

## BROOKE, Dame BARBARA MURIEL, Baroness Brooke of Ystradfellte (1908-2000), politician

**Name:** Barbara Muriel Brooke  
**Date of birth:** 1908  
**Date of death:** 2000  
**Spouse:** Henry Brooke  
**Child:** Henry Brooke  
**Child:** Peter Brooke  
**Parent:** Ethel Frances Matthews (née Evans)  
**Parent:** Alfred Augustus Matthews  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** politician  
**Area of activity:** Politics, Government and Political Movements  
**Author:** David Lewis Jones

Barbara Brooke was born on 14 January 1908 at Great Milton, Llanwern, Monmouthshire, the youngest of the five children of the Rev. Alfred Augustus Matthews (7 February 1864 - 13 August 1946), vicar of St. Paul's Church, Newport, and a Welsh rugby international, and Ethel Frances (died 1951), daughter of Dr. Edward Beynon Evans, of Swansea. She was educated at Queen Anne's School, Caversham, and at the Gloucester Training College of Domestic Science. For a brief period, she taught in a secondary school at Dagenham, Essex, and also trained as a nurse at St. Thomas's Hospital, London. At a party given by her only brother at Balliol College, Oxford, she met Henry Brooke, whom she married on 22 April 1933.

Barbara Brooke began her political career as a Conservative politician when she won the working-class Kilburn Ward on Hampstead Borough Council from Labour in 1948. Her husband was already a member of the Council and had served as Conservative MP for Lewisham from 1938 to 1945. Barbara Brooke was particularly able at committee work where she combined a tactful and pleasant manner with considerable determination. Her success as a borough councillor helped Henry Brooke to obtain the Conservative nomination for the Hampstead seat, which he won at the 1950 general election. In 1954, Lord Woolton, the party's chairman, chose Barbara Brooke to succeed Lady Kilmuir as one of the two Vice-Chairmen. She soon discovered that the Conservative Party depended on women volunteers in the constituencies and on local councils but that few women were nominated as Conservative candidates in parliamentary elections. Despite her vigorous efforts to persuade constituency parties to interview at least one woman when selecting a parliamentary candidate, she had little success; when she resigned as Vice-Chairman in 1964, there were only eleven women Conservative MPs. The party valued her talents as a good and strong speaker and she took part in a Conservative party political broadcast in 1959. The great influence she had on Conservative women was seen when she appeared without a hat at the 1962 Conservative Women's Conference. This prompted an inaccurate rumour that she was recommending silently that Conservative women should abandon the hats for which they were both famous and infamous. She was elected President of the National Union of Conservatives Associations in 1969.

Barbara Brooke combined her political work with service to nursing and hospitals. For over fifty years, she worked for the Queen's Institute of District Nursing, rising to the post of Chairman of the Executive Committee between 1961 and 1971, and she was awarded the Institute's gold medal. A member, later Chairman, of the North West Metropolitan Hospital Board, she was a regular visitor to hospital wards on Christmas Eve. She was also a member of the Management Committee, King Edward's Hospital Fund for London 1961-71. For these and for her political services, Barbara Brooke was appointed DBE in 1960 and created, in Sir Alec Douglas-Home's dissolution honours list of December 1964, a life peer as Baroness Brooke of Ystradfellte, in the County of Breconshire.

In the House of Lords, Barbara Brooke spoke on health, welfare and education. Henry Brooke was also made a life peer as Lord Brooke of Cumnor in 1966 and, for a short time, both husband and wife were front bench spokesmen for the Opposition in the House. She was responsible for welfare but also assisted on health and education subjects. In 1970, she was chosen to second the motion of thanks for the Queen's speech; in her speech, she described herself as Welsh and added that Wales was more than a region, it was a nation: "It is a land of mountains and valleys, and sun and shadow, and often the long, dark shadow of unemployment has chased the joy away." [*Lords Hansard*, 2 July 1970]

The last campaign led by Barbara Brooke arose from her position as Chairman of the Governors of Godolphin and Latymer School in Hammersmith. The governors refused to accept the Inner London Education Authority's decision to unite the school with a nearby school to form a new comprehensive school. Led by Barbara Brooke, the governors decided to take the school into the private education sector and she was largely instrumental in raising the money required to support the school when it became independent in 1977.

It was fitting that the last contribution made by Barbara Brooke in the House of Lords, on 12 July 1979, was during a discussion on the future of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for Women. Henry Brooke was suffering from Parkinson's disease and she left public life to care for him. They had moved from Hampstead to the Glebe House, Mildenhall, Wiltshire where Henry Brooke died on 29 March 1984. They had been a devoted couple, united by a profound Christian faith. Barbara Brooke stayed in Mildenhall, moving to a house called Romans Halt. There had been one last small campaign to complete and that was for a village hall in Mildenhall. She died at Highfield Residential Home in Marlborough, Wiltshire, on 1 September 2000 and left an estate of £473,318. The Brookes had two sons and two daughters: the elder son, Peter Brooke (born 1934) was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland 1989-92; Secretary of State for National Heritage 1992-94; and a life peer in 2001 as Baron Brooke of Sutton Mandeville; the younger son, Sir Henry Brooke (born 1936) was a Lord Justice of Appeal, 1996-2006.

## Author

David Lewis Jones

## Sources

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*The Times*, 5 September 2000

*The Independent*, 8 September 2000

*The Guardian*, 12 September 2000

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Q4858774](#)

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