

## SAMUEL, WYNNE ISLWYN (1912-1989), local government officer, Plaid Cymru activist and organiser

**Name:** Wynne Islwyn Samuel

**Date of birth:** 1912

**Date of death:** 1989

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** local government officer, Plaid Cymru activist and organiser

**Area of activity:** Politics, Government and Political Movements; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration

**Author:** John Graham Jones

He was born at Ystalyfera in 1912, orphaned and then brought up by his maternal grandfather, the Reverend William Jones of Soar Baptist chapel, Ystalyfera, and his aunt. He received his education at Ystalyfera Grammar School. He became a deacon at the age of twenty-two and was a prominent local lay-preacher. He joined Plaid Cymru at the beginning of the 1930s at a public meeting at Ystalyfera at the same time as a group of committed local coal miners and tin-plate workers. He was offered a position with the Glamorgan Cricket Club, but his aunt was opposed to his accepting the post, and he had then become an audit clerk at Swansea town hall in about 1928. Samuel was a committed pacifist, and after the outbreak of the war he was responsible for organising a great public meeting to oppose military conscription, a meeting addressed powerfully by Samuel himself and the miners' leader, Arthur Horner. He was dismissed from his post in 1940 as a result of his refusal to sign a statement declaring complete support for World War II. He consequently appeared before the South Wales Conscientious Objectors Tribunal in September 1940 and then registered unconditionally as a conscientious objector. For the next ten years, until 1950, he worked as an organizer for Plaid Cymru and also acted as the editor of the party's English language monthly publication *The Welsh Nation*; he also contributed regularly to *Y Ddraig Goch*. In these positions he helped to shape the Plaid Cymru of later years, and his undoubted gifts as an organizer helped to sustain Plaid Cymru during the difficult days of World War II when many party stalwarts believed that Wales should stand aside totally from the conflict. Using the Plaid Cymru branch at Ystalyfera as a base, he arranged a large number of public meetings in the area and was unfailingly a captivating and powerful speaker. The Ystalyfera branch became the largest in the whole of south Wales. During the war Samuel called for opposition to the movement of Welsh workers to munitions factories east of Offa's Dyke. He was to organise and spearhead a number of important nationalist campaigns during the post-war years, not least the campaign to keep open the coal mine at Cwmllnyffell on which so many local families depended.

Wynne Samuel was one of the first Plaid Cymru councillors in the whole of south Wales. He was a member of the Pontardawe RDC for a large number of years. He also stood as the Plaid Cymru candidate for Neath in the 1945 by-election, winning 6,290 votes (16.2 per cent of those cast, and thus saving his deposit), and the 1945 general election (thus becoming the first ever Plaid Cymru candidate in south Wales), and for Aberdare in the 1946 by-election and the general elections of 1950 and 1951. At Aberdare in 1946 he won twenty per cent of the vote, a respectable poll for a nationalist in one of the Labour Party's rock-solid seats. Samuel was also the Plaid Cymru organiser in the Ogmere by-election of June 1946 when the party candidate **Trefor Morgan** polled an impressive 5,684 votes (29.4 per cent of the total poll). These spirited campaigns proved invaluable to Plaid Cymru in helping to put down roots in the south Wales valleys which had previously proved rather impenetrable. He also contested Pembroke in 1970. His six (all inevitably unsuccessful) attempts to win a seat at Westminster bear witness to an extraordinarily persistent and tenacious character. He had also been chosen Plaid Cymru candidate for Merthyr Tydfil in the general election of 1964, but he was compelled by ill-health to withdraw his name. He was the secretary to the Ystradgynlais National Eisteddfod, 1952-54, playing a leading organisational role.

Samuel was in the employ of the Pontardawe UDC, 1947-56. He studied, too, for an external Diploma in Public Administration and also gained external law degrees (LL.B. and LL.M.) from the University of London) in middle-age. He was awarded a doctorate by the National University of Ireland for a thesis on the native Welsh laws of **Hywel Dda**, a subject which had attracted his attention since his youth. He gave a number of public lectures on the standing of women in the Welsh laws. He was called to the bar from Grays Inn in 1956, and was offered a post with the UNO at Geneva. He was appointed lecturer in law at Chester Technical College in 1964 and became town clerk of Tenby, the unofficial capital of Pembrokeshire, in 1965. He served, too, as legal adviser to the South Pembrokeshire County Council. He was president of the West Glamorgan Baptist Association in 1950 and of the Baptist Union of Wales in 1960-61, the youngest person ever to hold this position. He worked as a legal advisor to the Dyfed County Council from its inception in April 1974 until his retirement. He was also a member of the Welsh Council of the BBC. He was also a founder member of Cymdeithas Bro a Thref Cymru (The Society of Welsh Town and Community Councils) where he successfully co-ordinated the activities of hundreds of mini-parliaments in the Principality, a role which some considered his prime achievement. It became an enduring monument to his work and energy. He was married with one daughter. Samuel died at his Cardiff home on 5 June 1989 and was cremated at Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff. He had made an immense contribution to local government in Wales and to the development of Plaid Cymru.

### Author

Dr John Graham Jones

### Sources

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The Guardian, 7 June 1989

## Further Reading

NLW Archives: Neath Parliamentary Division By-Election, May 15th 1945... Wynne Samuel

NLW Archives: Neath Parliamentary Division By-Election, May 15th 1945. Wales has Suffered!... Vote for Wales by supporting Wynne Samuel

NLW Archives: Neath Parliamentary Division General Election July 5th, 1945. Election Address Wynne Samuel

NLW Archives: The Voice of Wales. Aberdare Bye-Election Special. The Welsh Party Candidate, Wynne Samuel

NLW Archives: Aberdare By-Election December 5 1946. Address Wynne Samuel Welsh Party Candidate

NLW Archives: Aberdare By-Election, December 5th 1946... Welsh Party Candidate Wynne Samuel

NLW Archives: Aberdare By-Election... Vote Wynne Samuel and the Welsh Party

NLW Archives: Pembrokeshire Wynne Samuel Plaid Cymru Sir Benfro

NLW Archives: Wynne Samuel for Pembrokeshire

Plaid Cymru: The Life of Wynne Samuel

Wikipedia Article: Wynne Samuel

## Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q16012333](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q16012333)

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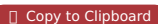
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