agreed that Labour would form a coalition government under Churchill in 1940, with Ernest Bevin becoming Minister of Labour and National Service. Citrine declined a ministerial offer from Churchill, feeling that he would be more useful at the TUC. Instead, he was made a Privy Counsellor in 1940, which gave him Cabinet status and access to all government Ministers including the Prime Minister. As a result he developed a close relationship

with Churchill. We find him on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1940 at Downing Street during the Blitz, after heavy bombing in Whitehall. Churchill had 'miraculously escaped' (he had refused to evacuate though ordered to do so by the Cabinet and the King!), but Citrine found him 'very depressed', thinking that Hitler had personally targeted him. The TUC leader made many other visits there, declining offers of 'whisky and soda' and cigars, while they kept each other's spirits up 'in the darkest hours', reciting patriotic poems (like, '*Ye Mariners of England*') and singing hymns (like, '*The Day though givest Lord is endeth*'), remembered from their school days. They both had phenomenal memories.

He also travelled extensively and frequently, for example, to the Soviet Union in 1941 and 1943 and to the USA in 1940, 1942 and 1945, as an informal diplomat to the unions (and through them, the Stalin government) there, to assist with the war-time alliance. His accounts of those trips in the form of diarized books such as, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (1936), *My Finnish Diary* (1940), *My American Diary* (1942) and *In Russia Now* (1943), were quite revealing and popular. These travels by sea and plane to the corners of the globe throughout, would themselves make a wonderful historical travelogue, as he has left us vivid illustrated accounts of his itineraries, his meetings with leading figures and detailed notes on what he saw and discussed.

Citrine's literary skills were appreciable. The flow of articles, reports, correspondence and books from his pen never ceased from the time of his first ventures in the *Electrical Trades Journals* as an ETU official in 1914, until his two volume autobiography in the 1960s. Considering that he left elementary school at age twelve and had no formal training, he developed a remarkably fluent, clear and engaging style (most unusual for trade union leaders those days!). The Reports of the General Council from 1926 to 1946, many in his own hand, were an eagerly awaited annual event at Congress by union officials, labour correspondents and civil servants/politicians. A model of lucid reporting on every conceivable subject, they were part of the secret of his success at TUC and Labour Party conferences. His media coverage was also extensive, starting with *The Daily Herald*, a TUC/Odhams newspaper, on whose Board he sat from 1929. At one-time, it rivaled Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* in circulation. Entries about his activities were regular items in *The Times* throughout his career. There is hardly a newspaper in the UK which didn't carry reports on his meetings, statements or travels.

During the war, he was also deeply involved in negotiations with government/army departments over civilian welfare and morale issues. Through the TUC, the unions were consulted on all major productivity issues and the sometimes contentious distribution of skilled labour to war industries or call up to the forces by the Ministry of Labour and National Service. They had equal representation on all joint committees at national, regional and workplace levels with Citrine himself sitting on the national committee. Citrine served on thirty public or industrial bodies and union officials were represented at every level of industry throughout the country. On one occasion in 1944, the government wanted to shorten air-raid warnings of the V1 bombs and the heavier explosive rocket bombs, the V2s, ('doodlebugs'), because they were disrupting production causing people to take to the

shelters. Over 8,000 of these reached the Willesden/Wembley area at a rate of over one hundred a day (some are still being found). But Citrine and the TUC delegation wouldn't hear of shorter warnings, dreading the likely huge casualties in the factories should one get through without warning. They got their way. He was also involved in discussions over other issues concerning the 'black-out' and unnecessary fire-watching and Home Guard duties. He visited many of the anti-aircraft gun sites around London and was taken to the Shell Mex House on the Strand, home to the Ministry of Supply for combatting the flying bombs to discuss people's concerns. Throughout the war, he also broadcast frequently on BBC Radio on the theme of 'Freedom and Trade Unionism', especially to America in 1940 before they came into the war, to counter the strong isolationist feelings among US trade unionists. He had toured the United States in 1934 previously for three months, seeking to get the trade unions there to see the threat from Hitler. He was back during the war to bolster the alliance by his accounts of what the British workers were doing to win it. As the war came to a close, at the request of the government, he sought to build a Soviet/British/American union alliance to influence the peace – with less success due to some of the American unions' virulent anti-communism.

Amazingly, Citrine found time also to devote to ARP warden duties in the area around Wembley, though not as much as he would have liked. 'I did a bit of firewatching at Wembley for a short period, although I had a certificate exempting me...I could not keep it up, the lost sleep interfering seriously with my administrative work. My frequent absences from London, week-end meetings and conferences, in addition to my visits abroad, made it nearly impossible for me to do my share.' They had built one of the first bomb-shelters at Kingsway in 1938 (when he feared hostilities with Germany would commence). By 1940, it was 'well patronized by relatives in my absence, so much so that I decided to have a second one built on top of it to accommodate the overflow'! In his marvellously written autobiography (*Men and Work* 1964 and *Two Careers* 1967), He tells how 'we were not much troubled with local bombing at Wembley, but we heard the German raiders night after night passing high overhead on their way to the West Country'. So he was able to take morning and evening walks round King Edward VII Park. As there was 'sometimes slight danger from shell fragments and as I had not steel helmet, I carried a thick saucepan which I could hold over my head'! Despite this, he had to laugh at Goebbels statement that these bombs had the British cowering in their shelters or rushing from the capital. 'Judging by Wembley on Saturday afternoon, there was not much terror. The people lay about in the parks on the grass in the sunshine, and even when there were raids taking place, concerts still went on in the park without intervention.' (*Two Careers*, p.195). Later on in June 1944, he was 'awakened by the loud sound of an aeroplane over Wembley Park' and the following Sunday a 'robot plane' went over and stopped with a dull thud nearby', he got on his bike and visited the site of one bomb which landed in Kenton.

After the war, the exhausted TUC leader became a bit disillusioned by what seemed a lack of appreciation of his efforts by the coalition government and even by senior Labour figures. They were preoccupied with the dramatic

change-over since Labour unexpectedly won the general election, ousting Churchill. Though only fifty-nine still, he began to think of seeking new challenges and when offered a position on the Board of the National Coal Board by the Minister for Fuel & Power, Emmanuel Shinwell MP, he took it. So, he retired as General Secretary in 1946, much to the dismay of his TUC General Council, who realized what a blow it would be for them and the Labour movement generally. With Ernest Bevin gone to the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Secretary since 1940, the departure of this other outstanding union leader left a vacuum which was never fully filled by their successors. In recognition of Walter's public services, he became Baron Citrine of Wembley in July 1946, in honour of the place he had resided so long. He received an illuminated address of congratulation from the Wembley Borough Council. His friend, now Sir Arthur Elvin, was similarly honoured for his many and generous contributions. After Lord Citrine's ceremony in the House of Lords, they had a family party.

In 1947 Lord Citrine embarked on a new career as chairman of the British Electrical Authority. For the former electrician, this was a dream job but an onerous one, involving the take over of 553 municipal and other private generators and suppliers of electricity (including ones in the Wembley and Willesden area). That was the coldest winter of the twentieth century, with acute power shortages and so hardly the best time to start in such a large new and untried public enterprise through a series of fourteen area Boards,. However, they managed to supply the key needs and by 1957, when he stood down as Chair, electricity output had more than doubled from pre-war levels and electrification had been extended to most rural areas. They supplemented the dependence on coal-fired power with oil and nuclear energy. Citrine brought the same methods to bear on BEA problems which had proved so successful at the TUC – pulling together a small team of managers which he and the operational directors guided successfully. It became a model of industrial relations best practice, with the workforce's unions fully involved with some of the best terms and conditions. After he stepped down as Chair in 1957, he continued as a part-time Board member until 1962 when he finally left aged seventy-five! It had engaged all his attention and energies to do something so positive – an indication of his great strengths and he described it as 'the happiest period of my whole life'.

At that venerable age, one would think it was time to relax. Not Citrine. He took up his seat in the House of Lords, making many useful contributions drawing on his vast experience, which were listened to keenly. His interest in trade union affairs never abated. Into the 1970s, as trade union affairs continued to dominate the news, he kept press cuttings of developments, occasionally expressing views and advice to his successors at the TUC and in the unions. He retained his membership and affection for the Electrical Trade Union (who revered him as 'their most famous son'), throughout his life, receiving their Gold Badge in 1947 and again that of the EETU in 1975. Walter Citrine, 'the ETU's most famous son' was described with justice by the union's historian, John Lloyd as 'arguably the greatest mind produced in British unions this century', Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, p.168 He was also one of

Wembley's most famous sons, certainly someone who deserves to be noticed far more in Brent.

The arms he chose as Baron are interesting: His motto: *Pro recto labora* ('Strive for right'). His arms: *Argent, on waves of the sea in base, an ancient three-masted ship in full sail*. This was derived from the arms of Middlesex. These were supported on the left by an Alsatian wolfhound (in memory of his beloved Rex) and a terrestrial globe on the shoulder (referring to his world-wide IFTU activities) with a spade, pickaxe and pen-nub (referring to the working class which he served so well). The hand grasps a light-yellow citrine or quartz resembling topaz.

His beloved life partner, Doris, died in 1973 and was buried in Harrow Weald cemetery. He then moved to Brixham in Devon where his elder son, Norman, a solicitor lived. Norman became Legal Adviser to the TUC from 1946 until 1951 and wrote a well-received volume on *Trade Union Law* in 1950. He inherited the title when his father died in 1983, aged 95. Walter was buried in Harrow Weald cemetery (plot K162) with Doris, sadly without a headstone. As Norman had no children, the title passed to his brother Ronnie in 1997, who preferred to be known as 'Dr Ron Citrine'. His wife was Mary (nee Williams) was also from Wembley. They moved to New Zealand sometime after and there was no heir to the title. (Cracroft's Peerage, 2012)



**Dr James Moher, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019**