

ROBERTS, GORONWY OWEN (sometimes OWAIN), Baron Goronwy-Roberts (1913-1981), Labour politician

Name: Goronwy Owen Roberts

Date of birth: 1913

Date of death: 1981

Gender: Male

Occupation: Labour politician

Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements

Author: John Graham Jones

He was born at Bethesda on 20 September 1913, the son of Edward E. and Amelia Roberts. His father was an elder of the Presbyterian Church of Wales. He was educated at Ogwen Grammar School, Bethesda and the University College of North Wales, Bangor (1st class honours in English, and MA with distinction), and he was then appointed a Fellow of the University of Wales in 1938. While a student at Bangor, he (together with [Harri Gwynn](#)) was one of the founders of the influential Mudiad Gwerin, a patriotic, left-wing pressure group. He undertook further research at King's College, London and on the Continent, 1937-39. He served in the army, 1940-41, and in the army reserve, 1941-44. He was the Youth Education Officer for Caernarfonshire, 1941-44, and lecturer in youth leadership at the University College of Swansea, 1944-45. He broadcast regularly on literary and political subjects.

He was elected the Labour MP for Caernarfonshire in the general election of July 1945 when he defeated the sitting Liberal MP Sir [Goronwy Owen](#) who had held the seat since 1923. He was re-elected for the Caernarfon division of Caernarfonshire in the general election of February 1950 when he defeated the Liberal candidate by a margin of more than 10,000 votes, and he continued to represent the division until the election of February 1974, when he was unexpectedly defeated by Dafydd Wigley (Plaid Cymru). He had served as an MP for twenty-nine years continuously, and his defeat vexed him deeply. He was chairman of Hughes a'i Fab, publishers, Wrexham, 1955-59, and a member of the Courts of the National Library, the National Museum and the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He was also chairman of the Welsh Economic Planning Council, 1964-66, and became deputy chairman of the House of Commons Library Committee. He was a member of the Fabian Society and a member of the Speaker's Panel of Chairmen, 1963-64. When the Labour Party returned to government, Goronwy Roberts was widely tipped for ministerial office. He served as a Minister of State at the newly established Welsh Office, October 1964-April 1966 (working in close proximity with [James Griffiths](#) MP and [Harold Finch](#) MP), then for education and science, April 1966-August 67, at the Foreign Office, August 1967-October 1969 and the Board of Trade, October 1969-June 1970. He was the opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, 1970-74. On his defeat in February 1974, he was at once created by Harold Wilson Baron Goronwy-Roberts of Caernarfon and Ogwen in the county of Caernarfon (life peerage), and assumed the surname of Goronwy-Roberts in lieu of Roberts. He was also re-appointed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by Harold Wilson in March 1974, serving until December 1975 under George Brown. He was then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, December 1975-May 1979, Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, 1975-79, and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords from 1979 until his death. While at the Foreign Office, he travelled very extensively abroad.

He was a Trustee of the Oppenheimer Trust for Ex-Servicemen and in 1965 he was appointed chairman of the Regional Economic Council for Wales. He became a Privy Counsellor in 1968 and was awarded the Freedom of Caernarvon in 1972. His hobbies included walking, music and collecting year books and annuals, and he also wrote and broadcast regularly on political and literary topics. He was elected FRSA in 1967. His political papers are in the custody of the National Library of Wales. He had married in 1942 Marian Ann, the daughter of David and Elizabeth Evans of Robertstown, Aberdare. She was herself the author of a number of Welsh books. They had one son Dafydd and one daughter Ann. Their home was Plas Newydd, Penrhos near Pwllheli. He died on 23 July 1981 having battled against ill-health for several years.

The whole of his political career was marked by an air of scholarship and moderation and a musical, quiet style of Welsh speech. He was a thoughtful and receptive individual who considered experiencing the hurly-burly of political life something of a chore. He displayed a deep feeling for the country of his birth, avidly supporting devolutionary solutions during the post-war Attlee governments, but detested what he regarded as nationalistic excess and bigotry. He had been a stalwart supporter of the Parliament for Wales agitation of the period 1950-56, and indeed it was he who was responsible for presenting the final petition, bearing more than 250,000 signatures, to parliament in May 1956. He was acutely unnerved by the outcome of the devolution referendum of 1 March 1979. It was his thankless fate to serve as a minister during a period of rift within the Labour Party and in the fortunes of Wales. As a minister he was efficient, but some considered him to lack political robustness and thus liable to become the mere mouthpiece of the civil servants within his department.

Author

Dr John Graham Jones

Sources

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Who was who?

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NLW Archives: General Election 1945. The Labour Candidate Greet you. Mr Goronwy O. Roberts

NLW Archives: Llais Llafur. Dyma'r dyn!

NLW Archives: 1950 General Election. The Labour Candidate Mr Goronwy O. Roberts, M.A.

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Wikipedia Article: Goronwy Roberts, Baron Goronwy-Roberts

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