

LEWIS, DAVID VIVIAN PENROSE, 1st Baron Brecon (1905-1976), politician

Name: David Vivian Penrose Lewis
Date of birth: 1905
Date of death: 1976
Gender: Male
Occupation: politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Lewis Jones

Born 14 August 1905, the son of Alfred William and Elizabeth Mary Lewis of Craiglas, Talybont-on-Usk, Breconshire. He was educated at Monmouth School to the age of 16 when he left to work with his father who owned stone quarries and slag merchants. He made a considerable contribution to the development of the quarrying side of the business, which became the largest and most advanced in Wales.

At a young age, Vivian Lewis showed an interest in local politics when he was elected to Brecon Rural District Council in 1938. He obtained a seat on the Breconshire County Council in 1946, giving up his rural district council seat in 1949. Lewis was a Conservative and served as Chairman or President of a number of local Conservative organisations: Talybont-on-Usk Conservative branch 1935-50; Brecon and Radnor Conservative Association 1947-51; Brecon and Radnor Young Conservatives 1949-56. His diligent service to the Conservative Party was rewarded in 1956 when he was made Chairman of the Welsh Conservatives. He was also well known in mid-Wales as a keen sportsman; president and captain of the Crickhowell cricket team and a rugby player with both the Abergavenny team and Crawshay's XV formed by his friend, **Captain Geoffrey Crawshay**.

During the early 1950s, the Conservative government resisted the growing pressure for the establishment of the post of Secretary of State for Wales. Churchill created a post of Minister for Welsh Affairs to be held by the post of Home Secretary. Macmillan altered this arrangement in January 1957 when he appointed Henry Brooke as Minister for Housing and Local Government and Minister for Welsh Affairs. Around the same time, the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire recommended the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales, with executive responsibilities similar to those of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Council's recommendation was supported by the opposition parties and by a number of Welsh Conservatives.

On 3 December 1957, the Cabinet rejected the Council's report but agreed to appoint a Minister of State for Welsh Affairs and to develop further measures of administrative devolution. Vivian Lewis was appointed Minister of State for Welsh Affairs on 12 December and he was created a hereditary peer as Baron Brecon of Llanfeugan, Brecknock, on 30 January 1958. The astonishment which greeted the appointment was recorded by *The Economist*: "How an obscure Brecon county councillor, visiting London (in his tweed suit) for the University Rucker match, was called to Downing Street to be made a baron and a Minister of State, represents one of the most curious political appointments since Caligula made his horse a consul. Mr. Lewis, the gentleman concerned, has shown engaging frankness about the unexpectedness of his appointment; he owes it, of course, to the fact that he combines some Welsh mystique, and probably the organising ability that often accompanies that mystique, with the very rare attribute of also voting Conservative."

Besides Lewis's obscurity, the other objections against the new Minister were that his role was imprecise and that he lacked executive power. He was to assist Brooke in bringing forward specific devolution of tasks from central government and he was to be based in Cardiff. The appointment did not satisfy the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire which produced a further report on 18 April 1958; in a tart reply, the Prime Minister commented "Nor do I share the view of the panel - indeed, it would surprise me to learn that the people of Wales generally shared it - that the new post of Minister of State for Welsh Affairs occupied by Lord Brecon is valueless to Wales".

Lord Brecon began as an energetic minister, especially in economic and industrial matters. In his first month in office, he had visited North Wales three times; on the third occasion, he undertook an analysis of the problems facing the slate quarrying industry and on the same day found himself both 1000ft up a mountain as he toured the Dinorwic Quarry and 1000ft underground at the Oakley Quarry in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Within a few months of his appointment, Lord Brecon was involved in the establishment of the Development Corporation for Wales, which was launched by Brecon and Sir Miles Thomas, the corporation's chairman, on 17 September 1958. The corporation was an organization of Welsh industrialists, free from government control and finance. These activities reflected Brecon's background in industry and led to little comment. He was less sure when he entered on to cultural matters. When he was appointed, he agreed, in answer to public criticism, that he did not speak Welsh but understood a certain amount. He promised that he would take steps to ensure that he was more confident in his knowledge of the language.

Lord Brecon's appointment was made against the background of the controversy over the Secretary of State, which led to a number of resignations from the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire and the ensuing emasculating of that body, and of the very bitter controversy over Tryweryn. In view of this, it is surprising that he did not anticipate the controversy that would arise over the appointment of Mrs Rachel Jones as the BBC's Welsh governor. Rachel Jones was the wife of the Dean of Brecon and she had spent a number of years in Australia where her husband held positions in Perth; she had little knowledge of Welsh affairs or the Welsh language. The Dean of Brecon and his wife were close friends of Lord and Lady Brecon. There was a great public row over the appointment, which gave both Brooke and Brecon a very uncomfortable time; a joke reported that the BBC now stood for Brooke, Brecon Club. Mrs Jones turned out to be an able chairman of the Broadcasting Council for Wales.

Lord Brecon served as Minister of State to Henry Brooke 1957-1961; briefly to Charles Hill 1961-62; and, to Sir Keith Joseph, 1962-64. He remained in the government when Sir Alec Douglas-Home became Prime Minister in 1963. With Joseph's assistance, Lord Brecon promoted, with a view to the investiture of the Prince of Wales, the appointment of Major Francis Jones as Wales Herald Extraordinary.

When he left office in 1964, Lord Brecon resumed a directorship with Television Wales and West Ltd., joined the board of Powell Duffryn, which had purchased his family's firms in January 1964, and took on other company appointments. He was one of the four assistant commissioners for Wales, appointed on 9 September 1969 to assist the Commission on the Constitution in the examination of regional problems. From December 1972 to the summer of 1973, he was nominated to the Conservative delegation to the European Parliament where he was placed on the economic and transport committees. In the Parliament, he raised questions on Welsh matters. He was Chairman of the Welsh National Water Development Authority from 1973 to his death, a period which included the very dry summer of 1976. In this role, he relied heavily on the Authority's officials.

Vivian Lewis was a man of energy with a strong sense of public duty, but he was not a man with an outstanding personality. He married Mabel Helen, the second daughter of John McColville of Abergavenny, on 19 April 1933; they had two daughters. He died at his home, Greenhill, Cross Oak, Brecon on 10 October 1976 and his barony became extinct.

The funeral service for family and parishioners was held at Llanfeugan Church on 13 October, followed by cremation. A memorial service attended by John Morris, the Secretary of State for Wales, and by leading figures in the public life of Wales and in the Conservative Party was held at Brecon Cathedral on 23 October 1976.

Lady Brecon (8 May 1910 - 4 September 2005) was active in the public life of Breconshire. She followed her husband as a member of the Brecon Rural District Council and was both a Justice of the Peace and a High Sheriff in the county. Lady Brecon was appointed C.B.E. in 1964 for political and public services in Wales.

Their elder daughter, Rosalind Helen Penrose (Lindy) Lewis (12 September 1938 - 8 June 1999) married Leolin Price, a barrister; she was active in works for prisons and prisoners and also in education. When she returned to Breconshire, she took a leading role in many health bodies. Lindy Price was also High Sheriff of the county and she was appointed C.B.E. in December 1993 for services to health care in Wales.

Author

David Lewis Jones

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