

IT WASN'T ONLY LLOYD WELSH WOM

Professor Russell Deacon provides a short history of some of the more prominent Welsh female Liberals

BY THE time that the Welsh Liberals became the Welsh Liberal Democrats, in 1988, there had been well over a hundred Welsh Liberal MPs – and they had garnered virtually every top political position that British politics had to offer. These ranged from that of party leader to the government posts of Home Secretary, Chancellor and prime minister. In addition, Liberal councillors at one time or another had been the chairs of councils and/or mayors of every county, town and city in Wales. Even to this day, their presence can be seen in statues, the names of parks, road signs, public buildings and even the name of the occasional public house. But all of the names on these visible reminders of Liberal history are male. What, therefore, of female Welsh Liberals? Do they also have a place in history, albeit one that has not been so publicly recognised? Lady Megan Lloyd George was certainly the most visible and famous woman in Welsh Liberal politics, but she was not the only one. This short article will therefore seek to provide some short biographical information concerning some of the more notable female Welsh Liberals, including, of course, Lady Megan.

Welsh women Liberals, 1890–1945¹

Margaret Haig Mackworth, 2nd Viscountess Rhondda (1883–1958),

daughter of the leading Welsh Liberal MP and later peer D. A. Thomas, in her autobiography looked back on her childhood and noted:

‘What,’ as a contemporary remarked, ‘is the use of college for a girl? You don’t want to become Chancellor of the Exchequer!’ I had no word to answer her with, and I had no idea at the time why the remark irritated me so much ... It never occurred to me that, or something akin to it, was exactly what, somewhere deep down inside me, I did want to become.²

Even the Women’s Liberal Federation was split into two in 1893 when the anti-suffrage female Liberals formed the Women’s National Liberal Federation.

In the Victorian and Edwardian period women were not only excluded from elected office but were expected either to bow out of political activity entirely on marriage or simply to endorse the political party of their husband. Victorian social thought placed great emphasis on what was regarded as the ‘natural’ separation of the spheres between the sexes. This in turn ensured a rigid sexual division of labour.³ Education, religion and the role models set by their mothers and fathers also reinforced this divide. Any political ambitions that women did have were dependent upon the blessing of their husbands or fathers. As a result, political development for the Welsh women Liberals was nearly always tied up closely with what males and society at the time deemed acceptable;

and, in Victorian Liberal politics, the main priority was to expand the franchise of men. Although the franchise was broadened, first to urban males and then to rural males, there always remained a strong voice, both within the Liberal Party and outside it, against extending the vote to women. Even the Women’s Liberal Federation was split into two in 1893 when the anti-suffrage female Liberals formed the Women’s National Liberal Federation – and the latter remained wholly opposed to the universal franchise and in particular the campaigning tactics of the militant suffragettes.⁴

The passing of the Second Reform Act of 1867, as well as significantly increasing the urban male electorate, also changed the way in which the political parties were run.⁵ From that point on, both general and local council elections would become more competitive and organised along more overtly political lines. This was due to the fact that parliamentary and local government elections became more regularly contested than before.⁶ Politically there was now a need to campaign on an almost permanent basis, and as a result permanent Liberal Associations were established across Wales in each constituency, rather than the *ad hoc* election committees that had existed beforehand. These constituency associations then provided a forum in female Liberals could be active.

GEORGE'S DAUGHTERS WOMEN LIBERALS

liberal politicians (1890–1988)

The majority of local associations were affiliated to the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) and the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations (WUWLA) or local branches of the Liberal Social Councils which brought both men and women together for social events. At the regional level, the South Wales and North Wales Liberal Federations also had female sections. By the mid-1890s the WUWLA comprised some 9,000 members from fifty-seven constituency associations.⁷ From 1891 they held an annual conference in Wales where they pursued their own political agenda, which did not always coincide with that of the wider party. As well as wishing to extend the franchise to women they were particularly keen on furthering employment rights for women. To this end, they campaigned that both no 'limitations should be placed on the hours and conditions of labour of women' which was not 'also imposed on men' and that female rather than male inspectors be employed to protect the welfare of women in factories and other workplaces.⁸

In 1892, Mrs Nora Phillips, as president of the WUWLA, became the first Welsh female Liberal politician to come to public prominence. She was the first wife of Sir Wynford Phillips, who was MP initially for Mid-Lanarkshire (1888–92) and later for Pembrokeshire (1898–1908). Amongst her many achievements,

Nora Phillips was a founder of the Women's Institute, Pembrokeshire president of the Welsh Industry Association and Lady President of the 1913 National Eisteddfod. Although she was English by birth, she later developed a great fondness for Welsh folk law and became an accomplished public speaker and gave recitals of music and poetry across Wales.⁹ Phillips contributed a regular column on women's interests in the Liberal *Young Wales* magazine. So prominent was Phillips in both Welsh and British Liberal Party business and campaigns that she would undoubtedly have been a Liberal MP in her own right if she had had the opportunity.

The prominence that English-born women, such as Phillips, held in promoting the suffrage movement in Wales meant that Welsh opponents of suffrage claimed that the movement was nothing more than an 'alien English imposition'. This argument was rebuffed, however, by the fact that there were also plenty of Evanses, Davieses and Thomases on the list of the suffragettes' supporters.¹⁰ The most prominent of the Liberal Welsh names were Sybil and Margaret Haig Thomas. Sybil was wife of 'D. A.' Thomas – the Merthyr Tydfil, and later Cardiff, Liberal MP and South Wales rival to David Lloyd George. Sybil, a passionate Conservative before her marriage to 'D. A.' in 1882, had now become an advocate of the Liberal

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cause.¹¹ After Thomas was ennobled as Viscount Rhondda in 1910, Sybil became the first Viscountess Rhondda. As well as her suffrage activities, she also later took on prominent roles as chairwoman of the wartime government's Women's Advisory Committee and of the National Savings Committee.

Their only daughter Margaret also followed in the family's political footsteps and was a keen Liberal until her marriage to her Conservative husband, Humphrey Mackworth, in 1908. Social convention at the time meant that she had to resign from the Liberals and support the Conservatives; however she didn't support their cause for long, instead taking up the cause of female suffrage in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Membership of the WSPU prohibited membership of political parties until after universal suffrage was gained for women. Margaret therefore threw herself into the heart of the protest movement, not only taking part in protest marches, but also jumping onto the running board of Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith's car in St Andrews and setting fire to pillar boxes. These activities resulted in her serving a period of time in Usk prison. None of this campaigning, however, prevented Margaret, a successful woman in her own right, from becoming a politician. Upon the death of her father in 1918 she was allowed by the King (through

WELSH WOMEN LIBERALS

a Special Remainder) to become a peeress in her own right – Baroness Rhondda of Llanwern. Margaret was now one of the few peeresses for whom the title could pass down through the female line, although in the event she had no children, so the title ended with her.

By the time of her ennoblement, Margaret had already taken over the directorships of some thirty of her father's companies, as a result of his joining the wartime government as food controller. She now became an even more prominent figure and role model in the advancement of women's political and employment rights. In 1922 she led an unsuccessful campaign to allow women to sit in the House of Lords; they would not be allowed to sit there until 1958, the year of her death. In this campaign she was backed by many leading suffragettes including Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the former Liberal, and now Labour-supporting, women's rights campaigner. Had she succeeded, Baroness Rhondda would have joined Viscountess St Davids, the second wife of the now ennobled Sir Wynford Phillips, and also a peeress in her own right, as two of the first Welsh women to sit in the House of Lords.¹² However, although she was never to sit in the House of Lords, Margaret did become the first female president of the Institute of Directors in 1926, and in 1922 established and from then on edited the influential weekly paper *Time and Tide*.¹³

In the period before Viscountesses Rhondda and St Davids became prominent on the British political scene, the WUWLA was the key to expanding women's political activity. They held regular constituency meetings and weekend schools, where they were addressed by MPs and other notable figures. Beyond the WUWLA there was widespread support for women's rights throughout the wider Welsh Liberal Party – particularly around election times when the absence of female candidates and voters was at its most apparent.¹⁴ On 18 April 1895, for instance, a National Convention of Wales (of all Welsh Liberals) was held in Aberystwyth under the president of the North Wales Federation, Thomas Gee. It committed the party in Wales to campaigning for equal rights for women within the Liberal Federation.¹⁵ It was not, however, able to

help women get elected to the Westminster parliament because women would not be able to stand as candidates until 1918.

Despite being barred from election to parliament, Welsh female Liberals still played an active role in politics. Outside the WLF and WUWLA, there were women serving on the committees of constituency parties; in local government most education committees had female members co-opted onto them; and at the same time, Liberal lady mayoresses, wives of the mayors, always had a prominent role in public affairs. In addition, the constituency Women's Liberal groups acted as an important campaigning force. Just a few weeks after the 1904 council elections in Cardiff, for instance, Mrs Eva McLaren, the Women's Liberal Association chairwoman, reminded their new parliamentary candidate, Ivor Guest, that women members had played a 'vital role in canvassing and educating the ignorant voter of the correct choice, we are fighting for a Liberal majority'.¹⁶ Although Guest – a former Conservative MP and cousin of Winston Churchill – acknowledged the role that women had played, outside elections he had little time for supporting women in their campaign for a franchise; indeed, in time he would prove to be a political enemy of McLaren's. He went on to lead the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, as its honorary treasurer. Despite the personal views of Guest and some other Liberals, all candidates still held separate election meetings for women Liberal members where the candidates were endorsed by women from their local Liberal associations. No candidate seeking selection could avoid this, indicating that, although women still could not vote, their political presence was nevertheless significant.

The new Liberal government of Campbell-Bannerman started on the road to full female suffrage. The Qualification of Women Act, passed in 1907, allowed women to be elected onto Welsh borough and county councils for the first time. Women could now stand anywhere for Welsh local government. As soon as the Act was passed, local Liberals in Brecon petitioned for a well-known and active Liberal, Gwenllian Morgan, to stand for election. She was duly

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elected, becoming the first female Welsh councillor and, in 1912, the first female Welsh mayor, of Brecon¹⁷. These were two notable firsts; despite this promising start, however, Welsh female Liberals would make slow progress in gaining elected council office, and until the 1990s they would only ever appear in ones or twos on most Welsh councils.

The campaign for universal suffrage, which dominated female Liberal policy at the start of the twentieth century, was also supported by Margaret Lloyd George. Dame Margaret, the supportive wife of David Lloyd George, ran the households at both 11 and 10 Downing Street with a distinct Welsh overtone: many of the staff employed there were from Wales and Welsh speaking. As well as supporting her wider political family, Dame Margaret also actively supported the Liberal cause in North Wales until her death in January 1941. On 28 April 1911, many of Margaret's North Wales female Welsh Liberals visited Lloyd George to press him to vote in the second reading of Sir G. Kemp's bill on women's suffrage, which he duly committed himself to doing.¹⁸

Despite Lloyd George's support for suffrage, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) directed its members to disrupt public meetings of all Cabinet members, and therefore in Wales action was taken against both Lloyd George and the South Wales Liberal MP and Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna.¹⁹ In 1912, for instance, suffragette disturbances directed against Lloyd George at his opening of the Llanystumdwy village institute caused the national press to focus its attention on North Wales; they also did the same when Lloyd George attended the Wrexham Eisteddfod in September 1912.²⁰ McKenna, as Home Secretary, was directly involved in dealing with the hunger strikes of women suffragettes in prison and introduced the so-called 'Cat and Mouse Act'. This allowed female prisoners out of prison when they were close to starvation and brought them back in again once they had recovered. One of the mice let go by McKenna was the 2nd Viscountess Rhondda, who went on hunger strike while imprisoned at Usk Prison for a month for refusing to pay a fine imposed for

attempting to blow up Cardiff post boxes. She was released after five days but did not go back to prison because her fine was then paid.

During this period of political turmoil for women, two of Wales's most famous Liberal philanthropists, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, were following a more sedate path. They started to develop the arts, music, education and various Liberal causes throughout Wales. The sisters' brother was the Montgomeryshire Liberal MP, David Davies. They had benefited from a multi-million-pound inheritance from their grandfather, the Liberal MP railway and coal pioneer David Davies senior. From the 1900s onwards both sisters collected mainly Impressionist paintings and made various gifts and bequests that would later form the main picture collection of the National Museum of Wales.²¹ Importantly for Welsh Liberalism, they also supported it and its many causes.

On 21 November 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act came into law and allowed women to sit in parliament as elected MPs. Much of the resistance to female suffrage had been reduced by the prominent role women had played in winning World War I. Acknowledging their wartime role, Lloyd George declared at Westminster in 1917 that the lack of a female franchise 'is an outrage, it is ungrateful, unjust, inequitable ...'.²² He was therefore able to ensure that, as prime minister, he finally enacted the legislation that enabled women to vote, albeit it initially only at the age of thirty, until it was equalised with men at the age of twenty-one a decade later. The year after the 1918 act, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 also allowed women to sit on juries and be justices of the peace.

Over the following decades, Welsh female Liberals would start to trickle into politics. Most prominent Welsh Liberal women were prevented from seeking seats in Wales by the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of Welsh constituencies and the legacy of Victorian and Edwardian social values, and as a result they had to seek easier avenues via English seats. Leading lights such as Dr Betty Morgan, a prominent Welsh Liberal and close friend of Ramsay Muir,²³ for instance, unsuccessfully sought a

seat in Sunderland in the 1929 election.²⁴ Similarly, Winifred Coombe Tennant, the leading South Wales Liberal and art collector fought but failed to win the Forest of Dean seat in 1922. Disappointingly, despite the Welsh Liberal Federation supporting votes for all women in their conference address of 1921, they did nothing of a practical nature to ensure that any women from its own party were either selected or elected in Wales.²⁵

Despite the fact that Wales was quite clearly a patriarchal society in terms of its politics, the Welsh Liberal Women's Organisation, until it disbanded in 1988, still continued to operate and push forward the female political agenda. In the immediate post-war period, Megan Lloyd George was the president of the North Wales Liberal Women's Federation which continued to attract support from leading male and female Welsh Liberals. Rosa Hovey, for instance, the principal of Penrhos College for Girls in Colwyn Bay, was the vice president of the Northern Federation in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ She was a prominent educationalist from Denbighshire who projected a strong presence for female Welsh Liberals. Similarly, Lillian Richards from Cardiff was a prominent member on the Welsh National Liberal Council between 1923 and 1927. Unfortunately, however, the decline of the Welsh Liberal Party consigned the memory of many key female Liberals of the time to the forgotten and frequently unrecorded shadows of the party's history, of which only a few fragments have survived, mainly in the National Library of Wales Political Archives.

Wales's first and last female Liberal MP – Megan Lloyd George

Once women were allowed to stand for parliament, it would take over a decade for a female Liberal to actually do so in Wales; and then just two female candidates were put before the electorate in thirty-six Welsh constituencies in the May 1929 general election. These were Anne Grace Roberts in Caerphilly and Megan Lloyd George (daughter of David Lloyd George) in Anglesey. Although Roberts had previously been the organiser for the Asquithian Liberals in Wales,

during the election campaign itself Megan toured Britain supporting other female candidates including Roberts in Caerphilly, despite her Asquithian past. In addition Megan became the voice of the Liberals in the special BBC broadcasts 'by and for women', which were tailored to the new female voters. However, only one of the two women – Megan Lloyd George – was a victor in these Welsh elections. At the age of twenty-seven she was elected to Anglesey by 5,618 votes (21 per cent). Megan became the first Welsh female MP and one of only eight Welsh women MPs in the House of Commons in the whole of the twentieth century. Roberts failed to get elected to Caerphilly and two years later defected to the Labour Party. There she was later shortlisted for the Liberal stronghold of Cardigan in 1932, but failed to get selected and thus avoided standing against her former party. She never stood for parliament again.

Megan, on the other hand, always enjoyed the support of her famous family. Her father, brother Gwilym and his brother-in-law (Major Goronwy Owen) were all MPs, and her sister Olwen, although never an MP, nevertheless played an important part in the smooth running of 10 Downing Street during World War I. Fluent in both French and German, Olwen was used as her father's personal translator and in meetings of generals, presidents and prime ministers was frequently the only female present.²⁷ The sole presence of Olwen in key war meetings illustrated the fact not only that this was still a very male-dominated society but at the same time that, if women had particular skills, knowledge or family connections, they could still find a position of some use to the Liberal government or party.

Megan's selection for the Anglesey seat, which was then one of the safest in Wales for the Liberals, was not without controversy. The sitting Liberal MP, Sir Robert Thomas, was a David Lloyd George loyalist who was stepping down due to financial problems and he was more than happy to endorse another Lloyd George as his successor. However, there were allegations by the other Liberal candidates that Megan's supporters had created new branches in order to enhance her chances and, most damagingly, the

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Daily Mail published a story that she had taken part in a 'Pyjama bottle party'. For teetotal Nonconformist Anglesey voters this was shocking behaviour and the story was only laid to rest after a series of denials by Megan and statements of support from leading Liberals.²⁸ Nevertheless, despite these problems, Megan was selected for the seat and duly elected for it.

Until her death in 1966 Megan enjoyed a high profile, due not only to her status as Lloyd's George's daughter and the only female MP in Wales but also to her own abilities as a politician. She loyally followed her father into what ever faction of the Liberal Party he went in to, until his death in 1945. Her father's earldom in 1945 meant that from then on she was referred to as Lady Megan Lloyd George. Consistently a pro-devolutionist, supporter of a Welsh Secretary in the Cabinet and later the chair of the Campaign for a Welsh Parliament, Lady Megan constantly pursued the cause of Home Rule for Wales. In 1944, as chair of the Welsh Parliamentary Party, she secured a 'Welsh Day' in the House of Commons. It was not the Welsh parliament that Welsh Liberals longed for, but it did mean that, in future, parliament would spend at least one day a year debating Welsh issues. In the general election of 1945, after her father's death,

Megan Lloyd George (1902–66) in 1929.

Megan retained her Anglesey seat with a majority of 1,081 (4.4 per cent) over Labour.

As a 'Liberal Radical', Lady Megan in the post-war period was firmly on the left of the party and became ever closer to Labour during this period. In an attempt to appease her and her fellow Liberal Radical supporters, who talked of having her as a potential party leader, Clement Davies made her deputy leader of the British Liberal Party in 1949.²⁹ She remained a Liberal until her defeat by Labour in 1951. In November 1952, however, Lady Megan refused an invitation to stand again as Liberal candidate for Anglesey. Her main reasons given at the time were that the Liberals were moving too far to the right.³⁰ Lady Megan resigned as deputy leader of the party at the same time. On 26 April 1955, amongst much publicity, she announced her conversion to the Labour Party. This took her forever out of the list of 'Welsh Liberal heroines' and onto that of 'Welsh Liberal turncoats'. Just under two years later, Megan stood for Labour in the Carmarthen by-election caused by the death of the Liberal MP Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris. Her accomplished oratorical skills and Liberal background in a Liberal seat helped her win by a 3,069 majority over a weak male Liberal candidate. Lady Megan died a Labour MP in 1966; nevertheless, her three decades at the forefront of both Welsh and British Liberal politics means that she remains the most prominent Welsh female Liberal to date.³¹

Women of the post-war Welsh Liberal Party

After Lady Megan lost her Liberal seat there were no more Welsh female Liberal MPs, let alone any to match the national pedigree and achievements of Lady Megan. Nevertheless there were still some female politicians who played central roles in the Welsh Liberal/SDP/ Liberal Democrat parties.

The South Wales and North Wales Federations dominated post-war Welsh Liberal politics until the Welsh state party was formed in 1966; and the first prominent female Welsh Liberals to emerge in the post-war era were those who held posts in the two federations and in the numerous constituency associations. As had been the case

in the pre-war era, almost without exception they were women whose husbands or families were also deeply involved in Liberal politics or some aspect of Welsh political life. The two most prominent were Lady Olwen Carey-Evans (David Lloyd George's second oldest daughter who remained active in Welsh Liberal politics until her death in 1990) and Mrs Parry Brown (wife of the party's treasurer Major J. Parry Brown). Mrs Parry Brown was instrumental in the running of the South Wales Federation. The assistant secretary of the Welsh party's council, Jennie Gibbs, was also one of the most influential figures in the South Wales Federation. In the general election of 1966 she stood as only the third Welsh female Liberal candidate in history and the first new Liberal parliamentary candidate since 1929.³² Not only did she serve on a number of councils during the 1960s and 1970s, but she was also the conference organiser behind the Welsh Liberal meeting that took place in Builth Wells on 11 June 1966. Here the Liberal Party of Wales agreed to create a federal state party in Wales and dissolve the Welsh federations.

This was a turning point in Welsh Liberal history and it was at this same meeting that Councillor Mary Murphy, from Pontypridd, became the first chair of the Welsh party.³³ Murphy, a Maths and PE teacher and the former treasurer of the South Wales Liberal Federation, became one of the party's most well-known figures in Welsh local government. She was also a keen supporter of Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe. In 1968 she became chair of Pontypridd Urban District Council where she was able to increase Liberal representation to a level which, when combined with the Independents, was just one seat short of controlling the council outright³⁴ – an achievement that would remain the best post-war South Wales Liberal council result until the party merged with the SDP in 1988, far ahead of those in other South Wales councils. Later on, as secretary of the Welsh Liberal Party, which she ran from her own house in Pontypridd, Murphy went around Wales helping reform existing branches and start new ones. This ensured that she was well known across both the Welsh and the wider federal party.³⁵

In the constituency associations there were also other powerful female figures. In Carmarthen, for instance, Dorothy Trefor Thomas – chair of the Carmarthenshire Women’s Association – became known as the ‘Queen of Carmarthen Town’ because of the power she wielded over the local constituency association. Even the sitting MP, Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, would have to gain her approval on various constituency issues before proceeding further.³⁶

Whereas the 1950s and 1960s had seen the rise of a number of prominent women, the 1970s saw only a handful of new female Liberal politicians arrive on the Welsh political scene. The psychiatrist Dr Jennifer Lloyd and the teacher Shiela Cutts joined Mary Murphy and Jennie Gibbs as Welsh Liberal parliamentary candidates.³⁷ None of them, however, came close to starting a political career at Westminster. In Cardiganshire, however, Cecilia Barton was emerging as a Liberal figure of some distinction. In the 1980s she became chair of the Ceredigion district council and one of the first Welsh Liberals to wield any real power in government. As chair of the Welsh party during the 1980s, she was also instrumental in the merger of the Welsh Liberals with the SDP. Another Welsh Liberal, further education lecturer Jenny Randerson, was also coming to the forefront of the Welsh Liberal Party during the 1980s. A Cardiff City councillor from 1983, she became president of the Welsh Liberals in 1988, then twice stood unsuccessfully for the Cardiff Central constituency at Westminster elections (in 1992 and 1997) before gaining the seat in the Welsh Assembly elections of 1999. Randerson went on to make political history for Liberal women in a number of ways. She served in the Lab-Lib Assembly coalition government of 2000–2003, which made her the first female Liberal Democrat government minister in history. She also served for a time as deputy first minister, and on occasions as first minister when Rhodri Morgan was either ill or overseas. This in turn made her the first Liberal Democrat leader of one of the United Kingdom constituent nations (Wales) and, after Margaret Thatcher, only the second woman to hold such a senior post in the United Kingdom.

In 2011 Randerson also became the first female Welsh Liberal to sit in the House of Lords.

The period that the SDP was active in Wales (1981–88) also brought forward two other female politicians who would later play substantial roles in the emerging Welsh Liberal Democrat party. The first of these was Jacqui Gasson, a Surrey-born child protection officer who became a South Glamorgan county councillor and later the Liberal Democrat group leader on that council. In 2005 she also became the Lord Mayor of Cardiff in its centenary year, the first post-war Liberal mayor in Wales’s capital city. In addition, Gasson held posts on a number of Welsh Liberal Democrat committees. She developed a formidable reputation for both her policy expertise and her successful, battling political style against often overwhelming odds both inside and outside the party. The second prominent SDP member was Councillor Robinia Feeley. She was a Glyndwr district councillor and held a place the SDP Welsh executive. Feeley initially refused to join the newly merged SDP and Liberal parties but did eventually come across and became one of the leading North Wales Liberal Democrats. She later became the deputy group Liberal Democrat leader on Denbighshire county council and unsuccessfully stood for a number of Welsh parliamentary and Assembly seats – nevertheless becoming one of the best-known North Wales female Liberals.

The 1980s also saw a number of other women coming into the Welsh party’s executive and holding a variety of portfolios, although none succeeded in gaining political office at Westminster. We should note, however, that even male Liberal electoral fortunes were limited to just two seats in Wales between 1956 and 1985 (Montgomeryshire and Cardigan), demonstrating that political opportunity for Liberals in Wales was limited almost everywhere, whether the candidate was male or female.

Conclusion

In the period when the Liberals were the dominant party of Welsh politics, between 1868 and 1922, women were kept out of politics by a combination of legal

discrimination and imposed social values. The social values that limited the role of married women in politics to that simply of supporting their husbands did not lessen until the 1960s; as a result, the lifting of legal and social discrimination came too late for many of those women who would today have gone into either the House of Commons, the Lords, the European Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.

Before the 1960s, only single women or those with supportive husbands could ever hope to engage in Welsh Liberal politics. Even these few women were restricted in their opportunities for advancement and rarely contested parliamentary seats in Wales. From 1931 to 1951, Megan Lloyd George was the only Welsh female Liberal candidate to stand in Wales. Between 1951 and 1966 there were no women Liberal candidates standing in parliamentary elections in Wales, which prevented any possibility of female Liberal MPs being elected. Similarly the restriction on women entering the House of Lords before 1958 prevented some notable Welsh Liberal women from gaining a place at Westminster by this route. It was therefore only in the 1960s, when the Welsh Liberal Party was a mere shadow of its pre-war glory years, that women started to fill central roles in the party and to push forward electorally. However, even though it was a slow process, it nonetheless paved the way for the significant leaps forward that occurred between 1999 and 2005. This period saw the election of four female Welsh Assembly members, one female MP and one female council leader. It provided more political achievements for Welsh Liberal Democrat women in six years than had been accomplished in the whole of the life of the old Liberal Party (1868–1988).

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WELSH WOMEN LIBERALS

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- 37 Rees, *Welsh Hustings*, p. 107.



undertaken previously. As the author rightly points out, there has never been any defined role for former British PMs, and there have never been more than five of them alive at any one time. When Margaret Thatcher was first elected in May 1979, there were indeed five such incumbents: Macmillan, Douglas-Home, Wilson, Heath and Callaghan. How former prime ministers have reacted and responded to the sudden loss of high office (and all its attendant prestige) and coped with the challenge of retirement has varied enormously from one individual to another. This impressive tome goes right back to the first PM Sir Robert Walpole, who resigned in February 1742.

Relatively few of the figures carefully delineated in this book chose wholly voluntarily the precise moment of their departure. The one exception certainly was Stanley Baldwin in May 1937 who reported ‘an enormous relief’ when the time eventually came to cast aside the burdens of responsibility of high office. Baldwin is also reported to have decided ‘to make no political speeches, neither to speak to the man at the wheel nor to spit on the deck’ (pp. 2–3). To a

REVIEWS

Walpole to Blair in retirement

Kevin Theakston, *After Number 10: Former Prime Ministers in British Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

THIS IS a most fascinating, superbly readable book. It is indeed surprising that

no survey of the role of former prime ministers in British public and political life has ever been