

97 Charles Street Heritage Group

Harold Wilson in Northampton

By John Buckell

On Saturday, 11th April, 1964, Harold Wilson, then Leader of the Labour Party and Opposition Leader in the House of Commons, gave a speech at Northampton Town Hall. Over 800 Labour supporters were in attendance, so many that the main assembly hall could not contain them all. As a result, his speech was relayed to the overspill in a smaller hall upstairs.

Northampton's Labour MP, Reginald Paget, pointed out that the last time this had been necessary was for a speech by Clement Attlee on the eve of Labour's 1945 General Election victory. The Northampton Mercury headlined its report "ATTLEE'S NORTHAMPTON SPEECH HERALDED 1945 VICTORY Could Wilson's do the same?" After Wilson's hour-long address, he was given a standing ovation. He led Labour to victory that October.

Earlier that day, Wilson was welcomed to the town by the Mayor, Councillor G. J. Hackett. The Labour leader was shown a large oil painting of him by local amateur artist, Eric Capell, of 15 Tarncroft, Eastfield, Northampton. Done from photographs, it showed a relaxed Wilson with his ubiquitous pipe. Mr Capell had also painted portraits of Mr Paget and the late Hugh Gaitskell.

Sources: *George Attewell's unpublished history of Northampton Labour Party and Northampton Mercury, 13th April, 1964.*