

**Dr William Eric Allsebrook – “Willie”
(1918-2004)**

Some remembrances from his former colleagues

Until the news of his estate broke nationally on the morning of 7th March 2006 none of his former colleagues from BICC, Wood Lane knew that Willie had died in April 2004 in a fire at his home in Borrowwash, near Derby. The revelation that he had left almost £2 million, coupled with his very particular lifestyle, took up many column inches in a wide range of publications. Reports that have so far come to light (and are appended) are from:

The Derby Telegraph (of 6th March 2006, from which other reports probably derived)
The Times
The Daily Telegraph
The Daily Mail
The Mirror
The Sun

Plus 2 on-line news organs, SA Online (South African) and Ananova.

There was also a report on BBC Radio 4.

In addition Willie was the subject of the third leader in The Times and a commentary in The Scotsman. Both of these are also appended.

Many messages and phone calls have been received, from which the following is a flavour.

Willie was born in Derbyshire in 1918 and, contrary to some ideas, it seems that his family was probably long-established there. Certainly nobody recalls any information that, for instance, would suggest that his parents had come to UK seeking refuge from another regime. **Karl Plessner**, who believes that it was he who recruited Willie to BDR in 1956, has done some research into the name Allsebrook, and found evidence of it in Derbyshire back to the 1700s.

The attached article that **Keith Elder** found from the Bush Telegraph of May/June 1983, published on the occasion of Willie’s retirement, gives a little of his background before he came to Wood Lane, and in particular the fact that he seemed to have followed his father’s calling as a chemist. **Wordsworth “Wordy” Price**, who for many years maintained a contact with Willie, says that the father was a successful industrial chemist who made a considerable amount of money from an important discovery, thus allowing him and his wife to enjoy an early retirement.

Many people recalled Willie’s basic routine. For many years he commuted on a weekly basis from Borrowwash to Wood Lane, arriving early on a Monday morning and returning

north on a Friday evening. During the week he had a room (over a transport café according to some reports) where he passed a frugal existence. The diet of porridge and apples reported in the press is consistent with other reminiscences.

For those who did not work directly with Willie, his most public face was in the staff canteen at lunchtime. Many people remembered his habits, and **Michael Pater** summed it all up thus: “At lunchtimes, he would come into the canteen on the 4th floor as late as possible, with the aim of getting the servers to give him everything that was left. Not only that, he would always have soup, and gradually dilute it from the water jugs until he must have been drinking pure water! Then, with his main course, he would go round all the tables emptying all the sauce bottles on to his plate so as to maximise the nutrient intake as cheaply as possible.” The cleanliness of his plate at the end was always something to behold.

Willie’s acquisitiveness is the other major theme remembered, not just in pure financial terms, but of course his habit of scouring the site for discarded items that could conceivably be turned to profit. His lunchtime visits to the building society were legend, and two of our colleagues now in New Zealand (**Stuart Castle and Rob Corne**) both recall how he invested in gold Krugerands at the time of their popularity. It is, however, his role as a scrap merchant that seemed to capture the imagination the most.

Brian McCarthy and Ian Fordham both recall him with parcels and carrier bags of “stuff”, ready to take home to Derbyshire. On one notable occasion he had the metal top from an old desk, which he wrapped in brown paper and took home, starting at White City on the Central Line. **Derek Edwards** wrote in with a recollection of when one of the Wood Lane flagpoles snapped off. This led to a slightly mischievous cartoon in the *Bush Telegraph*, showing a train heading north with the broken pole sticking out of its window.

The sense of “waste not, want not” was perhaps seen at its starkest with his use of postage stamps. **Tony Town**, in a letter to the *Derby Telegraph*, recalled that Willie’s mother would send him the local paper using only half-penny stamps for the postage. This allowed a fair chance that some would get through unfranked, allowing Willie to steam them off for re-use. It is said by others that this habit also extended to any post arriving at his digs in the café. If he managed to get to the post before anyone else he would “borrow” any mail with unfranked stamps, remove them, and add them to his store. The story that he never bought a stamp in his life may, however, be apocryphal.

Another means of adding to his wealth came via the technical press, for which he wrote review articles as noted in the BT retirement report. **Alan Hopkins** recalls that Willie had a veteran typewriter that he kept in the lab. It was used for all manner of things including, says Alan, his tax return. That must have been a work of art.

Despite his eccentricities many people, including **Elizabeth Ness, Michael Fox and Viv Semmens**, remember Willie as a kindly but shy person who gave no offence and did no real harm to anyone. He had his own code of conduct extending to a sense of

indebtedness if he received a small favour, such as help with an experiment, or receipt of a newspaper or magazine. More than likely the giver of the favour would find an apple (windfall; bruised) on his or her desk the next day. He hated to owe anybody anything.

As a final kindly thought, many of us recall that when his mother, who always called him Eric, was at the end of her long life, Willie changed his weekly commuting into a daily one. His constitution seemed never to flag, despite a weekday routine that must have had him up and about at about 4 o'clock in the morning and back home well after 9 o'clock in the evening. Perhaps we should all change to an apple and porridge diet.

Mike Hagger
19 March 2006

Derby Telegraph

TORY GAIN AS RECLUSE LEAVES £2M IN WILL BY SARAH WHELAN

09:30 - 06 March 2006

An elderly recluse who lived in squalor left almost £2m in his will.

But mystery surrounds the will made by Dr William Allsebrook after its executor refused to reveal the details of its main beneficiaries.

All that is known is that £50,000 of Dr Allsebrook's fortune was left to the Conservative Party.

Dr Allsebrook died in a blaze at his home in Borrowash on April 14, 2004.

The 86-year-old man, who lived as a recluse, was found by firefighters sitting on a chair in his home in Nottingham Road.

Dr Allsebrook, a retired industrial chemist, made his money trading on the stock market. He never married and had no children.

Despite his wealth, he led a very simple life.

At the inquest into his death, at Derby Coroner's Court in July 2004, Derby and South Derbyshire Coroner Peter Ashworth heard how Dr Allsebrook only used one room of his house and ate meals of porridge and sliced apple.

He heated up his meals on an old electric heater, which caused the fire which killed him.

John Caulton, senior fire investigation officer with the Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service, examined the house after Dr Allsebrook's death.

He said: "It was obvious from the way the house was that he lived a very frugal life. From what I can gather, he grew a lot of his own food and lived in just one room of his house.

"From looking at the house, you would never have known that he had almost £2m.

"I'd heard he was a wealthy man but the amount is quite a shock."

During the inquest, the court heard that Dr Allsebrook had been asked by social services to improve his home, including investing in a new gas cooker, several years before his death.

Dr Allsebrook's estate was worth a net total of £1,980,133. His friend, Mick Allseybrook,

was named executor of the will.

Mr Allseybrook, an antiques dealer who lives in Mickleover, refused to talk about the windfall.

Speaking at Dr Allsebrook's inquest, he said: "After his mum died, the property went downhill. It's been like that for about 15 years.

"He had business newspapers all over his floor. Some I found were from the First World War.

"He used to trade a lot on the stock market but always reinvested the dividends."

A spokesman for the Conservative Party said that the organisation was pleased to receive £50,000 from Dr Allsebrook.

He said: "We're delighted to have been remembered in Dr Allsebrook's will."

Planning permission for 10 houses to be built on the site of Dr Allsebrook's home was granted last year. The application was made by Mr Allseybrook.

The Times

Recluse who cooked on electric fire leaves £2m

BY ALAN HAMILTON

AN ECCENTRIC miser who lived and died in a squalid room left nearly £2 million in his will, including a £50,000 bequest to the Conservative Party.

Dr William Allsebrook, a retired industrial chemist who never married, died two years ago aged 86 in a fire at his home in the Derbyshire village of Borrowash. It was caused by an ancient electric fire on which he cooked his frugal meals.

Firefighters found him dead from smoke inhalation, sitting in his favourite chair and surrounded by the source of his fortune — piles of newspaper business pages, covering the floor and his bed, some dating from the First World War. While living a life of virtual isolation he played the stock market and always reinvested the dividends. His will, made public yesterday, showed that he had amassed an estate with a net worth of £1,980,133.

From what emerged at the inquest, which recorded a verdict of accidental death, there was no evidence that he ever spent any of his fortune. He was proof of the simple financial theory that an effective way to amass money is not to spend it. He seldom ventured out, grew much of his own food, and survived largely on a diet of sliced apple and porridge, which he heated on the electric fire by his chair. He ignored requests from social services to improve his home.

John Caulton, a senior fire investigation officer, said on hearing of the will: "It's quite a shock. It was obvious from the way the house was that he lived a very frugal life . . . you would never know that he had almost £2 million."

A friend of Dr Allsebrook said that he had let his property deteriorate after the death of his mother. The house had been in poor condition for at least 15 years before his death. "He used to trade on the stock market but always reinvested the dividends," the friend said.

Carl Freebern, a gardener for the local council who visited Dr Allsebrook, told the inquest: "Bill was an eccentric recluse. His house was quite large but he lived in just one room."

A friend of Dr Allsebrook has been made executor of the will, but where the bulk of his fortune will go has not been disclosed.

A spokesman for the Conservative Party said that it was delighted to have been remembered in the will.

Daily Telegraph

Porridge hermit left £2m By Stephanie Condon

A reclusive bachelor, who lived mostly on porridge heated up on his electric fire, was worth £2 million, it was disclosed last night.

Dr William Allsebrook, 86, seldom left his home in Borrowash, Derbyshire, but played the stock market.

His will, made public yesterday, showed that he left £1,980,133 including a donation of £50,000 to the Conservative Party.

Dr Allsebrook died from smoke inhalation in his favourite chair, surrounded by newspaper business pages, when a fire swept through his house in April 2004. Some of his newspapers dated from the First World War.

The former industrial chemist seemed content with his hermit life, growing much of his food and usually dining on porridge and sliced apple.

His mother died 15 years ago and he slowly retreated to one room as his large house fell into disrepair.

Ananova

Hermit left £2m fortune

A virtual hermit who lived in a hovel, eating only porridge and apples, left a £2million fortune in his will.

Dr William Allsebrook spent his days hunched over his tiny electric fire playing the Stock Market, reports the Mirror.

Over the years, the 86-year-old recluse built up a £1,980,000 estate - and rarely spent a penny of it.

His astonishing secret was only revealed after his will was published following his death in a blaze that gutted his home.

Dr Allsebrook, a former industrial chemist, lived in just one room of his ramshackle home in Borrowash, Derbyshire.

He grew his own food which he cooked on a hot plate or on the heater which finally killed him when it started a huge blaze in 2004.

Executor and near namesake Michael Allseybrook, 60, said: "He was a miser who wouldn't spend any cash. He wasn't interested in his home, only in saving money. I was just about his only friend."

Independent Online (SA)

Britain - industrial chemist who lived in a hovel, eating only porridge and apples, left a £2-million (about R22-million) fortune in his will.

Dr William Allsebrook spent his life hunched over his tiny electric fire playing the Stock Market, reports the Mirror.

Over the years, the 86-year-old recluse built up a £1,980,000 (about R21,6-billion) estate - and rarely spent a penny of it.

His overwhelming secret was only revealed after his will was published after his death in a blaze that destroyed his home.

Dr Allsebrook, a former industrial chemist, lived in one room of his ramshackle home in Borrowash, Derbyshire.

He planted his own food which he cooked on a hot plate or on the heater that killed him when it started fire in 2004.

"He was a miser who wouldn't spend any cash. He wasn't interested in his home, only in saving money."

"I was just about his only friend," Executor and near namesake Michael Allseybrook, 60, said.

The Mirror

THE £2MILLION HERMIT

He lived in a hovel, ate only porridge and apples, was kept warm by one tiny electric fire ..and left a secret fortune in his will

By Bill Daniels

A HERMIT who lived alone in this filthy hovel left a £2MILLION fortune, it emerged yesterday.

Living off porridge and sliced apple, and hunched over his tiny electric fire, Dr William Allsebrook spent his days playing the Stock Market.

Over the years, the 86-year-old recluse built up a £1,980,000 estate - and rarely spent a penny of it.

His astonishing secret was only revealed after his will was published following his death in a blaze that gutted his squalid home.

Executor and near namesake Michael Allseybrook, 60, said yesterday: "He was a miser who wouldn't spend any cash. He wasn't interested in his home, only in saving money. I was just about his only friend."

Dr Allsebrook, a former industrial chemist, lived in virtual isolation in just one room of his ramshackle home in Borrowash, Derbys.

The room was littered with papers, some dating back to the First World War, and yellowing business pages.

Windows were blackened with grime, a conservatory had collapsed and the garden was filled with junk.

Dr Allsebrook rarely ventured out. Instead, he grew his own food which he cooked on a hot plate or on the heater which he turned on its side. The heater finally killed him when it started a huge blaze in 2004.

The body of Dr Allsebrook was found in his chair. An inquest in Derby recorded a verdict of accident.

Dr Allsebrook, who lived with his mother until she died, never married.

It is not known where the bulk of his fortune will go. But he did leave £50,000 to a "delighted" Tory party.

The Sun

Miser leaves £2m fortune



By JOHN ASKILL

A PENNY-pinching recluse who lived in squalor has stunned neighbours . . . by leaving a £2million fortune.

Bill Allesbrook, 86, lived alone in one room of his ramshackle £200,000 house and survived on a diet of porridge and stewed apple.

He died after accidentally setting the room on fire while cooking on his single-burner stove.

Bill was found by firemen sitting in his favourite chair surrounded by piles of business pages, some dating back to the First World War.

But the miser had a Midas touch and had been secretly playing the Stock Market for years. He died with an estate with a net worth of £1,980,133.

Bill, a former industrial chemist with a doctorate degree, had repeatedly ignored social services requests to improve his home in Borrowash, Derby, and refused to invest in a new cooker.

Fire investigation officer John Caulton said: "From what I can gather, he grew a lot of his own food and lived in just one room."

Bill was never married and had no kids, and it is not known who will inherit the cash, though £50,000 has been left to the local Tories.

The Times (3rd leader column)

Cleaning up

There is valour in squalor, except on Everest

Cleanliness has had an overly good press. It has never really recovered from its undeserved positioning next to godliness. For proof, look no further than William Allsebrook, who died two years ago, having spent much of his retirement living in one “squalid” room of his house warmed by an ancient electric fire. Dr Allsebrook grew much of his own food, refused to invest in a cooker, and resisted help from social services to improve his living conditions. This turns out to have been an ecologically and financially sound lifestyle choice: his “carbon footprint” must have been miniscule, and he has cleaned up by leaving almost £2 million in his will.

Much of the rubbish strewn around the room, to which so many objected, was share price lists and old newspapers. For he played the stock market, and reinvested the profit. He was rolling in it, and took his pleasure in rolled-up business pages. That is the kind of eccentricity *The Times* can appreciate.

Such frugality deserves applause, as do the climbers who are planning to scale Everest to bring down rubbish next month. The mountain is covered with discarded oxygen canisters, tents, food wrappings and batteries, as well as, sadly, bodies. A team from Austria, Japan, South Korea, Italy and France hope to bring down five tons from the higher camps. The only question is why there are no Britons joining them. More than 1,400 climbers, many of them British, have scaled the peak since the conquest of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953. The estimated 50 tons of rubbish they left behind is sullyng the majesty of a mountain where humans feel close to the gods. Now that is a waste.

The Scotsman (Property column)

Profligacy or parsimony? Try the middle road

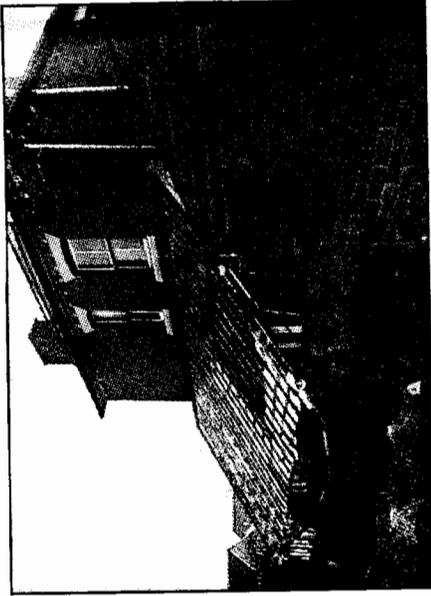
KIRSTY McLUCKIE

But before I turn my life into one of Zen-like minimalism, let me mention the other story that caught my eye this week. When the will of Dr William Allsebrook of Derbyshire was read, it revealed that he had left a fortune of £2 million. The amount came as something of a surprise to those who knew him, who were kind enough to describe his lifestyle as that of a virtual hermit who lived in a hovel, eating only porridge and apples.

Apparently he spent his days hunched over a tiny electric fire playing the stock market. Over the years, the 86-year-old recluse built up a £1,980,000 estate, but didn't seem to spend any of it in Starbucks, or on subscriptions to magazines. Even his meagre diet was homegrown.

While I don't pretend that foregoing the odd edition of Heat magazine will turn you into a wealthy hermit, somewhere between Dr Allsebrook's example and that of self-indulgence and financial ruin is where the route of happiness lies.

The hermit who lived on apples and porridge (but left £2million in his will)



Dilapidated: Dr Allsebrook's home in Borrowash

TO HIS his neighbours, he was a penniless and eccentric recluse, using only one room in his dilapidated house and surviving on a diet of sliced apple and porridge.

Retired industrial chemist Dr William Allsebrook seldom went out except to grow a few vegetables in his overgrown garden and refused social services requests to improve his home.

He died when the ancient electric fire he sometimes cooked meals on set the room

By **Bill Moulton**

alight. But yesterday, nearly two years after his death in April 2004, villagers in Borrowash near Derby were astonished to learn that the 86-year-old bachelor left nearly £2million in his will.

It is believed that the litter of old newspapers scattered on his bed and all over the floor carried the records of shrewd investments on the stock market.

The will's executor, antiques dealer Mick Allsebrook - no relation - has declined to name the main beneficiaries, except to say that

£50,000 has been left to the Conservative Party. It is known, however, that Mr Allsebrook has won planning permission for ten houses to be built on the site of his old friend's home in Nottingham Road. 'It was something he always wanted me to do,' he said.

He said Dr Allsebrook began neglecting the house - worth up to £250,000 in its heyday - around 15 years ago after his mother died. Even before being gutted by fire, it had an overgrown, junk-filled garden, a collapsed conservatory and windows blackened by years of grime.

Mr Allsebrook, 60, met his near-namesake 20 years ago after Dr Allsebrook visited his antiques stall in Derby. The pair struck up a friendship after discussing the similarity of their surnames - but Dr Allsebrook never once invested in any of his friend's antiques.

Mr Allsebrook said: 'He was cer-

'He was a man who saved everything'

tainly a miser and would never spend any money. He was a man who saved everything and spent very little.

'There were times when he would have a go at me for spending money. I guess we all have our standards - he was quite happy to save.'

Mr Allsebrook, who would meet the recluse two or three times a week at his rundown home, added: 'I think I was pretty much his only friend. His house was in rack and ruin - he would not spend any money on it.'

'He was not interested in his home - he was interested in saving money - It used to be his parents' house - he never bought his own. If you did that and never spent anything you

might have as much as he did. Most of his money went on shares, but he very rarely sold any - he just kept them.

'He had all his faculties until the end. If he had not died in the fire he would have lived to 100.'

Mr Allsebrook said there were 'various bequests' to attend to in the will but refused to say what they were or how much he would receive himself.

Council gardener Carl Freebern, who was one of Dr Allsebrook's visitors, said: 'Bill was an eccentric recluse. His house was quite large, but he lived in one room.'

'There were old newspapers scattered everywhere - on his bed and all over the floor.'

'He used to do all his cooking in there. Sometimes he used a hot-plate, and sometimes he used an ancient electric fire that he turned on its side.'

Firemen found Dr Allsebrook dead in his chair when they tackled the blaze at his home in April 2004.

The inquest heard that social services had asked him to improve the property, including buying a new gas cooker, several years earlier.

Senior fire investigation officer John Caulton said: 'It was obvious from the way the house was, that he lived a very frugal life. From what I can gather, he grew a lot of his own food and lived in just one room.'

'You would never have known that he had almost £2million.'

A Conservative Party spokesman said: 'We are delighted to have been remembered in Dr Allsebrook's will.'

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The retirement of Dr.W.E.Allsebrook , popularly known as Willie at Wood Lane , has removed one of our well known characters . Willie , preferably Eric to his late mother , was born in Derbyshire , his family home being in Borrowash, midway between Nottingham and Derby . He was educated in Derby and later , at Nottingham University , gained his B.Sc.(London External) with first class honours . He was awarded his Ph.D. whilst working as a paint chemist with Hadfields (Merton) in 1944 . Willie gained further experience as a resin chemist with ICI Dyestuffs Division (1944 - 1950) , as a paint chemist with R.J. Hammers & Son Ltd. (1950 - 1951) and as a research chemist with L. Bergers & Son Ltd. (1951 - 1956) . He joined BICC in 1956 and was seconded to BDR as a Scientific Officer , where he worked alongside Dr. Margolis . Willie later transferred to the Enamels Section , where he worked on the synthesis of novel high temperature resins for use as insulation on high temperature winding wires . He completed his service as a member of the Resins Section of the Polymer Materials Section . During the course of his career Willie had several review articles on paints and enamels published in the technical press , he also wrote on aspects of patent law .

Willie was brought up to believe in the principle of 'waste not want not' and practised it throughout his career at Wood Lane . He was quiet and introspective but was very popular with all of his colleagues . His popularity was shown by the large number of people that were present at his retirement presentation . At this Stefan Verne presented Willie with an electric jig saw , an electric plane and a scale model of an industrial skip - to remind him of some of his part-time activities at Wood Lane . Willie commented on these activities in his acceptance speech in which he noted that one could get something for nothing at BICC !

We extend to him our wishes for a long and happy retirement .