

Biographies

Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–1899)

J. Graham Jones

Thomas Edward Ellis was born on 16 February 1859 at Cynlas, Cefnnddwysarn, near Bala, Merionethshire. He was educated at the Llandderfel British School and at the Bala Grammar School where his contemporaries included D. R. Daniel (who became a lifelong friend), O. M. Edwards and J. Puleston Jones.

He received a remarkable higher education for a Welsh nonconformist of the late nineteenth century. He spent the years 1875–79 at the young University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and matriculated at New College, Oxford, in 1880, where he was active in the Essay Society, and was active in a wide range of social and political activities. He graduated in the Oxford honours school of modern history in 1884.

Ellis refused an academic post at the UCW, Aberystwyth, and became fully absorbed in his journalistic activities, contributing regular columns to the *South Wales Daily News* under the *nom de plume* 'Cuneglas'. Articles penned by him also appeared regularly in a number of North Wales newspapers. At the same time he spent a year as a tutor to the family of John Cory of St Mellons before in 1885 securing appointment as personal secretary to Sir John Brunner, a Swiss and the founder of the chemical company Brunner-Mond in the north of England. In December of the same year Brunner was elected the Liberal MP for the Northwich division of Cheshire.

In July 1886 Ellis was himself elected the Liberal MP for his native Merionethshire. He soon became an astute parliamentarian and a conscientious MP. From the out-

set of his political career he took an abiding interest in Welsh affairs, and was instrumental in securing the passage of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. The following winter, when visiting Egypt, he was stricken with typhoid fever, and was given a national testimonial by the people of Wales on his return in 1890. Thereafter Ellis never fully regained his health, and his weakness was aggravated by a tendency to exert himself overmuch. He played a part in the activities of the *Cymru Fydd* movement, and was an admirer of the continental nationalism of Mazzini and Kossuth. His appeals for a legislative assembly for Wales fell largely on deaf ears, both at Westminster and within the Principality.

When the Liberals under Gladstone returned to power in 1892, the government's majority was only forty, thus rendering vital the loyalty of the thirty-one Liberal MPs from Wales. The Prime Minister offered Ellis the position of Junior Whip. After a great deal of perplexed heart searching, and in the face of intense opposition on the part of some of his Welsh colleagues, he resolved to accept the position. Although he was thereafter to some extent hamstrung by his acceptance of this official position within the Liberal Party, Ellis played an impor-

tant role in helping to secure the appointment of a Royal Commission (as opposed to a mere Select Committee) on Welsh Land, and in promoting bills for the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. He himself proved to be one of the most effective witnesses before the Land Commission.

In 1894 a new Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, against all expectations promoted Ellis to be the party's Chief Whip. In his new position he faced the 'Revolt of the Four' Welsh MPs against the conspicuous failure of the government to give priority to Disestablishment in its legislative programme. He played a part in the framing and passage of the 1894 Parish Councils Act. In the general election of 1895 the feuding Liberal Party was decimated at the polls, and in the autumn of 1896 Ellis' confidant Lord Rosebery resigned as the leader.

For the brief period of his life which remained, T. E. Ellis was to be free from the cares of office. His Welsh interests had increasingly recaptured his imagination during these years. He was especially interested in Welsh education, and was active in the affairs of the University of Wales, the Central Welsh Board, the Old Students' Association of the UCW, Aberystwyth, and the Guild of Graduates of the University. An erudite, cultured, attractive personality, Ellis edited the first volume of *Gweithiau*



Morgan Llwyd o Wynedd (London, 1899), a task which was later furthered by his brother-in-law J. H. Davies, Cwrt-mawr.

On 1 June 1898 Ellis married Annie J. Davies, the daughter of R. J. Davies of Cwrt-mawr, Llangeitho. The occasion was a major society event in Wales.

After suffering years of intermittent severe ill-health, Ellis died at Cannes on 5 April 1899, at the age of forty. His son, Thomas Iorwerth Ellis (1899–1970), was born eight months after his death. His widow, Mrs Annie J. Hughes-Griffiths, survived him un-

til 1944. Ellis was buried at Cefnddwyssarn, and a memorial column, the result of public subscription, was unveiled by fellow Liberal politician John Morley in the High Street at Bala in October 1903. Another adorns the quadrangle of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. A volume of his *Speeches and Addresses* saw the light of day in 1912.

T. I. Ellis published a two-volume biography of his father in Welsh in 1944 and 1948, while an English biography by Mr Neville Masterman, *The Forerunner: the Dilemmas of Tom Ellis* became available in 1972.

thinking for the post-Great War era. The school's leading figures included the historian and passionate Liberal activist Ramsay Muir and the Manchester businessman and city councillor Ernest Simon.

The second stream was the growing ascendancy within the Liberal Party of David Lloyd George, who succeeded Asquith as leader in October 1926. He had already organised some important policy studies, paid for by his infamous 'funds'. These included *Coal and Power* (1924), which promoted a 'middle way' between private ownership and nationalisation of the coal industry; *The Land and the Nation* (1925), on agriculture; and *The Towns and the Land* (1925) on the better use of urban land. Interestingly, Richard Grayson pointed out that this ascendancy happened largely by default. Asquith had lost his Paisley seat in November 1924, suffered a stroke in 1926 and died in 1928. There was an Asquithian faction, the Liberal Council, but it was largely ineffective.

The Liberal Industrial Inquiry was established in July 1926. Substantial contributors included the Liberal Summer School stalwarts Muir and Ernest Simon, the economist Hubert Henderson, Lloyd George's former private secretary Philip Carr, Charles Masterman and the Asquithians Herbert Samuel and John Simon. The editor of *The Economist*, Walter Layton, chaired the Inquiry. But the two most influential authors were Lloyd George himself and the former Treasury official, John Maynard Keynes. Keynes wanted to develop 'new wisdom for a new age' and strongly believed that tackling unemployment would require more than reliance on market forces. He and Lloyd George were at one in opposing the Gold Standard and, unlike the Asquithians, criticising the actions of the Baldwin government in the run-up to the General Strike. The product of their endeavours, more than 500 pages in length, was written in a dense style that makes for difficult reading; indeed, Keynes himself was highly critical of the pa-

Reports

Did the Yellow Book spell the end of Asquithian Liberalism?

Evening Meeting, 12 April,
with John Grigg and Richard Grayson
Report by Neil Stockley

In February 1928, the Report of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry — *Britain's Industrial Future*, generally known as the 'Yellow Book' — was published. 'By common consent,' Roy Douglas has written, 'it represented the most thoroughgoing set of proposals on the field of industry and employment which was advanced by any organisation whatever in the post-war period.'¹ Robert Skidelsky has called it: 'an exhaustive and far-penetrating survey of the British post-war economy, with far-reaching proposals for government planning, well in advance of anything in existence at the time.'² On 12 April, Dr John Grigg, the biographer of Lloyd George, and Dr Richard Grayson, Director of the Centre for Reform, led a stimulating discussion on the Yellow Book's implications for Asquithian Liberalism.

John Grigg began by outlining the genesis of the Yellow Book. It was the product of two confluent streams

of 1920s' Liberal activity. The first was the Liberal Summer Schools, which sought to promote new Liberal