

# DAVID AND



**Dr J. Graham Jones** uses A. J. Sylvester's detailed diaries in the custody of the National Library of Wales to examine the tortuous build-up to the marriage of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson at Guildford Registry Office on 23 October 1943.

**D**AME MARGARET Lloyd George died at her beloved north Wales home Brynawelon, Criccieth on the morning of 20 January 1941 after a mercifully brief illness. Although the couple had been semi-estranged for many years, spending only relatively brief intervals in each other's company, usually during the month of August, Lloyd George was still devastated. Part of his grief could be explained by his unfortunate, tragic failure, attributable to exceptionally heavy falls of snow across the country, to reach the deathbed scene in time. The old man had been forced to spend the previous night at a hotel

at Cerrig-y-Druidion in Denbighshire (while in a mad rush en route from Bron-y-de, his home at Churt, in Surrey, to Brynawelon, Criccieth), and had to be informed of his wife's death by his friend Lord Dawson of Penn, the esteemed royal physician, over the telephone. Dawson had told him softly, 'Your wife died at twenty past ten this morning'. The situation was, in the words of Lloyd George's Principal Private Secretary A. J. Sylvester, 'most pathetic. LG was broken and he sobbed at the other end of the telephone: I heard him. I expressed my deep grief for him; he sobbed, "She was a great old pal". I said, "You are very brave", but he said: "No, I am not"'.

# D FRANCES

The following day the London train was able to get through to Criccieth bearing their elder son Richard, widely known as Dick, and his wife June, and their second son Gwilym and his wife Edna. Members of the family were thus reunited in their profound grief. The immensely tragic and moving events of these days made a very deep impression upon Sylvester, clearly an emotional man: 'I shall never forget LG's face when he drew up in the Rolls Royce driven by Dyer. I have never seen anybody looking so near death. His face was an awful colour. For the first time in my life I saw him wearing a woollen scarf'. Although there had long been an extremely deep rift between father and son, and Dick had long considered that Lloyd George had treated his mother shamefully for decades, now, 'LG fell into Dick's arms and sobbed. Supported on the arms of his family he boarded the train and went to sleep'. Only Sylvester and their son-in-law Sir Thomas Carey-Evans, himself a medical man too and married to their second daughter Olwen ever since 1917, felt sufficiently composed and in control to go to see the body of Dame Margaret lying in her coffin: 'She looked very peaceful. LG did not see her. I do not think he has ever seen death: I learn that he did not even see Mair. Neither did Dick or Gwilym see her'. A little later Sylvester met Megan Lloyd George in the hall at Brynawelon – 'She just fell into my arms. The scenes I witnessed between members of the family were most pathetic'.<sup>2</sup> Thelma Cazalot, the Conservative MP for the Ilston East constituency since

October 1931, and a close personal friend to Megan Lloyd George, had rushed to Brynawelon as soon as she had heard of Dame Margaret's death. The scenes she then saw had confirmed her view that the Lloyd Georges were 'a genuine circle, consisting of people who did not merely put up with each other, but were genuinely fond of each other however much they had to put up with'. Upon her arrival at Brynawelon, 'Lloyd George threw his arms about me, burst into tears and sobbed out that he would never forget me coming at that moment'.<sup>3</sup>

Generally A. J. Sylvester was extremely loyal to Lloyd George whom he served devotedly, sometimes at considerable personal cost and sacrifice to himself, for more than twenty-two years. He was also most fond of Dame Margaret who tended to take his side in family squabbles. He, in turn, was at pains for the rest of his life to try to ensure that she was given the attention and respect which, he felt convinced, she deserved. He also enjoyed a reasonable rapport with Megan. With Frances Stevenson, however, Sylvester's relationship was at best uneasy. In her view, he had displayed an enormous vanity when he had dictated to Lloyd George that he must be known as 'Principal Private Secretary' as part of the deal when he had rejoined Lloyd George's staff in 1923. Frances, recognising that he would undoubtedly be a useful asset as an addition to LG's personal staff, had magnanimously shrugged her shoulders and did not quibble. But a latent, simmering antagonism between the two persisted, although it was somewhat masked

until after Lloyd George's death in March 1945. In her heart of hearts, Frances considered Sylvester vain, over-ambitious and touchy. Behind his back she would always laugh at him and his voice which had a strong nasal twang overlaying a marked Staffordshire accent and his tendency to rub his hands together rather subserviently which made him appear, in her view, a modern day Uriah Heep. Sylvester in turn accused Frances of being prim, stiff, and intent only on providing comfort for Lloyd George and personal self-seeking.

Dame Margaret's funeral took place just three days after her death on Thursday, 23 January. A private funeral service at Brynawelon at 2 p.m. saw Lloyd George once more 'overcome with grief and in floods of tears'. Thereafter the coffin was borne the two miles from Brynawelon to the Criccieth public ceremony on a simple traditional farm wagon, pulled by sixty-five members of the Criccieth home guard, each of whom was carrying an individual wreath. All shops and private houses had their blinds tightly pulled down along the route taken by the funeral procession.<sup>4</sup> Lloyd George, still sobbing, rode behind the farm wagon with his two sons, his younger brother William George and 'little David', the elder son of Major Gwilym Lloyd George, still only ten years of age. At the cemetery there were to be no women mourners. The sheer poignancy of the scene was increased by the fact that Dame Margaret was to be buried in the same grave as their eldest (and favourite) daughter Mair Eluned, who had died at the family home at

Left: Frances and David Lloyd George in 1943

Routh Road, London, at just seventeen years of age back in November 1907 after a failed operation to treat a burst appendix. At the time her father had been the President of the Board of Trade under Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Subsequently Mair's simple grave had been turned into a Lloyd George family vault, crowned by a majestic sculpture of a teenage girl executed by Sir W. Goscombe John, monumental sculptor par excellence at the beginning of the twentieth century. This vault was now re-opened for the first time thirty-three years later as Dame Margaret was finally laid to rest. 'LG, standing between Dick and Gwilym, trembled and sobbed, but bore his grief bravely. Dame Margaret would have been delighted if she could have seen the whole setting. I have been to many important funerals, none was so impressive as this'.<sup>5</sup> On the mountainside nearby stood Mynydd Ednyfed Fawr, the farm where Maggie had been born on 4 November 1864 and where she had spent much of her childhood and youth.

The death of Dame Margaret Lloyd George potentially meant a wholly cataclysmic change for her husband. He had always assumed that he was likely to predecease his wife who had been almost two years his junior and in robust health. Now the unthinkable had actually happened, and LG's major link with his Welsh roots and with his constituency base had been suddenly removed. Also he was well aware that, decades earlier, he had given his word to his private secretary, mistress and confidante Frances Stevenson that, if he ever found himself a free man, he would, after a decent interval had elapsed, make an honest woman of her. Frances might well now be willing to bide her time, but she was certainly not prepared to give up the prize which was at long last within her grasp. For thirty years she had grudgingly played the role of the perpetual mistress, obliged to make herself scarce each time her love rival Dame Margaret came out of Wales. She had long craved respectability, a status – and a wedding ring. And she was certainly not now prepared to back down, regardless of the feelings of the Lloyd George family. Frances's apparent sympathy for them in their tragic loss in January

1941 would inevitably prove short-lived and largely cosmetic. For years on end she had deeply resented the fact that she had had to leave Bron-y-de, Churt each time Dame Margaret or Megan had decided to go there. Such a scenario she was just no longer prepared to tolerate. The battle lines were being drawn. As Sylvester put it in rather exaggerated language in early February, 'The fight is ON, not only with Germany, but between Frances and the family'.<sup>6</sup>

Within just two days of Dame Margaret's funeral, Lloyd George had told Megan (who had inherited Brynawelon absolutely under the terms of her mother's will) rather tactlessly that he could no longer afford to continue to pay her an allowance towards the upkeep of the property as he had previously done. In Sylvester's perceptive words, 'Yet he is spending a fortune in having all sorts of people around him who do not earn a fraction of their salaries'. Megan's intense annoyance was even exceeded by that of the family's Welsh housekeeper Sarah Jones who had constantly backed Lloyd George in family disagreements for more than four decades. Now she vowed that she would never condescend to speak to him again.<sup>7</sup> Megan's intense grief was further increased by her recent split from her long-term lover the Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, a wrenching experience which she had certainly felt very deeply and of which her father knew nothing. The very same month their local GP at Criccieth Dr Rees Prytherch intimated to A. J. Sylvester that Lord Dawson had informed him of his conviction that Lloyd George was already suffering from a growth in the bowel, likely to prove malignant, as well as dangerously high blood pressure: 'He might go off at any time, or he might live a number of years. I said that I had made up my mind that he would never again take office and was not fit for it. Prytherch agreed'.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of February Lloyd George duly returned to Bron-y-de, Churt. He was pressurised by Frances Stevenson not to continue subsidising the bills for Brynawelon, but rather to use his resources on renovating and modernising Ty Newydd, the farmhouse situated on a hill behind his

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native village of Llanystumdwy which he had bought, together with some forty acres of agricultural land, shortly before the outbreak of the war in September 1939. The property had already been extensively reconstructed and modernised, and orchards had been planted on eight acres of the land containing no fewer than three thousand trees. Frances clearly subjected the ailing old man to considerable pressure. 'She either does not realise or does not care that this puts him in great difficulties. For him to go to stay at Ty Newydd would be just another damn fool thing amongst many which he has done lately. It would be the talk of the constituency, especially if she went with him which is what I think she is after'. Moreover, whenever Megan or Olwen now visited Churt, Frances stubbornly refused to budge from the house, and she also began to squander Lloyd George's money, for example on hiring a private car to take her daughter Jennifer to her school at Bakewell. As she herself put it neatly to Sylvester, 'Things are different now: I have had a lot to put up with for years'. The idea of marriage was already in the air. 'I can only suspect that that is what she is after, as when she and Evelyn [Sylvester's wife] were on their way home from America, she said that LG had promised to marry her if anything should happen to Dame M. Yes, but there seemed little chance of anything happening then! LG is always loudest in his criticisms and statements when the thing is not likely to happen'.<sup>9</sup>

By March Sylvester could record that 'LG is insisting on Frances showing herself about the house at Bron-y-de when Megan is there. Looks as if LG and Frances are trying to drive her away'. About a month later Megan had personally telephoned Sylvester from Churt to inform him that she felt 'very fed up'. She said that her Father was behaving very peculiarly'. Sylvester went on to record the same day that the old man was 'not on speaking terms at the moment with Olwen who is at Brynawelon'. Megan meanwhile had caught sight of Frances in the house at Churt so that 'as a result she did not speak to her Father the whole weekend and just snubbed him'. The timing of the quarrel was indeed most unfortunate, as Thelma Cazalet had only just suggested to

Lloyd George that he should give Megan an annual allowance of £2,000. Problems were mounting as Megan simply did not have a sufficient personal income to meet the running costs of Brynawelon. She also had a cottage at Chesham in the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire for which her father still continued to pay the weekly rent of £5-5s-0d. Further problems were arising from Lloyd George's request to the distinguished Welsh architect Clough Williams-Ellis to assess Ty Newydd and then prepare a professional report on 'what is required to make it habitable during war time with a view to LG going to live there when he goes to Wales'. Commented Sylvester, 'That will start a row to be sure and some talk in the constituency. And all this at a time when LG has agreed to make a special garden at Brynawelon to the memory of Dame Margaret'.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between Megan and her father was evidently rapidly deteriorating, a newfound tension born of Frances's remaining at Churt during the weekends. On 24 April Sylvester recorded 'a terrific row in progress between LG and Megan. ... Megan saw [Frances] there the other day, and as a consequence just ignored her Father and refused to speak to him. She has had nothing to do with him since and stays at her cottage at Chesham'. There was further friction between father and daughter over Lloyd George's demands that payments for secretarial support now had to be reduced and over his insistence that furniture should not be removed from the family home at Victoria Road, London – 'She flew right off the handle and said that no one would prevent her taking things which had been given to her by her Mother which were her own property'. Megan's annoyance knew no bounds – 'He is fussing and bothering about little things which he ought not to bother his head about. To think of all that brilliance, all those talents, all those gifts, just going to seed, because that is what they will do, with a lot of women around him, fussing him, making an old man of him. It is the most pathetic thing I have seen'. The question of financial support to meet the running expenses of Brynawelon was an especially thorny issue. 'I think he will be up to his monkey tricks and

perhaps go to live at Ty Newydd with Frances. Then we shall have some fun'.<sup>11</sup>

By the beginning of the following year – 1942 – the relationship between father and daughter had become a little less frosty. In the spring the question of the marriage was back on the agenda. Frances had asked A. J. Sylvester, confidentially, to send her details of the procedure for marriage in a Baptist chapel – totally unknown to Lloyd George. The old man had been talking about resigning his seat in the House of Commons and possibly accepting a peerage and going to the House of Lords. Frances assured Sylvester that he personally would certainly not lose out materially in the event of such an eventuality. Lloyd George, still generally pessimistic and defeatist about the allied war effort, was talking about the desirability of making a negotiated peace settlement with Hitler and even thought that he himself might still be called on to form a new government to achieve this. No one really took this seriously.<sup>12</sup>

The old man had certainly aged ever more rapidly since the death of Dame Margaret, he almost always looked very pale, and his leonine like head and neck had shrunk considerably. Frances undoubtedly feared that he might well be trying to get out of marrying her, a course which members of the Lloyd George family would all certainly have applauded: 'We probably expected them to continue living as before'.<sup>13</sup> Did Lloyd George himself also hope, in his heart of hearts, that Frances would be happy to carry on as before? Did he also hope that her long, passionate affair with Colonel T. F. Tweed back in the late 1920s had somehow negated his pledge to her? Possibly he felt that his mistress, who had herself become a mother in October 1929, might in consequence be less concerned about getting married.

Before the end of March Lloyd George had taken lunch at the House of Commons with Megan, Gwilym and A. J. Sylvester. After lunch Megan had shown her father a telegram which she had recently received from a Mr Lambert, the organiser of Criccieth Warships Week, noting that the Criccieth area alone had raised some £70,000 for the cause. Lloyd George responded by noting that

he expected that Llanystumdwy had contributed most of that sum, 'including Ty Newydd'. 'At this remark Megan's face set like a piece of chiselled marble. She said not a word. There was silence. LG understood'. Feelings ran especially high in the area at the time because it was known that William Jones, who was acting as the manager of the Ty Newydd farm, and his wife had recently visited Lloyd George at Bron-y-de, Churt and had returned home with "'instructions" to get the place ready for Easter as LG was going to stay there "with someone else"'. The news had then spread around Criccieth like wildfire as a wagon of furniture arrived at Ty Newydd. 'If LG takes Frances and Jennifer to Ty Newydd there will be an unholy row. Megan will regard it as an insult to the memory of her Mother, and Megan tells me that not even Gwilym would tolerate that. But happily the place is not ready, so he cannot go to Ty Newydd for Easter'.<sup>14</sup>

Frances had already told her daughter Jennifer that she and Lloyd George were to be married, and quite innocently the twelve year old girl had asked him when the wedding ceremony was likely to take place: 'Taid [Lloyd George] roared with what sounded like very embarrassed laughter at my question, and said something fairly non-committal. ... I suspect that LG would have been not unwilling to continue with the status quo without my intervention. (I think I may have asked Frances first, and that she suggested I asked Taid.)'.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that by this time Lloyd George was becoming increasingly unstable psychologically and was certainly not in a position to assume governmental office. He was constantly accusing Frances of becoming intimately involved with other men. On the evening of 28 April Frances had telephoned A. J. Sylvester at his home – 'Don't you think he is awful? He is trying to get some grievance against me. He is in that mood just now. He is crazy. Does not seem to be satisfied unless quarrelling. He was better, but now he is bad again. It is so upsetting. You feel you are guilty all the time. People get the idea that he is unreliable. One day he is telling Hankey to turn Winston out; next day he is lunching with Winston. Cripps has no use for him. I think Cripps sized

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LG up at those talks they had before he went to Russia. He is so selfish and jealous. It never occurs to him to ask himself: "What job of work can I do?" But he won't do anything except develop quarrels with any one'.<sup>16</sup>

Megan's totally intransigent attitude clearly remained the primary stumbling block to the proposed marriage. Nervous, Frances asked Sylvester to act as a go-between and test the waters: 'I would like to jog it on a bit. I think I am perfectly justified in taking things into my own hands. Everybody is expecting it in the neighbourhood'. Sylvester, also afraid of upsetting Megan, demurred and decided first to approach Olwen to see how the land now lay within the Lloyd George family.<sup>17</sup> Another rather underhand tack adopted by Frances was to invite Megan's old friend Thelma Cazalet to lunch at the Savoy Hotel, London, and request her to inform Megan of the impending marriage: 'No ambassador can ever have been charged with a more uncongenial mission'. Thelma, too, was hesitant, but eventually agreed to approach Megan if Olwen was also in attendance, but, predictably, 'The interview was as unpleasant as I feared. Megan's relations with her father had been specially close – almost telepathic'.<sup>18</sup> In Megan's obsessive, almost paranoid mind, the question of the marriage had become inexorably entwined with the proposed move to Ty Newydd, where she had recently seen the furniture arrive. Clough Williams-Ellis had rather tactlessly showed Megan a plan of the reconditioned property and the rooms which it contained. She had arranged to see Lord Dawson on 8 May. Three days later Frances reported to Sylvester that Lloyd George had become 'very worried about Megan. He wants to buck her up and get her out of this mood. He is afraid that if she becomes worse, it may become chronic. ... He does not mind quarrelling with her, but he does not like her being ill'. Lloyd George had tried to diffuse the situation by assuring Megan that 'he would not do anything without first talking to she and Gwilym'. The whole issue was becoming bogged down in some confusion and uncertainty. In order to play for time and to save his own skin, Lloyd George was constantly trying to reassure both Frances and Megan. 'I have

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Before the end of the month he was recording in his diary the opinions of George Dyer, Lloyd George's chauffeur, who now believed that Frances had 'completely changed. She is terribly mean and greedy and has turned absolutely against him [Dyer] for some reason which he cannot imagine'. Dyer had firm evidence that she was regularly diverting some of the coke supply intended for Bron-y-de to her own cottage Avalon. There was also considerable friction between Frances and Mrs Bennett, the housekeeper at Bron-y-de 'because Miss Stevenson interferes with the domestic staff and is so mean to them'. There were other bones of contention too – Frances was making regular use of Lloyd George's car to run personal errands and to ferry her family members from place to place, including her elderly parents. Her younger sister Muriel Stevenson had been quietly added to the Bron-y-de estate payroll 'as a land worker to prevent her being called up, but she does precious little work'. The surplus money from the sale of eggs on the estate was also being pocketed by Muriel, while Dyer was chauffeuring Frances willy-nilly from place to place although petrol was in woefully short supply during war-time. Sylvester summed up, 'All this talk has left a very bad impression upon my mind. If she marries LG, how long will it be before she interferes in the wider sphere and perhaps works against me? I have never trusted her TOO MUCH. She has a very sweet smile, and a very engaging manner, but my Heavens she's HARD! Look at her face. (And I have a memory: that in 1932 my revelation of she and Tweed to LG at his blunt request).<sup>20</sup>

By the high summer of 1942 Frances had begun wearing a ring sporting a large single diamond on her engagement finger. There seemed, however, to be something of a rapprochement between Lloyd George and Megan, although the former still stubbornly refused to give any kind of lead to the nation in wartime. The question of the marriage again resurfaced in the

autumn. At the end of October Frances told Sylvester, 'It's as I thought, he wants to wait for two years for the sake of appearances. After that I do not think LG will bother about Megan. I suggested to him that he should get Dawson to see her [Megan] and talk to her when it is settled. LG thought it was a very excellent idea. It would save LG a lot of unpleasantness and Dawson could put it on medical grounds'. Three weeks later Sylvester took tea with Lord Dawson at the House of Lords and warned him of Carey-Evans's conjecture about Lloyd George's irregular bowel movements. Dawson, fearing the existence of a growth, felt that LG should be pressed to have an x-ray – 'He felt that if LG's health were in doubt that would strengthen the case for the marriage. He thought Frances had a case and that she would marry him even on LG's deathbed'. But Dawson also pointed out 'the likely unfavourable reactions round Criccieth' to news of the marriage, while Megan 'might just break off entirely with her Father'. Days later Lloyd George discussed the proposed marriage with his second son Major Gwilym Lloyd-George, the Minister of Fuel and Power in the wartime coalition government, subsequently reporting dejectedly to Frances that his son 'was not very favourable. Gwilym had said that it would not be popular with the people of Criccieth. Megan would not accept it either'.

Lloyd George tried valiantly to renege on his pledge to marry Frances, now arguing that 'the present circumstances were all right: it suited him all right, so why alter it?'. Enraged by LG's backtracking, Frances took pains to remind him 'of the chances she had had to be married which she had given up' for his sake. Lloyd George had just retorted sharply, 'That is all done with', and Frances had insisted, 'Honourable people think you should do it'. LG had simply said, 'There are no honourable people'. He had been much swayed by warnings from Gwilym that 'the people' would be 'critical' of the marriage. Sylvester had warned Frances 'that it looked to me as if LG was trying to get out of it: at any rate, he had a game on'. Frances was not, however, to be put off, instructing the ubiquitous Sylvester to establish the

difference between a church wedding by special licence and a registry office wedding by civil law. The matter dragged on, Frances telling Sylvester on 26 November, 'I told him [Lloyd George] the other day that if it was not soon settled I should go mad'. On the last day of the month, while Megan was staying at Bron-y-de for the weekend, Frances had said to Lloyd George, 'I cannot go on like this. It is very humiliating to me to go out the moment Megan comes'. Lloyd George, sympathetic, replied, 'I must do something about it'.

Frances was encouraged by Lloyd George's solicitor John Morris to leave him to reflect for a while and then to come to a decision. Morris had informed her that Gwilym was generally 'friendly disposed' to the idea of the marriage, but, 'LG was afraid of Megan. The actual snag was Criccieth. As LG did not often go to Criccieth, he recommended her not to press going to live there. The question of her social position would be greatly jeopardised by William George's position. William George's name stinks in Criccieth'. Frances had replied, 'I cannot take action. LG is an old man; I do not like to bring pressure on him'.<sup>21</sup>

On 3 December Megan had a private meeting with Lord Dawson to discuss her father's marriage plans. Within days, apparently, Lloyd George had put his foot down that, in the event of Megan visiting Bron-y-de at any point in the future, Frances was always to remain at the house. Never again would she make herself scarce.<sup>22</sup> The following day Frances telephoned Sylvester: 'Frances said LG wondered what Megan's attitude would be. She might say to her Father: As long as you do not marry I will speak to you; but, on the other hand, the moment it is done I shall have nothing to do with you. "On the other hand, if she would agree not to break off relations with him, that is as much as he wants". I am very glad she is not coming this weekend. I am not going to clear out again for her. LG said to me last time, "When Megan comes again, you must avoid going away". They hate it with her here. There is nothing natural about it and everybody says it is so quiet'.<sup>23</sup>

On 11 December she rang him again:

Frances telephoned me tonight after 10 p.m. She had had an interview with Lord Dawson this afternoon at 3 p.m. She said he was very nice and very kind. He has seen Megan again and he says she is irreconcilable. I think she must have gone there yesterday evening. He said he had thought after his first interview he might be able to do something, but he realises now that nothing he says makes any impression. She just goes round and round and just comes back to this one thing – HER MOTHER.

She said repeatedly that if this thing happened [the marriage of her father to Frances Stevenson] that her relations with him were FINISHED, and her life would be finished. Apart from that, of course, he says there is absolutely no reason why it should not go forward. There would be some criticism, including the re-opening of the criticism about the treatment of 'the old girl'. He said that to me. Some people, he said, think LG did wrong; but Dawson said that would not matter very much. For the people who would criticise him another lot would say he was doing the right thing. He did not set much store upon that.

Gwilym would not stand in the way. Dawson knows LG wants it. He said there is no doubt that it would be a worry to him for Megan to behave like that. In that case, I shall just sit back and allow him to decide. I shall not bring any more pressure to bear, but I shall feel very bitter about it. I gave Dawson my views. He agreed with my point of view. I told LG all this, and of course he is going to turn against her. Oh, yes, I can see that has happened already. He does not like to be crabbed. The first thing he said was: 'Well, she will not come down here again'. Once they start that they will soon get at loggerheads. I think he will leave her severely alone. You cannot talk to her like a normal being: she does not understand. She is not a normal woman. She has this mixture of sex and religion which creates the most extraordinary obsession in her. Dawson tried to explain to her her Father's difficulties – what

he calls 'divided and conflicting loyalties'. But she does not understand. There is only one person who matters, and that is loyalty to herself.<sup>24</sup>

What was still generally unknown to everyone in the family circle (except possibly to her sister Olwen) was that Megan was at an emotional crisis point because of the break-up of her relationship with her married lover Philip Noel-Baker the year before. In so doing, she had adhered faithfully to her mother's wishes. Philip for his part had resolutely refused to leave his wife Irene – the only scenario which would have enabled Megan to have had a happy ending with him. Now her father, it seemed, was going to achieve that happiness in his last days by marrying his long-term mistress who had made Dame Margaret unhappy literally for decades. In the words of Ffion Hague, 'Megan's grief, disappointment and hatred of Frances made her unpredictable and volatile'.<sup>25</sup>

Lloyd George was to celebrate his eightieth birthday on 17 January 1943, potentially a high-profile occasion when journalists and photographers were to be invited to Bron-y-de to interview and take pictures of the octogenarian former prime minister and survey his expansive estate and its produce. A private family luncheon was also to be held at the house to mark the auspicious and symbolic milestone. The press indeed displayed great interest in reporting the occasion. On 15 January Lady Olwen Carey-Evans telephoned A. J. Sylvester for advice about attending the birthday party at Bron-y-de, now only two days away – 'I said that nothing and no one ought to stop she and Megan going to Churt on Sunday and greeting their Father on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, whether Frances Stevenson was there or not. If neither of LG's daughters were present, he would be able to point to the fact that they had both neglected him upon a most important occasion. If he should die in his sleep on Sunday night, and they had not been to see him, how great would be their remorse. I said I had never behaved generously in a case of doubt when I had had occasion to regret my action. Olwen later spoke to Lord Dawson, who gave her similar advice'. Sylvester then

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discussed matters with Frances Stevenson, and ‘an instruction’ came to hand from Lloyd George that ‘he would be pleased to see Olwen and her family and Megan, but it was understood that Frances would be there too’. Following this, Sir Thomas and Lady Olwen Carey-Evans decided to travel to Churt.<sup>26</sup>

On the day of the birthday, a large number of newspapers carried long features on Lloyd George’s political career, most notably the *Sunday Express* which, in an article entitled ‘He saved us last time; today he is 80’ by Beverley Baxter, published an extensive interview with him.<sup>27</sup> The family indeed duly assembled for lunch at Bron-y-de as previously arranged ‘on the strict understanding that Frances would also be present’, and it must have been a considerable strain on her to fulfil for the first time the role of hostess of the house and to receive many members of the Lloyd George family there en masse. Recorded A. J. Sylvester, ‘This is the first time the family as a whole have been there with Frances’. The elder grandchildren were serving in the armed forces and thus unable to get leave to attend the celebrations. On their arrival, Lady Olwen, Sir Thomas and their son known as Bengy within the family circle had greeted Frances cordially and politely shaken hands with her. Megan had ‘simply ignored her’. They had all taken lunch together, but Frances had tactfully taken her leave for certain periods, and the family photographs and the toast had pointedly not included her. At tea Olwen had sat next to Frances, with Megan seated ‘some distance away’. Later on, a telegram in the Welsh language had arrived from Criccieth. Frances asked Megan if the sender was known to her, but Megan had responded by ‘turning her back on Frances and powdering her nose!’. There was general relief, however, on all sides that the celebrations had taken place ‘without any open breach’, but, when Megan Lloyd George had returned to Du Cane Road, the house owned by Sir Thomas and Olwen Carey-Evans in London, ‘She just cried her eyes out, saying that she could never forgive her Father’.<sup>28</sup>

Not wishing to annoy his younger daughter more than was necessary, Lloyd George gave the

distinct impression that the marriage plans had been dropped, in the hope that Megan would then more readily attend the birthday lunch. Megan had still vacillated, but had been won around, it would seem, by a long letter from Lord Dawson on 15 January:

The birthday would seem to offer an opportunity for a gesture because other members of the family will be going down [and] there will be the occasion to carry off any difficulties. And if the gesture were made it cannot be doubted it would make a great difference to your father’s comfort and happiness. If you make the gesture, as I hope you will, it must be warm and really friendly in its quality. It need not last long, but you could make the short time Miss S. was there an occasion and then as it would be a family party she would probably go from the room on her own.

Now I want you to listen to me. I both understand and sympathise with your feelings and especially those which surround your mother’s memory, but I am sure she would wish nothing but that the evening of your father’s life should be made as smooth as possible. He is in need today of physical care and is likely in this respect to become more dependent in the future. Miss S. fills this role and there is no one else at once fitted available and acceptable for this duty.

If it be a fact that what you feared is off, as it appears to be, it must in justice be said she has now made a great sacrifice and from what she has said to me I think she has made things easy and put aside the bitterness of her disappointment. ... You are not called upon to be a friend but only to be kindly, in the way you understand so well, when you meet her in the capacity as a necessary helpmate for your father today.

Knowing that you were brought up as a Christian there can be no question that you should make this gesture. ... For it is a matter of Christian charity for your father’s sake. He has changed his intention mainly for you. From my deep attachment to you I do urge you on the next suitable occasion to make that

gesture and make it generously and you will never regret it.<sup>29</sup>

Megan had attended the birthday lunch believing that Frances had by now renounced the idea of marriage, but this was soon to be proved totally erroneous. Frances was still determined to press ahead.

The family feuds inevitably persisted. The evening following the luncheon on 19 January, Lady Olwen Carey-Evans telephoned Sylvester to say that she had experienced ‘a terribly difficult time with Megan on Sunday night when they got back. She cried incessantly. “Megan could not get over the fact that she had been disloyal to Mummy. She said she would not go down [to Bron-y-de, Churt] ever again”’. When Sylvester interjected that Megan ‘was very friendly with her Father today’, Lady Olwen replied, ‘Yes, but Megan is not the same when Miss Stevenson is about. I do not know what we can do about it now. I suppose we shall have to put up with it. Megan has won hands down with the other thing, and we have to consider that’. Pressed by Sylvester to explain this cryptic reference, Lady Olwen continued, ‘Father has told Megan again definitely that he won’t marry her (Miss Stevenson)’. Rather taken aback by what he knew full well to be wholly untrue, Sylvester asked her again, ‘Are you sure he has told her that again and recently?’, Lady Olwen still insisted, ‘Yes. If I can do anything to help him now that he has promised not to do the big thing, I want to help him as much as I can. I am sorry for Megan because she is in a difficult position. I have got a husband and children, but she has nobody. She must, of course, make her own life, and stand on her own. Megan said she would never forgive Father for having Miss Stevenson there’.<sup>30</sup>

A week after the eightieth birthday celebrations Frances Stevenson contacted A. J. Sylvester yet again:

Frances phoned me tonight to see if there were any news. I at once tackled her on the question whether she was quite satisfied that LG had not made any new and definite promise to Megan, that he would not marry. Frances answered that she was quite certain he had not done so. (I am not at all convinced of this: Olwen

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told me definitely he had so promised Megan, but I am not going to be repeated as having made that statement).

Frances said, 'He is willing to delay it for a bit if she would consider being friends with me. Once on speaking terms with me, he has an idea that the whole thing would break down. But she has not consented to that. No, I am quite sure that he has not sold the pass. I think he has got in mind to put it off, not because of Megan at all, but until he resigns from the constituency. I have come to the conclusion that the whole thing is governed by that and the political situation. Once he has no feeling that he has no longer to fight another election, in plain words he does not care for Megan at all. Until he can be sure of that he has to take some notice of her, and especially if he thinks she is going to cut up rough. He is thinking it over very carefully. I am sure he does not intend to stand again. I think that is the reason why he is delaying it for a little while I am quite sure, and I have no doubt at all, that he does intend to do it. He is thoroughly honest about that. Delay may be dangerous. It is taking a risk, but one has got to take it. There is no alternative. I feel that Megan is a little fool. She has got it into her head that because it is not done, it won't be done at all. That is where she is wrong. I am sure she has no guarantee. He is playing a game with her'. (I am sure he is playing a game with both of them!).<sup>31</sup>

The following day, Sylvester spoke to Lady Olwen Carey-Evans, 'She told me privately that it made it very difficult for her because of Megan's attitude. "Anything we can do to make him happier I think it is up to us to meet him. I am not certain if Mother knew that it would upset her. It is not being disloyal; and I do not want to be horrid to anybody, because it works on him. The main thing is to stop him marrying and that we have done". Concluded Sylvester, 'In the light of Frances's conversation last night and now Olwen, I am convinced he is double crossing one of them, and I wonder which it is. Evelyn

**It is ridiculous'. Sylvester reflected, 'Megan said that her Father said that he would never do it. LG had a different interpretation. He knew he promised Frances that he would do it. And there we are. This conversation, and his reaction, convinced me of one thing: that he was he himself who wanted to marry Frances'.**

[Sylvester's wife] has always said that LG will never marry Frances. I wonder if she is not right?'.<sup>32</sup>

There were genuine fears within the family that Lloyd George might well not survive for very much longer. Having visited Bron-y-de in May, Sir Thomas Carey-Evans saw Lloyd George 'change colour completely, he looked so ghastly'. There was precious little love lost between Lloyd George and his only son-in-law: 'I cannot get on with that old Bugger. ... The more I see of him, the more I loathe him. He is not a man's man, you know'. He found Lloyd George conjecturing about resigning his seat in the House of Commons and possibly accepting a peerage and going to the House of Lords: 'I think the Almighty will decide for him: that is my opinion, and that not very long ahead. He has got some heart trouble. When he gets very excited he gets very pale with strain'.<sup>33</sup>

But Lloyd George did not expire, although he was growing steadily ever weaker and more frail, and the plans for an October wedding went ahead largely in secret. There was very little contact between Lloyd George and Megan throughout the summer of 1943. They very rarely even spoke on the telephone during the long summer recess. Then they met at Westminster largely by accident on 8 September, the occasion of a farewell lunch given to Ivan Maisky, who was then retiring as the Soviet envoy to the United Kingdom, and his wife. The lunch was given by Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, and his second wife Beatrice. The meeting between Lloyd George and Megan was shrouded in an intense 'air of artificiality. ... He [Lloyd George] is still leading Miss Stevenson to believe that he will marry her, and the fact that Megan has suddenly come into the picture again has thoroughly upset his plans. Megan still thinks LG will never marry again. He told Frances that he had had a row with Megan'.<sup>34</sup> That very same day Sylvester was able to record, 'I think he has made his mind up. I think he now intends to do it (marry). He never intended to do it before the end of this year, but he did not want to say so. The only thing is will Megan do anything violent? She will do anything she can to stop it. I think he will be one too

many for her when it comes to the point'.<sup>35</sup>

Six weeks later the marriage took place – a civil ceremony at Guildford Registry Office on the morning of Friday, 23 October 1943. The previous day the ever-dependable Sylvester had transported 'masses' of flowers to Bron-y-de in readiness for the ceremony the following day. The evening before the wedding, a highly distraught Megan Lloyd George telephoned her father at Bron-y-de. A heated exchange predictably followed. Lloyd George was away from the drawing room for so long that Frances felt obliged to go to find out what was happening. Soon, she returned convinced that 'Megan would make her Father ill', and asking the trusted Sylvester to intervene. He in turn found his aged employer 'somewhat upset and exhausted', protesting loudly to Megan, 'But Gwilym and Edna agree and Olwen agrees. ... Well, my dear, that shows that you are thoroughly selfish'. At this point Sylvester volunteered to take over the telephone conversation with Megan in order to relieve Lloyd George of the obviously escalating 'pain and strain' of continuing to argue with his ever more enraged daughter. 'Did Father hear what I said?', demanded Megan. By now sobbing hysterically down the telephone, she went on, 'People will laugh at him: I could not bear people to laugh at him, because it would be terrible. ... He must do this knowing what he is doing. ... It is ridiculous'. Sylvester reflected, 'Megan said that her Father said that he would never do it. LG had a different interpretation. He knew he promised Frances that he would do it. And there we are. This conversation, and his reaction, convinced me of one thing: that he was he himself who wanted to marry Frances'.

Returning to the library at Bron-y-de, Sylvester found Lloyd George to be still 'a little upset', but soon he became 'quite composed'. By now LG's patience was running thin with his younger daughter. Indeed, he had become 'rather annoyed with Megan and her attitude'. Before retiring to bed, Frances telephoned Gwilym and his wife Edna who gladly confirmed that that they both still planned to attend the wedding ceremony the



following morning. LG was truly delighted. Upon hearing this happy news, the bride and bridegroom duly retired to spend the last night before their wedding in the underground 'dug out' at Bron-y-de. Here Lloyd George, still perpetually petrified of the Nazi bombers, at least felt safe and secure in his 'dug out', but it was by any standards a distinctly unromantic setting for a couple on the eve of their wedding day.<sup>36</sup>

After speaking to her father and then to Sylvester on the telephone in this frenzied, highly agitated state of mind, Megan had promptly telephoned her brother Gwilym and pleaded with him at least not to attend the wedding ceremony. Eventually he yielded, and rang Bron-y-de at 8.30 the next morning to tell his father that he would travel down there only in the afternoon. In spite of this intense disappointment and setback, Sylvester found Lloyd George to be 'fit and sparkling' on the morning of the wedding – 'Yes, I am going to do it, so now you know what you are down here for!'. Only Sylvester and Frances's younger sister Muriel Stevenson attended the wedding ceremony and acted as witnesses at Arlington House, the registry office at Guildford. The press was excluded. The little party then drove back to Bron-y-de via the Punch Bowl, Lloyd George looking 'immensely happy'. 'The autumn tints of brown and red of the trees in the great Bowl and beyond, and the rolling hills up to the Hogs Back looked wonderful. And the sun shone through a rather angry sky'.<sup>37</sup> When she came to pen her own memoirs more than twenty years later in the mid-1960s, Frances recalled vividly, 'L.G. was looking gay and handsome, and after the ceremony we drove up to Hindhead around the Punch Bowl. Then L.G. told the chauffeur to drive to the farm office and introduced me to the manager as "Mrs Lloyd George". The whole countryside was bathed in sunshine, as was my heart, and a deep contentment possessed me; contentment, but not the thrills of the usual bride. Our real marriage had taken place thirty years before'.<sup>38</sup>

On their return to Bron-y-de, Lloyd George stopped to inform Mr Withers, the estate manager, of the exciting event which had

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just occurred. The house was covered in the choicest flowers. Lloyd George was positively delighted to find Frances's daughter Jennifer (possibly his daughter too), who had been allowed home early from school, waiting for them at the house. They toasted the bride and bridegroom and lunched on home-grown pork. As agreed, Sylvester then issued a statement to the Press Association, and Bron-y-de was soon bombarded with incessant telephone calls from journalists and press editors. Most of these Sylvester fielded, often claiming to be 'the butler' with but little first-hand, detailed knowledge of the course of events. Jennifer also pretended to be a secretary while answering the telephone. She later recalled, 'When I arrived at Bron-y-de, a comment I made to one of the genuine secretaries, that Frances's bed had disappeared from her bedroom, was received with lascivious giggles. As Taid was 80 and my mother 55 (and I 13) I had not thought of the marriage in terms of sex'.<sup>39</sup> Frances rather excitedly practised her new signature as 'Frances Lloyd George'. Then Gwilym and Edna arrived at the house as expected, Gwilym asserting that Megan had been 'much upset and he had had a very bad time with her'. After taking tea, he shook hands with his father but pointedly did not congratulate him on his marriage, confirming Sylvester's by now deeply held view that here was indeed 'a funny family'.<sup>40</sup>

The marriage was noted widely in the daily and Sunday newspapers.<sup>41</sup> Megan told her sister Olwen and her husband that the marriage was now 'a closed door, and she was going to stand on her own feet'. Reflected Sylvester, 'I personally never thought she would do anything silly such as doing away with herself as she has sometimes indicated'. He went on, 'I feel that he [Lloyd George] is an exceedingly lucky man. The Gods are certainly with him to a most remarkable degree. In somewhat similar circumstances King Edward VIII was dethroned. LG is elevated. He has lived a life of duplicity. He has got clean away with it. When he went to Criccieth to stay with Dame Margaret, he was fretting to get back to Frances and Churt: nothing was too

low or mean for him to do to carry out his object. He would quarrel with Dame Margaret like Hell, or with Megan, and prance away in the middle of his rage. When he went abroad with his family, he did nothing but calculate how long it would be before he returned'.<sup>42</sup> Three days after the wedding, Frances wrote to Jennifer, 'What a marvellous weekend it was, made all the more marvellous by having you here, & watching your joy. Since then, we have just been snowed under by letters & telegrams, including one from the P.M., & General Smuts, & many members of the Cabinet. ... I've also had a magnificent 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian jewel from Lord Beaverbrook – rubies & diamonds – it takes your breath away. I feel quite overwhelmed by it all'.<sup>43</sup> But Frances's subsequent efforts to reconcile with Megan predictably fell on stony ground.

Indeed at Criccieth and throughout much of north Wales the news was received with intense astonishment and incredulity. It was recorded that some traditional Lloyd George supporters in the constituency and beyond had simply broken down and wept on hearing of the second marriage. After all Dame Margaret had been deeply revered in the area, and the very idea of a second marriage was viewed as sacrilege and a betrayal. But Lloyd George, based at Bron-y-de, Churt, and now aged almost eighty-one years, was not inclined to worry overmuch.

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- 1 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), A. J. Sylvester Papers A50, diary entry for 20 January 1941.
- 2 Ibid., diary entry for 21 January 1941.
- 3 Thelma Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings: an Autobiography* (Bodley Head, 1967), p. 47.
- 4 See the funeral reports in the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* and in the *North Wales Observer*, both dated 24 January 1941.
- 5 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A50, diary entry for 23 January 1941.
- 6 Ibid., diary entry for 9 February 1941.
- 7 Even after Lloyd George and Frances had returned to live at Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy in September 1944,

- Sarah Jones still had not forgiven him for stopping the allowance for Brynawelon in January 1941: 'I will not go [to meet Lloyd George]. He stopped my money'. Under considerable pressure from Sylvester, she eventually relented, and, 'There was a short talk in Welsh. She told me afterwards that he had looked so different that she could not be other than civil'. (NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A56, diary entry for 21 September 1944).
- 8 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A50, diary entry for 24 January 1941.
- 9 Ibid., diary entry for 9 February 1941.
- 10 Ibid., diary entries for 10 March and 7 April 1941.
- 11 Ibid., diary entries for 24 and 30 April 1941.
- 12 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A53, diary entry for 3 March 1942.
- 13 Lady Olwen Carey-Evans, *Lloyd George was my Father* (Gomer, 1985), p. 166.
- 14 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A53, diary entry for 26 March 1942.
- 15 NLW, Frances Stevenson Family Papers X3/1, reminiscences of Jennifer Longford, p. 26.
- 16 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A53, diary entry for 28 April 1942.
- 17 Ibid., diary entry for 6 May 1942.
- 18 Thelma Cazalet-Keir, *From the Wings*, p. 52.
- 19 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A53, diary entries for 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 21 May and 9 June 1942.
- 20 Ibid., diary entry for 28 June 1942.
- 21 Ibid., diary entries for 2 and 16 July, 4 August, 23 October, and 19, 21, 23, 26 and 30 November 1942.
- 22 Ibid., diary entries for 3 and 8 December 1942.
- 23 Ibid., diary entry for 9 December 1942.
- 24 Ibid., diary entry for 11 December 1942.
- 25 Ffion Hague, *The Pain and the Privilege: the Women in Lloyd George's Life* (Harper Press, 2008), p. 526.
- 26 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A55, diary entry for 15 January 1943.
- 27 *Sunday Express*, 17 January 1943.
- 28 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A55, diary entry for 17 January 1943.
- 29 NLW MS 20,475C, no. 3172, Lord Dawson to Megan Lloyd George, 15 January 1943.
- 30 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A55, diary entry for 19 January 1943.
- 31 Ibid., diary entry for 24 January 1943.
- 32 Ibid., diary entry for 25 January 1943.
- 33 Ibid., diary entry for 23 May 1943.
- 34 Ibid., diary entry for 8 September 1943.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid., diary entry for 22 October 1943.
- 37 Ibid., diary entry for 23 October 1943.
- 38 Frances Lloyd George, *The Years that are Past* (Hutchinson, 1967), p. 272.
- 39 NLW, Frances Stevenson Family Papers X3/1, reminiscences of Jennifer Longford, p. 26.
- 40 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A55, diary entry for 23 October 1943.
- 41 See, e.g., *The Times*, 25 October 1943.
- 42 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers A55, diary entry for 25 October 1943.
- 43 NLW, Frances Stevenson Family Papers FCF1/2, Frances Lloyd George to Jennifer Stevenson, 27 October 1943.

# LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2011

In the last issue, *Journal of Liberal History* 73, we published the questions in our annual history quiz at the Liberal Democrat conference in Birmingham in September last year. The winner was Stuart Bray, with an impressive 19 marks out of 20. Below we reprint the answers.

1. David Lloyd George
2. Shirley Williams, Crosby
3. Sir Archibald Sinclair
4. The Liberal Unionists
5. Colne Valley
6. The Tawney Society was named after RH Tawney who wrote *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*
7. Lord John Russell
8. Elizabeth Shields
9. *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism*
10. Harry Willcock. He was the last person arrested for failing to produce an identity card in the UK in 1951.
11. 1959
12. Susan Kramer
13. Des Wilson
14. Name of pre-merger policy document; Thatcher's reference in conference speech October 1990.
15. Liberal Prime Minister W E Gladstone who in a memo on his retirement wrote 'What that Sicilian mule was to me, I have been to the Queen.'
16. Gladstone enjoyed rowing at Eton and Rosebery requested that the Eton Boating song be played on a gramophone as he lay dying.
17. Alistair Stewart
18. All babies of the House (youngest MPs) at the time of their election
19. New Orbits Group
20. Dame Margaret Corbett Ashby