

BOWEN, EVAN RODERIC (1913-2001), Liberal politician and lawyer

Name: Evan Roderic Bowen
Date of birth: 1913
Date of death: 2001
Gender: Male
Occupation: Liberal politician and lawyer
Area of activity: Law; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

Roderic Bowen was born at the Elms, Cardigan on 6 August 1913, the son of Evan Bowen JP and Margaret Ellen Twiss. His father was a retired businessman whose family roots were deeply implanted in the agricultural communities of southern Cardiganshire and north Pembrokeshire. Many of Bowen's forefathers had played a prominent part in local Liberal politics.

He was educated at Cardigan Council School, the Cardigan County School, the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (LIB 1933), and St John's College, Cambridge (BA 1935, MA 1940). At both Aberystwyth and Cambridge Bowen achieved first class honours in law. He qualified as a barrister and was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in 1937. He then took chambers at Cardiff and practised on the South Wales circuit. As a barrister, his work often focussed on workmen's compensation and he had taken a particular interest in local government administration. His devotion to Welsh culture was reflected in his involvement in the activities of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and Urdd Gobaith Cymru, while he had also served as legal advisor to the Teifi Net Fishermen's Association.

Bowen served in the army from 1940 until 1946 and attained the rank of captain. He served as an officer on the staff of the Judge Advocate-General. He was elected the Liberal MP for Cardiganshire in the general election of July 1945 as the successor to the recently deceased **Sir David Owen Evans**, and was re-elected there in five successive general elections, but was defeated by D. Elystan Morgan (Labour) in the general election of 1966.

Bowen - 'the plump Welshman with the polished manner' - was soon to make his mark at the Commons as a dextrous, amusing debater, but clearly on the right wing of his tiny party, and generally reluctant to break ranks with the party leadership. He was elected the chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party in 1955. Bowen stood unsuccessfully against Jo Grimond for the position of Liberal Party leader following the retirement of **Clement Davies** in September 1956. There was a strong Welsh faction within the Liberal Party which pressed for Bowen's election to the vacant leadership. Although his prospects of success were very slim, he did harbour something of a grudge thereafter, and his relations with Grimond remained distinctly frosty until his election defeat in 1966.

During the Suez Crisis of 1956, he defended the Conservative Government against opposition 'carping criticisms'. One of the chief opposition critics of the Government over Suez was his own party leader, Jo Grimond. Roderic Bowen extolled the virtues of private enterprise, supporting the reintroduction of flogging and in 1958 signing a Conservative backbench motion protesting at St Pancras town hall flying the Red Flag on May Day.

At the same time he continued his legal career, serving as Recorder of Carmarthen, 1950-53, Merthyr Tydfil, 1953-60, Swansea, 1960-64, and Cardiff, 1964-67. These commitments led to much criticism in Cardiganshire that their MP was rather neglecting his parliamentary work and his constituency duties. The county Labour Party began to scent the prospect of possible electoral success, an optimism encouraged by a sharp reduction in Bowen's majority to just 2219 votes in October 1964 following a keenly contested four-cornered contest.

Roderic Bowen also served as the chairman of the Montgomeryshire Quarter Sessions, 1959-71, and was chosen to be chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party in 1955. Contentiously, following intense pressure from Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, he accepted the position of Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, also ex officio Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, in 1965. His decision led to much antagonism and indeed criticism within his constituency. He played conspicuously little part in party politics following his electoral defeat in 1966.

Bowen served as the National Insurance and Department of Social Security Commissioner for Wales from 1967 until 1986. He was also a member of the Lord Chancellor's Committee on Leasehold Reform, and in 1972 he occupied the chair of the committee on Bilingual Traffic Signs. He also served as the committed president of St David's University College, Lampeter from 1977 until 1992. One of the libraries and a research centre at Lampeter carry his name, and Roderic Bowen is also the name of one of the student halls of residence on the Lampeter campus. He was awarded the honorary degree of LID (Wales) in 1972 and was also elected a fellow of Trinity College, Carmarthen in 1992. Bowen was a member of the Governing Body of the National Museum of Wales, 1945-2001, and of the federal University of Wales, 1950-2001.

A warm admirer of **Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris**, Bowen's Liberal credentials were impeccable, reflected in his unwavering belief in the responsibility of the individual and the duty of each one to contribute to the betterment of society. Although veering generally to the right in the political spectrum, sharply opposed to socialism and communism, he was just as dismissive of the claims of those vested interests championed by the Conservative Party.

Bowen's Welsh patriotism was beyond question, reflected in his stalwart support for equality of Wales with Scotland and for Welsh representation in the Cabinet, a commitment recognized by both the National Eisteddfod, which he attended regularly, and the University of Wales. An individual of deep religious convictions, he had become an elder of the Presbyterian church. A lifelong bachelor, tending in his last years to be a recluse living frugally in a small flat at 3 Maynard Court, Fairwater Road, Llandaff in the Welsh capital and suffering from deteriorating health, Roderic Bowen died at Cardiff on 18 July 2001. A small group of his political papers were deposited at the National Library of Wales soon after his death.

Author

Sources

National Library of Wales, *Roderic Bowen Papers*

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various issues of the *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard* and the *The Welsh Gazette*

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The Daily Telegraph, 23 July 2001

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Roderic Bowen](#)

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