

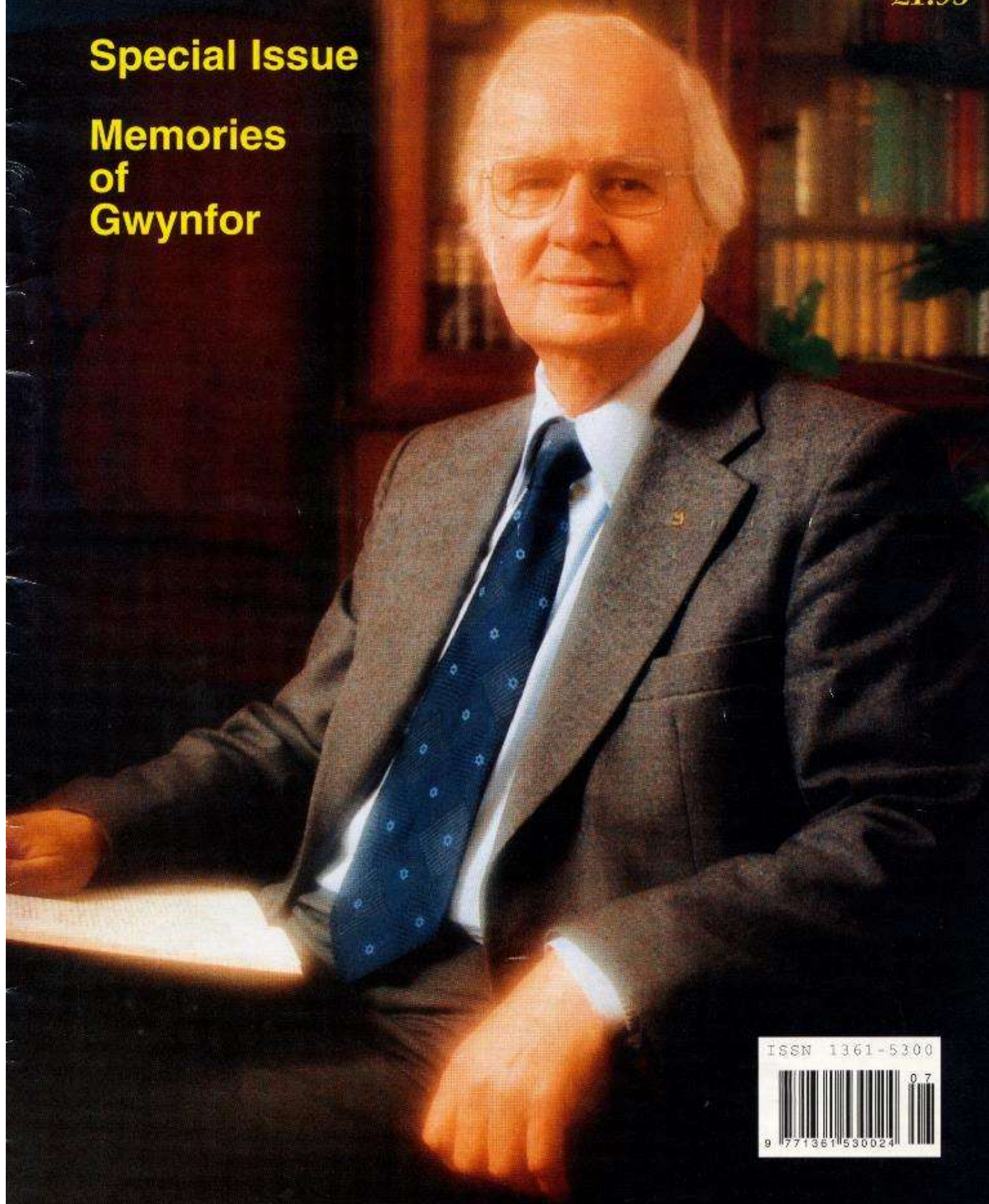
# Carmarthenshire Life

10th Anniversary Year

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**Special Issue**

**Memories  
of  
Gwynfor**



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## **Carmarthenshire from the air**

Carreg Cennan Castle, 1995. Photographed by Toby Driver of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales in Aberystwyth.





**Editor: David Fielding**

I would guess that everyone who came into contact with Gwynfor Evans had a personal story to tell about him. He was that kind of man.

Three people have written their memories of him in this issue of the magazine - Peter Hughes Griffiths, Arwel Davies and Anthony Jenkins.

In addition Arwel Davies has allowed us to use the superb portrait on the front cover - as well as a family group outside Talar Wen.

Our thanks to all three in helping us make our contribution to the greatest Welshman in living memory.

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Cover: Gwynfor Evans

Portrait by Arwel Davies

(Erratum: Last month's front cover was of the 2000 Llandeilo Children's Pageant by Ken Day)



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# Gwynfor

## Some personal memories

from  
**Peter Hughes Griffiths**  
 &  
**Arwel Davies**  
 &  
**Anthony Jenkins**

Photographs in this feature from the Peter Hughes Griffiths collection and by kind permission of Arwel Davies

### Memories of Gwynfor

Much has been written about the life of Gwynfor Evans and especially his political impact on Wales and his achievements since his passing in April this year.

However, I thought it might interest *Carmarthenshire Life* readers if I shared some of my personal memories and recollections on the everyday life of Gwynfor.

It was in 1972 that I became his agent and personal assistant and I was based in the Plaid Cymru Office at 8, Water Street, Carmarthen.

After winning the famous 1966 by-election in Carmarthen and then losing the seat in the next General Election it was obvious that Gwynfor needed a personal organiser as it was

generally felt that his work load in a national context was so heavy that he needed someone by his side to arrange his comings and goings, his engagements and deadlines, and the demand for articles and press releases.

At the same time he was running a successful market gardening business at Llangadog.

### The Scotland Trip

One of the first problems I had to encounter as Gwynfor travelled so widely and regularly throughout Wales was the fact that he insisted on driving and travelling in his own car at all times. The reason for this was that he could not travel, even short distances, as a passenger without feeling quite ill. This became a difficult

issue as Gwynfor preferred to travel to all corners of Wales and England rather than someone meeting him off a train and taking him to his engagement.

He rarely stayed overnight following a function and insisted on driving home to Llangadog from as far away as Ynys Mon or Flintshire even. It is well documented that Gwynfor very rarely missed a Sunday morning service at his chapel in Llangadog and even took his Sunday School class of teenagers every Sunday.

I have very fond memories of the time when Gwynfor and myself travelled by train from Llangadog to Glasgow where we were to be met by car to take us to the Scottish National Party conference in Oban in the mid 70s.



As the train drew nearer and nearer to Glasgow, Gwynfor could not refrain from telling me how worried he was about the next part of the journey by car to Oban, which was a good few hours drive. He asked me if I would allow him to sit in the front passenger seat as he would be requesting a regular stop for some fresh air.

He felt even worse when we met our SNP friend and saw his two-door very small, box like Citroen car.

I managed to squeeze into the back seat with our cases, while Gwynfor crouched into the passenger seat, and in Welsh - knowing that our Scottish friend could not understand - Gwynfor said

"I'm not looking forward to this journey. It's dark, it's pouring down, which means I will not be able to get out for some fresh air or even open my window," and jokingly added, "I think I'll start praying."

In no time we both realised that our driver fancied himself as a bit of a Stirling Moss as he belted along, cutting corners at some speed and tossing Gwynfor from side to side, then breaking suddenly at junctions and overtaking other vehicles somewhat recklessly.

After being thrown around for more than half an hour I ventured to ask Gwynfor, again in Welsh, how he felt, and much to my surprise he replied, "Fine, fine. But I'm scared stiff. He's a terrible driver isn't he?"

"I think both of us should start praying!" he added. This time I was not sure if he meant it as a joke or not!

Unbelievably we reached our hotel in Oban unscathed with Gwynfor feeling no ill effects. He insisted that this was the first time, as long as he could remember, that he had travelled as a passenger in a car without feeling ill. When I suggested, tongue in cheek, that it was the wreckless driving that had occupied his mind and that he was concentrating more on his survival rather than on his car sickness, he tended to agree.

#### The Oban Experience

At that Scottish National Party's Conference I was able to share with Gwynfor an experience that neither of us had ever been part of and which remained with us for the rest of our lives. We often referred to it when in each other's company along the years. It was unique and shared only by those who were present in the Oban Town Hall on that Saturday evening of the conference.

We attended the performance of *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil*. It was an historical and contemporary review of Scotland, ideal for the SNP audience as it showed how their country had been raped by the English and how Margaret Thatcher and the Tories were continuing to do so by taking all the North Sea oil.

There must have been a thousand people packed into the hall with a very long bar running down the whole length of one side as Scottish people are so keen on having their tipple before, during the break and after a show.

The performance commenced and soon we were spellbound by the stage presentation as we saw before our very eyes the cruel suffering of the Scottish people at the hands of the English. It was mesmerising and feelings were high as the truth of yesteryear was spelled out to this captive audience.

Towards the end of the first half I was emotionally moved and turned to Gwynfor sitting next to me. He also had tears in his eyes so moving was the presentation. We both sat there sharing an extraordinary once in a lifetime experience.

The first half was over and the curtain came down. No one moved. There was deathly silence. No applause - nothing. For at least ten minutes it remained the same. Waiters and waitresses stood behind that long bar, but still complete silence as I whispered to Gwynfor in Welsh, "Gwynfor, what is happening? I've never experienced anything like this before."

"Neither have I," he replied in a cracked voice.

At that moment Robert MacIntire the President of the SNP got up slowly and made his way on to the stage. He faced the audience and spoke in a broken voice.



Rhiannon & Gwynfor  
in the 1970s





Gwynfor Evans with Carwyn James, coach of the British Lions. Carwyn stood twice for Plaid Cymru in Llanelli

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is what my life is all about and I ask the performers to continue with the show immediately."

There was no applause, still no one got up to go to the bar. The curtain went up and the show carried on.

The contrast of the second half was unbelievable. Whereas we broke down in tears during the first half, we were now shedding tears of laughter and delight as they showed us how Margaret Thatcher and her puppets told Scotland how safe they were in their hands. For another hour they kept us laughing and clapping and at the end people stood on their seats and they applauded and applauded.

If it was ten minutes of silence at the end of the first half, now it was another quarter of an hour of never ending wild appreciation.

I stood on my seat joining the packed hall as Robert MacIntire led Gwynfor on stage to meet the cast and then he turned to the audience and said

"This is what my life is all about also."

He said no more, the revolution had started - for that evening at least as everyone ran to the bar to celebrate a once in a lifetime experience. And I was there - with Gwynfor Evans.

To be able to recall that evening and to share it with others today fills me with satisfaction.

On Sunday we were to be driven back to Glasgow from Oban and we were so relieved to be told that we would journey with back in the company of a Glasgow solicitor. After Sunday lunch he picked us up from the hotel. We placed our cases and bags in the very large boot of what looked like a very comfortable Humber car. This was going to be luxury - but not for long for Gwynfor. Very soon I saw Gwynfor's colour

changing. He was too much of a gentleman, even in that situation to ask the driver to stop for some fresh air.

So, I stepped in and suggested that both of us needed a stop and some mountain air on a fine Sunday afternoon. The driver kindly obliged but became rather suspicious when we requested some six other stops before Glasgow and what became a very unpleasant journey for Gwynfor.

When we reached the Glasgow hotel, Gwynfor duly went to his room and to bed without supper.

He was in top form the following morning as we started our train journey back to Wales.

Although Gwynfor attended dozens of SNP conferences along the years he often referred to the Oban experience as an occasion that stood out in his mind. I could not agree with him more!

#### Six Months to Live

It was a commonly known fact that Gwynfor was a staunch teetotaler. However, he was always prepared to buy drinks for others. In respecting Gwynfor's stance I always tended to join him in his favourite drink of orange and lemonade and when we were together I know of others who tended to do the same in his company. Even at the bar one could not avoid noticing others showing respect for the man. The only clear exception would be his great friend in Parliament and the first SNP



Copy of a famous line drawing of Gwynfor by Alfred Janes, 1970





Member of Parliament, Winnie Ewing. She would always accept a whiskey or two off him!

I was very much aware at that time of the long hours Gwynfor worked as an MP. Not only did he attend to his parliamentary duties, but there were constantly other national and international issues which people brought flocking to Gwynfor, seeking his support and requesting action from a man who could influence people at all levels.

I was not too surprised therefore to hear that Gwynfor had been rushed to Glangwili Hospital one weekend from his home at Llangadog. I immediately went to see him and there he was sitting up in bed in a jovial mood and saying, "I cannot stop these hiccups," as he hiccuped constantly every ten seconds.

I became very unsure of myself and how to react and whether I should laugh along with him or console him as he hiccuped away.

He insisted on dishing out instructions and briefed me regarding his immediate programme.

The doctor declared that it was sheer exhaustion on his part and that his body could not take any more, so he would have to take at least a month off. We succeeded in keeping him at Talar Wen for most of that month but he insisted on working constantly at home mainly over the telephone.

As a consequence of his illness - and as the general election was looming again - one of the opposition parties had a field day in spreading the rumour that Gwynfor was gravely ill and had only six months to live. As the opposition prospective candidate was a local GP it had that extra credence.

To my mind that rumour did affect the result of the following general election. The main opposition parties spread other untruths about Gwynfor also leading up to that election. One

of them was that he only employed Italians as cheap labour at his market gardening business in Llangadog. This was totally untrue off course.

I should note that Gwynfor outlived by some twenty years that particular G.P. who did become the MP for Carmarthen!

#### George Thomas

When Gwynfor entered parliament he had a similar experience to becoming a county councillor in Carmarthenshire for the first time. In both places Labour members became very hostile towards him, to say the least.

In parliament, members such as Jim Griffiths and others would constantly come to the chamber to heckle and interrupt him. Every Welsh Question Time became a contest between Gwynfor and George Thomas.

Gwynfor often related to me how vile George Thomas was towards him and how he would regularly revile





President of the  
National Eisteddfod,  
Barry, 1968



him in the House and in the press. Gwynfor often said that even Leo Abse's attacks were mild compared to George's hatred of him.

There was a great uproar in Wales when the Eisteddfod invited George Thomas, the then Secretary of State for Wales to become a member of the Gorsedd and to be given the White Robe (the top honour) at the Barry Eisteddfod in 1968.

There were hundreds of people on hand on the day to protest and to prevent George from receiving such a distinguished honour. There was great concern regarding George's safety and there had been public threats. The organisers were aware of this, so when George Thomas appeared in his white robe, who was walking with him in his own white robe but Gwynfor Evans. George and the Eisteddfod had asked Gwynfor to help George in what could have developed into a very ugly situation.

"My knees are like jelly," George told Gwynfor.

As they passed George's Mam during the procession he turned to her.

"It's all right, Mam. Gwynfor is with me."

The protest fizzled out.

Even after suffering the wrath of

George Thomas in Parliament and in the press, Gwynfor Evans was prepared to turn the other cheek and help George Thomas in adversity. That showed the greatness of the man.

After the Gorsedd ceremony, George turned to Gwynfor and thanked him for his support and said, "What can I do for you Gwynfor?"

Taking up George's offer, Gwynfor jokingly replied, "What about a Parliament for Wales?"

George was not amused.

#### Congratulations

I have in my possession an enormous scrap book of some four hundred pages containing the thousands of telegrams, letters, poems and greetings that Gwynfor received following his election as the first Plaid Cymru MP at the by-election in 1966.

They were collected and pasted in by Nans Jones, a member of the Plaid Cymru national staff at the time.

It takes hours to go through all these greetings from not only Wales but from all over the world.

It is such a valuable collection and the comments from certain individuals including the late Sir Harry Seacombe, Saunders Lewis, Lewis Valentine and DJ Williams makes stunning reading.

Soon, I will be handing this collection over to the Welsh Political Archive in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth to be included with Gwynfor's papers, documents and precious memorabilia.

PHG

*Early in June I telephoned Arwel Davies to ask if he had a suitable photograph of Gwynfor for the front cover. Did he ever! When I went into his studio on Blue Street to see it he told me a number of stories about his time with Gwynfor. I asked him if he would put his memories down on paper. This is what he wrote.*

I had barely replaced the telephone handset before a whole plethora of pleasant images and memories of pho-

tographing the late Dr Gwynfor Evans came flooding into my mind, taking me back to the sixties, a time when I had spent many hours in this untiring politician's company.

#### Photographing Gwynfor

It would have been just after the great Caerfyrddin by-election of 1966 that I first met Gwynfor Evans as MP. He was guest of honour at a function in Llandeilo which I was covering as junior photographer for the local South Wales Guardian newspaper. Right from the outset the impression he left was of a charismatic person who unknowingly radiated an aura. You just knew that there was a special person present in our midst.

Some years later when I'd become a freelance photographer I was asked by the Plaid Cymru organiser for the Carmarthenshire constituency - as it was then - to photograph Gwynfor for publicity and the election campaign.

Over the coming years this meant spending day after day taking countless images of him at various venues. Thinking back I'm sure that at times he must have been sick of the sight of me and my equipment! But he never once gave me any such impression. He was always polite and gentlemanly.

Being in the company of this great Welshman for hours on end was truly inspirational. He made a great impression on my life. Without wanting to sound overemotional I feel that I am a better person for knowing him.

My wife Dilwen, who was brought up in Llangadog, knew Gwynfor and his family well. She kept on telling me during those campaigning years, "If every constituent in Carmarthenshire really knew Gwynfor the person he truly is then undoubtedly they would all vote for him."

After being in his company for so long I had to agree with her. From that very first day, travelling round the country in his car - he wasn't keen on being driven - I would learn something about local and national history. Far more than I ever learned at school. Those history 'lessons' were put over in such an interesting way by the quiet, softly voiced academic that they naturally stirred and inspired a national pride and identity which had long lain dormant inside me. He never failed to inspire people in whatever he did.

#### His Personal Qualities

I could write endlessly about precious occasions in his company talking about everything but his work and, yes, his mischievous sense of humour too.

Some things I will keep to myself. Others I will share. Five things stand out:

His ability to adapt to the level of



people in his company without making them feel inferior or inadequate.

His love of his family. He often spoke of his dear wife Rhiannon, especially of her sacrifice and support in the years when he was away from home with his work when the children were young. He was indebted to his brother Alcwyn for his kindness and he was immensely proud of his children. His face lit up whenever he spoke of them.

His surprise and feeling of pride when he returned from North Wales after his first election campaign to his parents' home in Barry to find that the framed photograph of David Lloyd George had been removed from its pride of place in the sitting room.

The great personal sacrifices he made in his life to further the cause of his beloved Wales.

And, lastly, his endless enthusiasm, capacity for hard work and untiring drive to promote everything for the betterment of Wales.

Incidentally, how many people know that some years ago Gwynfor's name appeared in the London Times amongst a list entitled *Distinguished Elder Statesmen of British Politics*. Gwynfor never mentioned it.

There are three Welsh words which come to mind which fittingly describe Gwynfor: 'Gwr didwyll, di-ymhongar, diflino'.

Sincere, unassuming, untiring.

AD

*I also asked Carmarthen solicitor Anthony Jenkins if he would write down his memories of Gwynfor and the historic by-election of 1966. This is what he wrote.*

#### The By-election of '66

Almost 40 years ago, on the 14th July 1966, 16,179 'Carmarthenshire hands made history' as surely as the Paris mob, which, on that day, almost 200 hundred years earlier, had burnt the Bastille and set in motion the French Revolution.

Those hands, as Islwyn Ffowc Elis famously described them, may have little realised that by electing Gwynfor Evans to the House of Commons as the first Member of Parliament representing Plaid Cymru, the Nationalist Party of Wales, they had not only created news headlines around the world but also launched a train of events which would lead eventually to the establishment of S4C, the Welsh Language TV Channel, and the first elected National Assembly of Wales in six hundred years.

Life in Wales would never be the same again.

My memories of my involvement in those events are as clear to me now as if they had happened yesterday. It was a time when young people, students in particular, were much more interested in and involved in politics.

Two years later in 1968, revolution, mostly student inspired, would break out over much of Europe and shake the Establishment to its very foundations.

Here in Carmarthen, I and my friend Geraint Thomas, known then and now as 'the Prof', discovered that we had an interest in politics and that our affinities lay with Plaid Cymru.

We were both students at Carmarthen's Grammar School for Boys, and following our decision to form a Youth Branch of Plaid Cymru in the town I wrote to Gwynfor Evans, inviting him to address the inaugural meeting. Thus I came to know the greatest Welshman of our times.

Of course he accepted my invitation - I never knew him to refuse one - and on the 23rd March 1965 he addressed the inaugural meeting of the Carmarthen Youth Branch of Plaid Cymru.

It was an extraordinary event. The word had got around and over 200 hundred young people turned up for a meeting which I hurriedly had to reconvene in St. Peter's Civic Hall. The decaying old Plaid offices in Bridge Street, leased to the Party by Mrs Harvey Nichols - reputedly a member of the Knightsbridge Store Family - were hopelessly inadequate.

He spoke to us for two hours in that quiet intellectual manner of his about the history of Wales, what it meant to him to be Welsh, his love for our language and culture and we were transfixed, as surely as the wedding guest in Coleridge's Rime of The Ancient Mariner. The Prof was elected Chairman of the Branch, I its General Secretary and the leading committee members were Sian Edwards, Margaret Morgan and Richard Huws.

Campaigning in Carmarthen West in the General Election, 1974





On that night were sown the seeds of electoral success fifteen months later. Gwynfor himself was always the first to recognise that without us, his young supporters in Carmarthen, the result of the 1966 by-election might have been different.

Of course, the reasons for his stunning victory were many and complex. They may have included dissatisfaction within the Labour Party at the new candidate from outside the constituency, tactical voting on the part of voters from the other parties in an effort to achieve a Labour defeat and even a genuine swing to the policies of Plaid Cymru.

Above all else, however, there was a widespread belief across the political divide that in Gwynfor Evans, Plaid Cymru had a candidate of quiet and impressive dignity and stature who would bring to the office of member for Carmarthen those statesmanlike qualities possessed by former holders of the office such as Lady Megan Lloyd George and Sir Rhys Hopkins Morris.

I never did meet anyone who did not have the highest regard for Gwynfor Evans as a man. As a Christian, he respected the worth of all men and women, whatever their religious or political beliefs. As a lawyer, he recognised that we all have rights and responsibilities and, as an Internationalist, he valued all cultures whilst foreseeing Wales taking its rightful place in the United Nations.

There is little doubt that he inspired us all and for the next year we campaigned on his behalf with passion. Whether it was organising a Twmpath Dawns to raise funds or selling literature and canvassing outside the old market gates, we brought a vigour and inventiveness to politics, hitherto

unseen in Carmarthen. Always Gwynfor was there to encourage us and to attempt to curb our excesses when they threatened to get out of hand.

The result of the 1966 General Election was a disappointment. We felt that our efforts deserved better and although the vote for Gwynfor Evans improved significantly, there was still an enormous Labour majority. However, within a few weeks Lady Megan, the sitting member, had passed away and a by-election had been announced. The time had come for Gwynfor and us.

I represented the Youth Branch on the By-Election Executive Committee chaired by the intellectual Dr. Eurfyl Jones and comprising, amongst others, Cyril Jones as Gwynfor's tireless election agent, the irrepressible Dr Gareth Evans, the author Islwyn Ffowc Elis, such a lovely man, and of course Gwynfor himself. For a seventeen year old, it was an education that money could not have bought.

By the time voting day arrived, I believe that we had electrified the political atmosphere in the constituency. Gwynfor, always professional, retained his usual calm self-possessed exterior; whereas we, with the enthusiasm of youth, had made certain that the political temperature had risen to boiling point.

Who now remembers the sensation caused by the publication in the Carmarthen Journal of a letter from a certain George Thomas from Rhydychen Talog or our intervention in a meeting being addressed by a cabinet minister, which prompted the Western Mail to comment the following day, 'Carmarthen By-Election sparks into life'.

During that campaign, I spent many hours in Gwynfor's company, travelling the length and breadth of the constituency and visiting places I never knew existed. With my limited experience, I did not realise that Carmarthenshire was so varied or so beautiful.

He always used to say to me that he could never get lost in his beloved Sir Gar and sure enough we usually got to the right place, almost always nearly on time!

Naturally we talked about politics. However, Gwynfor was essentially a shy man and our conversations tended to be limited. There was of course a significant difference in age between us. It was only much later that I learnt that we shared a passion for the game of cricket. How I would have enjoyed discussing the sport with him.

I look back on those days with a sense of astonishment that I lived through and participated in an extraordinary episode in our country's political history.

Although I followed Gwynfor Evans into the legal profession, I often regret that my relationship with him was limited to those few years when I was a student. Yet he left us all with a legacy that will remain with us for the rest of our lives, a legacy that teaches us to be proud of our Welsh heritage and to strive to fulfil our potential as Welsh men and women.

On the morning of the 15th July 1966, as the result of Gwynfor's victory was announced from the balcony of Carmarthen's Guildhall and as the first light of dawn streaked the early morning sky, I kept thinking of those lines written by William Wordsworth 200 years earlier at the time of the French Revolution:

'Bliss was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.'

AJ



Gwynfor and Rhiannon with children and families at Talar Wen, Llangadog, 1983.