

## DAVIES, (FLORENCE) ROSE (1882-1958), Labour activist and local alderman

**Name:** (Florence) Rose Davies

**Date of birth:** 1882

**Date of death:** 1958

**Spouse:** Edward Davies

**Parent:** Fanny Rees (née Berry)

**Parent:** William Henry Rees

**Gender:** Female

**Occupation:** Labour activist and local alderman

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

**Author:** John Graham Jones

Rose Davies was born at 43 Cardiff Street, Aberdare in the Cynon Valley on 16 September 1882, the daughter of William Henry Rees, a local tin worker, and his wife Fanny (née Berry). She was one of seven children, six of whom became teachers. In 1896 she became a monitor at the Aberdare Town National School, and was then apprenticed as a pupil teacher there, subsequently becoming an assistant mistress. She earned £40 per annum in the position. Although her family was not, it would seem, especially politically active, Davies spent her formative years in the distinctive political atmosphere engendered by the long and bitter 1898 coal strike and the election of Keir Hardie as the ILP MP for Merthyr Tydfil in the 'khaki' general election of 1900.

Her political awakening occurred in the context of being something of a feminist within the teaching profession. In 1906, after attending one of Keir Hardie's election meetings at Merthyr Tydfil, Davies was propelled into joining the ILP. In 1908 she married Edward or Ted Davies, a fellow teacher and an activist within the local co-operative movement. At about the same time Rose Davies was chosen as the first secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild in Aberdare, remaining in the position until pressure of work compelled her to stand down in 1920. She had resigned her teaching post at the time of her marriage (as was the custom at the time), but she was soon co-opted on to the Education Committee of the Aberdare UDC, and she became a member of the board of governors of the town's two (the boys' and the girls') grammar schools shortly afterwards. By 1915 she was the chair of the local education committee, and she soon developed a special interest in the provision of school facilities for blind, deaf and dumb pupils, and subsequently for 'mental defectives' and the physically disabled. The first of her own five children was born in 1910.

Over these formative years Rose Davies, together with her husband Ted, also developed a close political and personal friendship with Keir Hardie MP, and both assisted his local campaigns in the two general elections which took place in 1910. The exigencies of the war years saw her assume further public responsibilities, including membership of her local Military Service Tribunal. By 1918 she was elected the chair of the Aberdare Trades and Labour Council, the first woman to occupy this position, and in 1920 she became a JP. In 1919 Davies stood unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate for the Aberdare town ward of the Aberdare UDC, but she was elected to represent the more working-class Gadlys ward in the following year. The need for improved maternity services and birth control featured prominently in her local election campaigns. In 1925 Davies was elected the Labour councillor for the Aberaman ward (Aberdare) of the Glamorgan County Council, thus becoming the first ever female member of the county council. Soon she was elected an alderman of the council. From 1919 until 1926 she was also a member of the Board of Health Welsh Consultative Council, a body brought to an end by Neville Chamberlain as Minister of Health in the latter year.

During the early 1920s Davies played a major role in establishing Labour Party organisation in the newly created parliamentary constituency of Aberdare, and she was elected the first secretary of the East Glamorgan Labour Women's Advisory Council. She became a passionate advocate of greater political education for women. She also became active in the Women's Co-operative Guild, the array of peace movements in the 1920s and various women's movements throughout Wales. She played a major role in the preparation of the impressive peace memorial from the women of Wales to the women of the United States. Davies was a warm admirer of the work of [George M. Ll. Davies](#).

In the momentous general election of 30 May 1929, Rose Davies stood as the first ever Labour candidate for the Honiton division of Devon, singularly unpromising territory for the Socialist cause, and she won just 915 votes, 2.6 per cent of those cast there, and predictably losing her deposit. It was conjectured locally that many Socialists in the constituency had cast tactical votes for the Liberal aspirant in the election J. G. H. Halse. Yet, with characteristic stoicism and optimism, she rejoiced in having 'sown the seed' in distinctly virgin territory for the Labour Party.

Davies remained a prominent public figure within Aberdare and the county of Glamorgan for the rest of her days. In 1925 she was chosen as a governor of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and of the University College of South Wales

and Monmouthshire, Cardiff. She was also prominent in the affairs of the Welsh National Memorial Association. She chaired every single committee of the Glamorgan County Council at various times, and she was later elected the chairman of the council. Her husband's death in 1951 saw her increase her efforts and involvement in public life. She became especially preoccupied with the setting up of a special school for deaf and dumb children at Penarth during the 1950s. She attended a positive array of public meetings at Aberdare and Cardiff, always making use of local public transport, and she regularly travelled by train to attend political and public gatherings at far-flung venues like Birmingham and Manchester. She was awarded the MBE in 1934 and then the CBE in 1954.

Rose Davies died 13 December 1958 at the Royal Infirmary, Cardiff, at the age of 76 and was given a highly impressive, well attended public funeral service at St Elvan's church, Aberdare, followed by cremation at GlynTaf, Pontypridd, 17 December. Especially fulsome tributes were made to her outstanding contribution to public life in the locality.

## Author

Dr John Graham Jones

## Sources

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Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (1975)

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Rose Davies](#)

## Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q18811222](#)

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