

## JANNER, BARNETT BARON JANNER (1892-1982), politician

**Name:** Barnett Janner  
**Date of birth:** 1892  
**Date of death:** 1982  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** politician  
**Area of activity:** Politics, Government and Political Movements  
**Author:** David Lewis Jones

'Barney' Janner was born in Lucknick, Lithuania, then part of the Russian Empire, on 20 June 1892, the second child of Joseph Vitum-Janner (c.1864-1932) and Gertrude Zwick (c.1864-1902). Within nine months of his birth, his father took the family to Barry, Glamorganshire, where Joseph Janner became a furniture dealer, first at 31 Holton Road and later in the High Street. Besides their eldest child, Rachel, and Barnett, the Janners had three other children: Sarah born in 1900 and the twins, Harry and Gertrude, born in 1902. Gertrude Janner died soon after the birth of the twins who did not survive their mother for long; Harry died in 1902 and Gertrude in 1903. These deaths affected Barnett Janner greatly and his unhappiness grew when his father remarried and his stepmother proved unsympathetic to her stepson.

Barnett Janner was educated at Holton Road School and then he spent a year in Cardiff with the family of Israel Cohen while studying for his Barmitzvah. He entered Barry County School as a scholarship boy at the age of thirteen; **Major Edgar Jones**, the headmaster, became a great influence on the young Janner. Throughout his life, Janner kept a photograph of Edgar Jones on his desk and when **Gareth Jones** died, Mrs Edgar Jones commented 'Now Barney is our only son'. Janner returned in May 1953 to pay a moving tribute at the funeral of Edgar Jones.

He won a scholarship in 1911 to the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire where he graduated with a BA honours degree in 1914. At university, he was elected president of the Students Representative Council and became editor of the university magazine.

Janner's chosen career was the law and he was articled to Sidney, Jenkins and Howell, a Cardiff firm of solicitors, in 1914. He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery as a private on 2 March 1916, but he was not called up until 7 August 1917 and left for France on 24 November. A few months before the end of the war, Janner was a victim of mustard-gas shells and his life was saved by the quick action of a fellow-soldier. On his return to Cardiff, Janner established his own firm of solicitors; he had a fine speaking voice and he was particularly effective in court. He soon considered a political career and stood unsuccessfully for Cardiff City Council, first in 1921 as a candidate for the Comrades of the Great War and then in 1924 as a Liberal. He was also unsuccessful when he stood as the Liberal candidate in the Cardiff Central constituency at the 1929 general election.

Janner married Elsie Sybil Cohen at the Hampstead Synagogue on 12 July 1927 and they settled at 50 Tydraw Road, Roath Park. Before he stood in the 1929 general election, Janner had decided to move to London where he became solicitor and secretary to two furniture companies owned by his father-in-law, Joseph Cohen. A second chance to enter parliament appeared quickly; Janner was selected to stand as the Liberal candidate for the Whitechapel and St. George's constituency in Stepney at a by-election on 3 December 1930. This by-election followed the death of Harry Gosling, the Labour member, and it was not surprising that J. H. Hall, the Labour candidate and a local man, won the election. At the general election in 1931, Janner obtained a surprising result when he won the seat from Hall, largely because Harry Pollitt, the Communist candidate, took some 2,500 votes from Labour.

Janner's maiden speech in the House of Commons was on the subject of leasehold reform, which drew on his experience as a solicitor in Cardiff. After the Nazi Party came to power in Germany, Janner made great efforts to highlight the plight of German Jews. He founded the Parliamentary Palestine Committee, to watch over the interests of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, and acted as its Secretary between 1929 and 1945. At the 1935 general election, Janner lost his seat in a straight fight with Hall. Recognising that the electoral future for the Liberal Party was bleak and that his own political sympathies had moved to the left, Janner joined the Labour Party in September 1936. While attending the Labour Party Conference at Bournemouth in that September, Janner had the good fortune to meet the delegates from the West Leicester constituency party who were considering the selection of a candidate and who were impressed with Janner's qualities. On 9 November 1936, he was selected to stand for West Leicester at the next general election.

In 1937, Janner decided to leave his father-in-law's companies and to establish his own practice as a solicitor at 200 High Holborn. He built up a successful firm and his clients included Jack Solomons, the well-known boxing promoter. During the Second World War, Janner served as an ARP warden in London. At the 1945 general election, Janner gained a majority of 7,215 votes over Harold Nicholson, the sitting member for West Leicester. For the whole of his career in the House of Commons, Janner sat for the West Leicester constituency, renamed North-West Leicester in 1951. As a Member of Parliament, he was watchful over the rights of tenants and he successfully sponsored the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Bill 1959, which banned the use of flick knives. Janner did not seek nor was he offered a place in government; he was involved with a number of parliamentary groups, including the Anglo-Benelux Group, and was active in the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

From his days as secretary to the small Jewish community in Barry, Janner played a leading part in the public life of British Jews. He was elected a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 1926 and a member of the executive of the English Zionist Federation in 1930, becoming Chairman in 1940 and President from 1950 to 1970. It was not easy to balance loyalty to the Labour Party with loyalty to the Jewish community and Janner had a difficult time when the Labour Party denounced British and Israeli involvement in the Suez crisis. Such difficulties resulted in Janner's failure to obtain re-election in 1964 for a fourth term as President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Janner was always willing to assist Jewish causes and he was a member of many Jewish bodies, e.g., World Zionist Organisation, European Council of the World Jewish Congress. To his great pride, he was knighted in 1961 for his work at the Board of Deputies. At the age of 78, he decided not to stand again for the House of Commons and he was pleased when his son became the successful candidate for Leicester North-West at the 1970 general election.

Barnett Janner was created a life peer as Baron Janner of the City of Leicester on 20 June 1970. He attended the House of Lords regularly and spoke on social and Jewish matters until shortly before his death. Lord Janner had a great interest in animal welfare and he introduced a private members bill to bring all British zoos under legal control five times in the House of Lords. Eventually, the Government adopted his campaign and enacted the Zoo Licensing Act 1981.

Janner was a heavy-set and large man who dressed impeccably, being especially striking in his cream linen summer suit decorated with his usual red carnation buttonhole. On meeting a new face from Wales, he spoke with great feeling of his early years in Barry and Cardiff. In his later years, he lived at 45 Morpeth Mansions, Morpeth, London. He died at St. Stephen's Hospital, Fulham, London, on 4 May 1982. The funeral was held at Willesden Jewish cemetery on 6 May; Lord Hailsham and Lord Elwyn-Jones gave addresses at a memorial service held in St. John's Wood Synagogue on 20 June. Lady Janner, who was also active in social and Jewish matters, died on 17 July 1994. Barnett and Elsie Janner had two children: Greville Ewan Janner sat as Member of Parliament for his father's constituency, re-named Leicester West in 1994, from 1974 to 1997 and became a peer in the same year as Lord Janner of Braunstone; Ruth Joan Gertrude Rahle Janner married Philip Geoffrey Morris, 2nd Baron Morris of Kenwood, in 1958.

### Author

David Lewis Jones

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Q4861635](#)

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### APA Citation



Jones, D. L., (2012). JANNER, BARNETT BARON JANNER (1892-1982), politician. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 9 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s8-JANN-BAR-1892>

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