

# Pioneer Patriot - The Life of Wynne Samuel

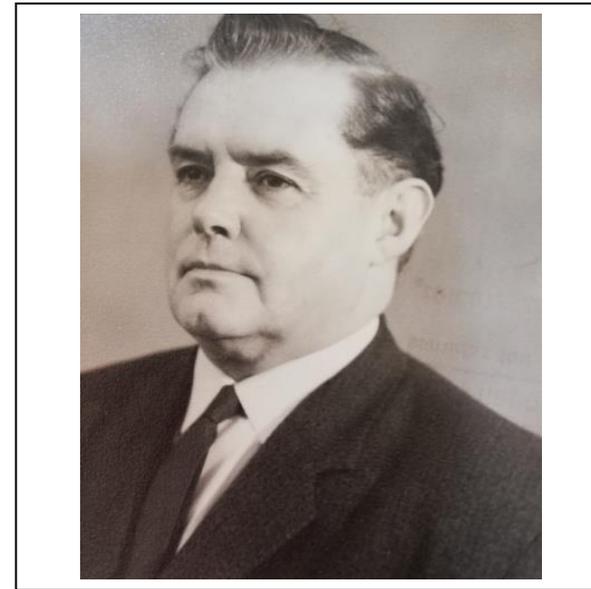
*A Tribute by Dafydd Williams, Chairman of Plaid Cymru History Society*

Wynne Samuel was a man of immense talent who set aside personal ambition to serve his country. He worked heart and soul for Wales from the beginning of the nineteen thirties, and continued until the final months of his life in 1989. He played a vital role in laying the foundations of Plaid Cymru in the valleys of South Wales; he had a strong influence on local government; and at one time he was considered to be a potential future leader of the party. Yet to a large extent his contribution has not yet been accurately recorded or widely celebrated. This tribute attempts to put the record straight.

## Childhood in Ystalyfera

Wynne Islwyn Samuel was born in Ystalyfera in the Swansea Valley on 17 October 1911 (not 1912, as suggested by a number of sources). Thus he was a year older than Gwynfor Evans. But he did not have an easy childhood. Before reaching the age of seven, he lost his father - killed in the first world war just over a century ago. The army's records show that Rifleman John Samuel died in battle in France on 26 May 1918, after four years in the trenches. His death occurred in the B ethune area of Pas-de-Calais Nord during the second phase of the Kaiserschlacht, the German offensive led by General Erich Ludendorff.<sup>1</sup> As a result, his mother, Mabel Dorothy, left the area to pursue her career as a nurse in Neath Hospital and Morriston

<sup>1</sup> Si n Dowling: conversations between the author and Wynne Samuel's daughter, Si n Dowling, Monday, 10 September 2018 and Monday, 1 October 2018 in the Chapter Arts Centre, Canton, Cardiff. I am most grateful to



**1. Dr Wynne Samuel (1911 - 1989)**

Hospital where she became a matron. It is important to note that she kept in touch with the family, helping her son financially throughout her life.<sup>2</sup> So Wynne was not an orphan, as some sources suggest. Rather he was brought up by his maternal grandfather, William Jones, a minister of religion at Soar, a Baptist chapel in Ystalyfera, his second wife Rachel Ann, and their

Si n for priceless information and insights, for correcting the text and for loaning a substantial number of photographs and documents.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

daughter, Eluned, who would always be very close to him. In an article in *Seren Gomer*, the Reverend Rowland Jones suggested that it was his grandfather who chose his two Christian names from Welsh literature - Wynne after Elis Wynne of Gwyrfai and Islwyn, the Gwent poet. According to one observer, on the kitchen wall at home hung three pictures of his grandfather's heroes - William Ewart Gladstone, Tom Ellis and David Lloyd George.<sup>3</sup>

Wynne lost his grandfather when he was twelve - a major blow - and the family moved from the manse to live in Bryn Tirion, 55 Alltygrug Road, Ystalyfera, and later on, 76 Alltygrug Road. Rowland Jones, describing the hardship of Wynne's childhood, relates that this put 'iron in his blood, and strength in his character'; but while there is no question about his strength of character, I remember Wynne as a man who always had a smile on his face.

Wynne attended primary school at Ysgol Gynradd y Wern, before going on to Ystalyfera Grammar School. Ystalyfera had once been home to the largest tinsplate works in the world, and later on to a number of coal mines - so his background was very much that of the industrial valleys of Wales. He was deeply involved in the activities of his grandfather's Baptist chapel, becoming a deacon at the age of just twenty-two, and making his mark as a lay preacher - an early indicator of his talent as orator and communicator. But he was also interested in sports - virtually all sport according to his daughter Siân: he was a lifelong and faithful supporter of the Swans and also of Swansea's rugby team, and after moving to Pembrokeshire, Llanelli Scarlets! And cricket - he proved to be an accomplished cricketer (another

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<sup>3</sup> J. Rowland Jones. 'Islwyn Wynne Samuel Ll. M. (sic) Llywydd Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru, 1960-61.' *Seren Gomer*. Spring 1960 Pages 5-6. This is an important article published when Wynne became President of the Welsh Baptist Union, although it contains a number of errors e.g. the year of his birth. I note these in the Bibliography below.

link with Gwynfor Evans) - to such an extent that he was offered a position on the full-time staff of Glamorgan Cricket Club, an offer never made to Gwynfor, as far as I am aware.

Apparently he was elated by the offer, but once home his hopes were shattered by Rachel Ann, who was determined he should have a more respectable occupation. Or as the Reverend Rowland Jones put it in his article, 'She spared him from taking a very strange path'. Instead of cricket, around 1928 Wynne took up the position of audit clerk in Swansea Town Hall - aged 16.



**2. Tacu, with Mabel Dorothy, Wynne's mother, as a young girl**

## Joining Plaid Cymru

Shortly after taking up his new job came another important turning point in his life. Wynne attended a public meeting in Ystalyfera called by the Welsh Nationalist Party, a new movement set up a few years before. And along with a group of miners and tinsplate workers he joined this new party. Who organised this meeting, and on what date? Who addressed it? It must have

been among the first held in the South Wales Valleys. I feel almost sure that it was the work of that legendary nationalist organiser, Oliver Evans, although I have no proof. But the great architect of Plaid Cymru, JE Jones, relates that a man by the name of Owen Jones, who later became a bank manager and retired to Porthcawl, claimed that he was responsible for signing Wynne up as a party member.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the background, there is no doubt that this was a major milestone in the young man's life. He became a Plaid member, around six years before Gwynfor, who joined up in 1934. From that moment on, he threw himself into the work of the national movement and played a notable role in the party's endeavours to haul itself up by the bootstraps in the mining valleys of the south. Wynne was among the first openly to stand as a local government candidate in the name of Plaid Cymru.<sup>5</sup> In 1935-36, says the historian Hywel Davies, the party's general secretary JE Jones could cite only two election campaigns - and this was said to be a 'successful year'! Significantly, the two referred to were led by a student, Cathrin Huws in Cardiff, and another young member, Wynne Samuel, in the Swansea Valley.<sup>6</sup> And after the burning of the bombing school in Penyberth in the Llŷn peninsula, Wynne turned to the pages of Y Ddraig Goch to call for intensive preparations for fighting local elections.<sup>7</sup>

One method used by Plaid Cymru to 'haul itself up' was the organisation of public meetings, and indeed Wynne had addressed one of these in Ystalyfera, at the age of just 17.<sup>8</sup> But these could be quite stormy affairs, to say the least. When Gwynfor Evans agreed to address a meeting of

communists on Tonypany square in 1937, Oliver Evans wrote to Wynne to express his concern that 'Gwynfor is a little too gentle for a meeting of this sort'! Wynne was quite a different character - one of Plaid Cymru's toughest, according to Gwynfor's biographer, Rhys Evans. This was the



**3. Wynne the cricketer, in the back row last but one on the right, nursing the ball: his friend Llew is in the front row on the right**

meeting, incidentally, where a brick was hurled in the direction of Kitchener Davies. In due course Gwynfor himself toughened up, it seems, so much so that his great friend Dewi Watcyn Powell nicknamed him 'Stalin'!<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> JE Jones. 'Tros Gymru: JE a'r Blaid'. Gwasg John Penry, Swansea (1970) Page 105.

<sup>5</sup> The first recorded candidate officially sponsored by Plaid Cymru in South Wales was Welsh Nationalist editor Morris Williams in the Rhondda Valley in 1933. D Hywel Davies. 'The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945: A Call To Nationhood'. University of Wales Press (1983). Page 149.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Page 149.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Page 208.

<sup>8</sup> Siân Dowling. Op. Cit.

<sup>9</sup> Rhys Evans. 'Portrait of a Patriot. Y Lolfa (2008) Page 48.

## The Shadows of War

As the 1930s wore on, so the shadow of war lengthened. Wynne was a convinced pacifist, no doubt driven on by the loss of his father in the slaughter of the First World War as well as his religious principles. Shortly after declaration of war, he was responsible for organising a major public meeting to oppose conscription, held over Whitsun on 26 May 1939, and addressed by the leader of the South Wales miners, the Communist Arthur Horner, as well as Wynne himself, who it is said delivered a powerful speech.<sup>10</sup>

It was no easy task to espouse pacifism at that time. In 1940 he was stripped of his employment with Swansea Council, the price he paid for refusing to sign a statement expressing full support for the war. This is certain to have come as a massive blow to him personally but those responsible for this persecution would never have realised that they were doing Wales' national movement a big favour. For their decision meant that someone of exceptional talent and determination was now free to spend all his time on furthering the cause of Plaid Cymru. Gwynfor Evans suggested that a farm should be acquired to enable young people such as Wynne to work in a cooperative, so that "a start might be made on this new communistic life" (Gwynfor's words, not mine!) - but nothing came of this idea.<sup>11</sup>

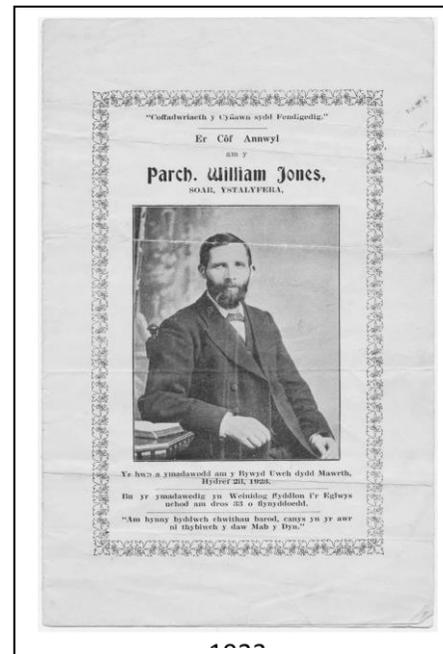
### Working for Plaid and Marriage

In September 1940, Wynne appeared before the South Wales Tribunal where he was registered as a conscientious objector. The following month, he was offered his Council post back; but by now he had dedicated himself to another course - one much closer to his heart. For the next decade he

<sup>10</sup> JE Jones. Op. Cit. Page 224

<sup>11</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 69.

worked as Plaid Cymru organiser in South Wales. He also worked as editor of the Welsh Nation, Plaid Cymru's monthly English-language newspaper - a considerable task in those days - as well as contributing regularly to Y Ddraig Goch.



**4. Tacu died in 1923 - a massive blow for Wynne**

**5. Our first photograph of Wynne as a young boy**

Saunders Lewis's correspondence also reveals that he was involved in the organisation of Plaid's campaign in the University of Wales by-election in 1943. In the opinion of Gwynfor Evans among others, this helped sustain Plaid Cymru through the difficult war years and their aftermath. For example, in 1941, he organised protest meetings against the government's refusal to evacuate children from Cardiff and Swansea, as had been

arranged for English cities. Swansea had suffered devastating air raids over three nights in February 1941, and Wynne worked for weeks following the damage to help those who had suffered.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of the war came another important event - his wedding in February 1942 to Phyllis Lorraine Lewis of 23, Owen's Lane, Godre'r Graig. Phyllis apparently was not fond of her first name, says Siân - she would have preferred to be called Frances! The reception was held in the Mackworth, one of Swansea's leading hotels which was situated on High Street. The Luftwaffe launched a raid on the same day: the wedding breakfast carried on, but according to Siân a number of injured people were brought into the hotel at the same time. Phyllis proved a tower of strength to Wynne and his work for Plaid, and I remember her as a most pleasant and elegant person.

By now, the Plaid branch in Ystalyfera had grown to be the biggest in South Wales.<sup>13</sup> It set up an office in the town, Tŷ'r Werin, which continued for decades (a pity I have no picture!). Wynne used this foothold to organise a large number of public meetings in the district, and he would invariably be one of the most effective and powerful speakers. During the course of the war, he also organised opposition to the compulsory transfer of workers from Wales to factories across the border and led a number of significant campaigns. These included an important initiative to keep open Cwmllynfell colliery, and seek transfer of ownership to the miners themselves.

### Election as Councillor

Around 1946 began one of the most significant themes of his life - his association with local government. Wynne was elected as one of the first Plaid Cymru councillors in South Wales, and he remained a member of

<sup>12</sup> JE Jones. Op. Cit. Page 284.

<sup>13</sup> John Graham Jones. 'Samuel, Wynne Islwyn (1912-1989), local government officer, Plaid Cymru activist and organiser'. National Library of Wales. (2008)

Pontardawe Rural District Council for a number of years. Towards the end of the year the former Plaid leader Saunders Lewis urged the party to fight the Neath constituency with Wynne Samuel as candidate, and went on to say to DJ Williams, "I was glad to hear your commendation of Wynne as a



**5 Around 1926 - Wynne and his great friend Llew, both members of the new Welsh Nationalist Party in Ystalyfera**



**6 Wynne as a young man, perhaps at the time of gaining his first job?**

ORIEL Y BLAID.—38.

**MR. WYNNE SAMUEL, YSTALYFERA**

**P**E baech yn sefyll wrth borth Neuadd y Dre yn Abertawe ben bore, ond odid na chanfyddech ddyu ieuanc talsyth, gydag wyneb hawddgar, a threm ddwys-lyfyrion yn ei lygaid, a chwd o walli da trefnus yn coronni ei ben, a rhyw benderfyniad diwyro yn ei osgo pan gerddai dros y llawnt tua'r porth.

Wynne Samuel o Ystalyfera a fyddai, gwr ieuanc rhadlon, o gwmpas pedair ar huggain oed. Derbyniodd ei addysg drwy Ysgol y Cynegor ac Ysgol y Sir yn Ystalyfera. Wrth ei aibwsgaeth, gwasanaetha Gorfforaeth Abertawe fel clerc. Defnyddia beth o'i hamdden i fyfyrto, a mynychu ddi o sbarth haidau mewn Economeg a Llywodraeth Leol. Cymer gryn ddi-ddordeb hefyd mewn pethau crefyddol, a rhydd lawer o'i amser i'w Eglwys yn Soar, Ystalyfera, lle yr etholwyd ef yn ddiagon ers peth amser yn ôl.

Ef yw ysgrifennydd Pwyllgor Rhanbarth Gorllewin Morgannwg. A phan benderfynodd Cangen Ystalyfera a'r Pwyllgor Rhanbarth i ymladd am sedd y

Cynegor Sir yn yr ardal yn erbyn y Blaid Lafur, nid oedid neb cymhwysach na Wynne i'w gael fel ymgeisydd am y sedd bwysig honno. A phe byddech yn Ystalyfera ar nos Sadwrn yn awr, fe'i gweldech ef yn arwain ei fyddioedd i'r gŵd ar Sgwâr y Pentre.

Mae'n siaradwr grymus a dylanwadol. Ac nid oes o'n arno sefyll i fyny dros egwyddorion y Blaid. Mae'n hollol gartrefol wrth ateb cwestiynau'r dorf.

Mae e' wrthi'r funud yma pan ysgrifennol. A chan nad beth fydd ei ddydd yn yr etholiad ddiwedd Ionawr, yr ydym yn sicr mai efe yw'r ymgeisydd gorau sydd ar y maes y tro hwn.

Proffwydwn ddyfodol gwych i Wynne. Os medr y Blaid ddenu serch a diddordeb dynion ieuanc o'r teip hyn, gellir yn hawdd broffwyo dyfodol gwych i'r Blaid hefyd. Rhyfeddwn ni damaid na weli rhai ohonom Wynne Samuel fel A.S. yn Senedd Cymru.—T.L.



**Y Ddraig Goch**

speaker. I heard him myself address Aberystwyth students in a debate with the Communist, Idris Cox, beat him hollow and make a good impression on the students. He and Gwynfor are the Party's two leaders now." In the same letter, however, he reported complaints that Wynne had not concentrated enough on the Neath constituency, and preferred "wandering outside it."<sup>14</sup> These absences from the Neath constituency were scarcely surprising given his rising prominence on the national stage as the war drew to a close. JE Jones records how Wynne and Gwynfor addressed a string of meetings in Pembrokeshire in November 1944 - in Fishguard, Tre-fin, Dinas Cross and Newport, all of them arranged by DJ Williams. In the same month, there were meetings at which he appeared in Cilfynydd and Pontypridd.<sup>15</sup> Then in 1945, Wynne contested a Parliamentary by-election in Neath, gaining 6,290 votes, 16.2 per cent and so sufficient to retain his deposit, a cause of considerable celebration in those days!<sup>16</sup> This by the way was the first time for Plaid Cymru to fight a Westminster seat in South Wales since its formation twenty years before. In the wake of this performance, the party decided to field candidates in seven constituencies in the general election that was shortly to follow, the first since the end of the war in Europe: three in the north, three in industrial south Wales, and the University.<sup>17</sup> Wynne contested Neath once more, holding on to most of his by-election vote, despite the presence of a Liberal in the field this time, a result that compared favourably with results in North Wales seats that had been fought by the party several times.<sup>18</sup>

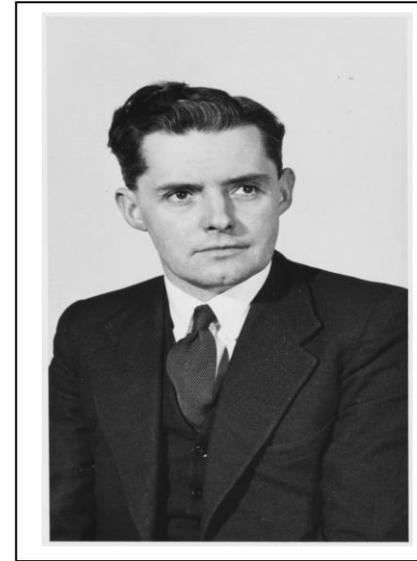
<sup>14</sup> Emyr Hywel (Editor) 'Annwyl D.J.: Llythrau D.J., Saunders, a Kate'. Y Lolfa (2007) Page 122-123. The passage is translated from Welsh.

<sup>15</sup> JE Jones. Op. Cit. Page 351.

<sup>16</sup> Dafydd Williams. 'The Story of Plaid Cymru'. Plaid Cymru (1990) Page 13.

<sup>17</sup> Hywel Davies. Op. Cit. Page 248.

<sup>18</sup> D. Hywel Davies. Op. Cit. Page 249.



**9 Shoulder to shoulder against war -  
Wynne and miners' leader, Arthur Horner**

But these two election campaigns pale in significance when compared with those of the following year, following the refusal of Deputy Prime Minister Clement Atlee to yield as much as a Secretary of State for Wales.<sup>19</sup> First, Wynne was seconded to the Ogmore constituency to organise the campaign of Plaid candidate Trefor Morgan, the businessman and fiery nationalist who established the Undeb insurance company and an independent Welsh-medium school. Plaid doubled its vote to gain 5,685. The Ogmore campaign took place in June 1946, and it is evident that Wynne had made a deep impression - because he was selected to fight the Aberdare by-election, held in December 1946, when he succeeded in winning over seven thousand (7,090) votes, finishing second to Labour and pushing Tory candidate Lincoln Hallinan to the bottom of the poll. The result ranks among the best ever secured by Plaid Cymru despite coming hard on the heels of the manifold problems encountered during the war.

<sup>19</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 91.

## Campaigning in the 1940s

There is no doubt that these challenging campaigns were a major spur for the development of the national movement in the mid twentieth century - especially in the valleys of South Wales.<sup>20</sup> They proved a vital contribution to the growth of Plaid Cymru under its newly elected young President, Gwynfor Evans. In my opinion Wynne shared Gwynfor's political philosophy and his policies on the topics of the day. But, as we shall see, he also had an independent mind and a readiness to express that independent opinion in no uncertain terms. Together with the economist and ex-miner DJ Davies, Wynne was responsible for framing a cooperative economic policy that aspired to undermine capitalism and transform it from within.<sup>21</sup> He wrote a series of pamphlets proposing that the post-war economy should be restructured on the basis of a cooperative system<sup>22</sup>; one suggesting a plan to save the tinsplate industry, as well as the pamphlet 'Transference Must Stop' in 1943, opposing the cruel policy of the compulsory transfer of workers from Wales.<sup>23</sup> All these evince his ambition for Plaid Cymru to make its mark and secure progress - and throughout his career we can find examples of his impatience with failure.

Wynne was closely involved with the party's efforts to defend Welsh land from takeover by the military. Wales had already lost thousands of acres during the war in areas such the Epynt mountains - but even after the conflict was over further threats emerged to whole districts at the hands of Western Command, among them Llyn-y-fan, Tregaron and Trawsfynydd.

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<sup>20</sup> John Graham Jones. Op. Cit.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Sandry. 'Plaid Cymru: An Ideological Analysis'. Welsh Academic Press (2011) Page 55.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Sandry. Op. Cit. Page 168.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Sandry. Op. Cit. Page 233.



**10. Protest at Llyn-y-Fan Fach, January 1947 - part of the struggle to defend the land of Wales**

The Plaid leadership, Gwynfor especially, stressed the need to set up local defence committees. Wynne however was somewhat impatient with this strategy and (along with Kate Roberts) called for 'action'.<sup>24</sup> Both he and DJ Williams addressed the 1947 Conference calling for 'practical action' against the plans of the War Office. In response, the Plaid National Executive decided at the beginning of 1948, that they would not 'give an inch' of land in Trawsfynydd, Wynne now prophesying that the 'time for taking practical action' was near.<sup>25</sup> This decision led to a remarkable act of civil disobedience in which Plaid Cymru staged a sit-down to block the road in

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<sup>24</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 113.

<sup>25</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 116.

and out of the military camp, and Gwynfor demonstrated his ability to lead such a protest effectively.

### Career Development

No-one on the payroll of Plaid Cymru could expect to take home a big wage packet. And by now there were three mouths to feed, for a daughter Siân had arrived in August 1944. I can only imagine the hardship faced by the family during those years - something I was never required to face. That may well account for Wynne's decision to return to working in local government once more in 1947, when he took up a post with Pontardawe Urban District Council.<sup>26</sup> At about the same time, he embarked on a serious course of study for a Diploma in Public Administration and then the law. His talent - and his determination - were clear. Now a family man, and with wartime prejudice fading, he went on to take an LI.B. and then an LI.M degree in the University of London. His research project for the latter degree was 'Special Research on the Act of Union of England and Wales 1536'. Incidentally, Wynne was to spend a considerable amount of time in London, where his grandfather's daughter Eluned, had settled in 80 Fairlop Road, Leytonstone E11: Phyllis and Siân would also come to stay there quite often. And Siân has related the story of how he would visit Hyde Park Corner, and address the crowd there on the topic of a free Wales!<sup>27</sup>

**12. Wynne seated next to Gwynfor at a party course at Kilvrough Manor in Gower in 1953**

<sup>26</sup> John Graham Jones. Op. Cit.

<sup>27</sup> Siân Dowling. Op. Cit.

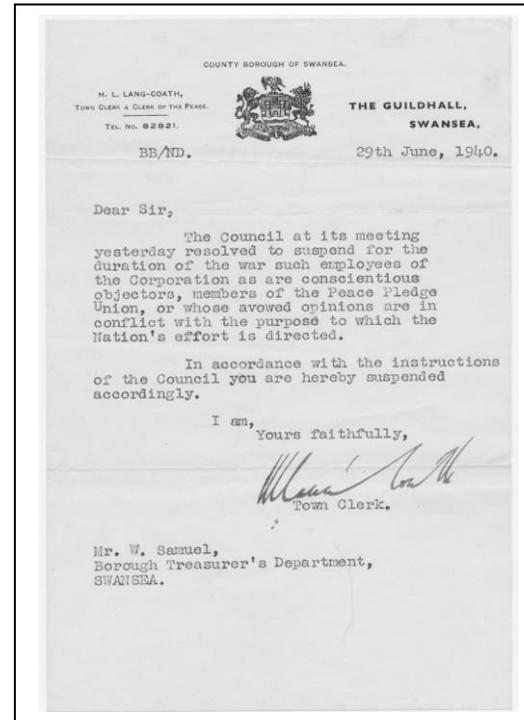


**11. The Newport Summer School, 1950 - Wynne (middle row, on the right) was no longer on Plaid's payroll, but still a key figure**





13. Wynne and Phyllis - wedding day as the bombs fell on Swansea, 1942



14. The sack - the letter from Swansea Council dismissing Wynne for refusing to back the war



15. Among members of Pontardawe Rural District Council - Wynne is in the back row on the right

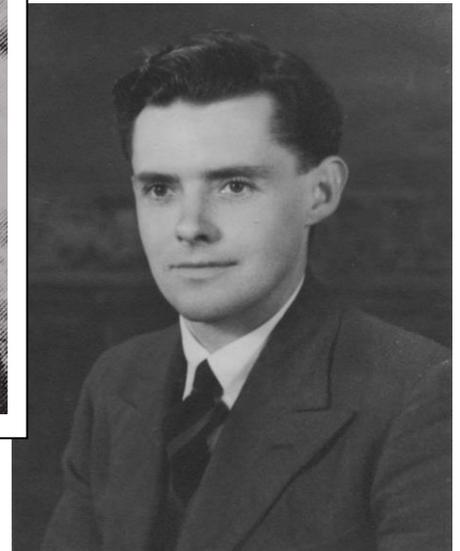
Although he fought the Aberdare seat once more in 1950, taking less than half the vote he had won four years before, from now on his focus was firmly on succeeding professionally. Another twist in the story therefore, in which he was advancing on two fronts - local government and the law. But he was still clearly fascinated by the political struggle and active with the national party. A little later, in 1951, he was to clash with the leadership, and with Gwynfor in particular. The issue this time was the Parliament for Wales campaign - and the dispute is a curious precursor of a similar argument that would take place three decades later at the time of the first devolution referendum. The argument arose because of Gwynfor's wish to further the Parliament for Wales campaign by standing down in seats where the sitting MP was in favour of the campaign. When he heard of this move, Wynne was gobsmacked - maintaining that the policy was 'utterly unworkable' in constituencies such as Caernarfon and Meirionnydd where both the Liberal and Labour candidates were in favour of a Welsh Parliament.<sup>28</sup> More opposition, from both north and south, was voiced when the new strategy was announced two months later, in June. A motion from the West Glamorgan Rhanbarth Committee challenging the new line was withdrawn only at the last moment, and, according to Wynne, 'solely out of respect for Gwynfor'. But respect or not, in a private letter to the party's General Secretary, JE Jones on 14 July, 1951, Wynne denounced the strategy, even maintaining that Gwynfor had staged a 'political farce'.<sup>29</sup> His misgivings were confirmed by the following general election in October 1951: the two strongest advocates of a Parliament for Wales, Megan Lloyd George in Anglesey and Emrys Roberts in Meirioneth both lost their seats - albeit both to MPs on the pro-Welsh wing of the Labour Party, Cledwyn Hughes and TW Jones.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 132.

<sup>29</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 133.

<sup>30</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 138

It is important to recall that throughout this debate Wynne remained on friendly terms with Gwynfor and other Plaid leaders. Indeed, three years later, in 1954, there was strong pressure on him to stand once more in Aberdare, where another Parliamentary by-election was called some nine years after the barnstorming campaign he had led at the end of the war. But this time, he refused - and it is easy to see why: he had every right to concentrate on his professional career and make up for all those lean years. Gwynfor Evans himself was obliged to fight Aberdare, readily conceding that he was not half as popular among local members as Wynne.<sup>31</sup> And yet - Wynne's heart was still set on politics, or rather the cause of Wales, and that flame remained constant.



**16. "Wynne and Gwynfor are the Party's two leaders now."  
Saunders Lewis, February, 1944**

<sup>31</sup> Rhys Evans. Op. Cit. Page 152.

## Barrister

Free of front line duties for Plaid, Wynne proceeded to take a doctorate with the University of Ireland: his thesis studied the indigenous Welsh laws of Hywel Dda. In 1956 he was called to the bar from Gray's Inn, and in contrast to many newly qualified barristers, succeeded in securing a substantial number of briefs. His mother, Mabel, supported him during this period as she had many times before.<sup>32</sup> At the age of 44 he was young enough to choose a career either in the law courts or in local government. Yet the pull of nationalism was ever present: in 1956, he was highly critical of a long awaited pamphlet 'Save Cwm Tryweryn For Wales', which it seems was littered with technical errors.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of the fifties, Wynne had established himself professionally. He spent around nine years working as a full-time barrister, although as Siân recalls, his heart was always in politics. In 1960 he was offered a post with the United Nations Organisation in Geneva - this of course would have meant leaving Wales, with all the consequences, and fortunately he turned the offer down. In 1964 he was appointed as senior lecturer in law at Chelmsford Technical College (not Chester, as one source claims), when he secured accommodation with Eluned once more. But the following year he succeeded in returning to Wales, accepting the post of Town Clerk - chief officer - of Tenby Borough Council in the south of Pembrokeshire. This is when I first got to know him: my father looked after the town's bowling green near Wynne and Phyllis's home at Gwernos, South Cliff Street. I remember climbing the stairs to the top floor of a plain building in the Norton, overlooking Tenby's North Beach - and discussing the latest news about Plaid Cymru. For Wynne was still politically active - he stood six times as a Parliamentary candidate for the party, a testament to his determination

<sup>32</sup> Siân Dowling. Op. Cit.

<sup>33</sup> Rhys Evans. Op Cit. Page 170.

**17. Called to the bar - Gray's Inn, 1956**



and strength of character. He was also chosen to stand in Merthyr Tydfil in 1960, and still listed as prospective candidate for the constituency in mid-1962<sup>34</sup>; it is said he withdrew because of ill health - exactly why is not clear. Plaid Cymru came knocking at his door once more with an invitation to contest the Rhondda West by-election in 1967, but once more he declined.<sup>35</sup>

For all his readiness to be critical, and even rebel at times, Wynne Samuel remained a person whom Gwynfor and JE Jones trusted and would frequently turn to. It is difficult to place him in any particular box: sometimes he was Wynne the rebel, at others a tower of strength for the party leadership. If he really was part of the select group who advised Gwynfor - 'Pwyllgor y Llywydd' (the President's Committee), or to use Harri Webb's more colourful term, 'Llys Llangadog' - as one author

<sup>34</sup> Plaid Cymru Archive. 'Llyfr Cofnodion y Gynhadledd' (Conference Minute Book). Plaid Cymru Archive G194. National Library of Wales.

<sup>35</sup> Rhys Evans. Op Cit. Page 277.



**18. All smiles at the Pontarddulais Summer School 1962 - but according to one observer, behind the scenes 'the place was full of frustration and division'**

suggests<sup>36</sup>, that did nothing to stop his occasional rebellions. It is worth noting that that one of numerous ginger groups within Plaid Cymru at the time, the Belle Vue Group, nominated Wynne as candidate for the National Executive in 1961.<sup>37</sup> This group was among those favouring direct action against drowning the Tryweryn valley. As we have seen, Wynne himself favoured a stronger campaign although I have seen no record of his calling for direct action.

### Challenging the Leadership

Despite his legal work, Wynne had continued to play a prominent role in Plaid Cymru activities. In May 1962, he addressed campaign meetings for Islwyn Ffowc Elis, the party candidate in the Montgomery by-election.<sup>38</sup> Three months later, during an eventful Summer School in Pontarddulais in 1962, he delivered a lecture entitled 'The Real Medicine - Self-Government': this followed a corresponding lecture given (somewhat unwillingly) by Dr Gareth Evans on the bitter medicine offered up by the English parties. This was a period of tension, following the radio lecture on the Destiny of the Welsh Language by Saunders Lewis and with dissatisfaction on the way the party opposed the drowning of the Tryweryn valley reaching boiling point.<sup>39</sup> Cynog Dafis, who attended the sessions, writes that "The place was full of frustration and division".<sup>40</sup> There was even expectation in some quarters that Wynne would challenge Gwynfor for the party leadership<sup>41</sup>, although I see no evidence in the archive that such a contest ever took place. However he was nominated for the post of party vice-president in opposition to Elystan Morgan, seen by many as the party leadership's favoured candidate, and the uncompromising rebel Trefor

<sup>36</sup> Alan Butt Philip. 'The Welsh Question: Nationalism in Welsh Politics 1945-1970'. University of Wales Press (1975) Page 154.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Page 90.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Wynne Samuel to Emrys Roberts, 3 May 1962. Plaid Cymru Archive. 'Llyfr Cofnodion y Gynhadledd' (Conference Minute Book). G194 National Library of Wales.

<sup>39</sup> A gripping account of the tumultuous atmosphere between 1961 and 1962 is provided by Elystan Morgan in his autobiography 'Elystan - Atgofion Oes', Pages 122-126.

<sup>40</sup> Cynog Dafis. 'Mab y Pregethwr'. Y Lolfa (2005) Page 109. The passage is translated.

<sup>41</sup> Elystan Morgan in a letter to the author, 30 December 2018.



**19. Wynne among Plaid Parliamentary candidates and officials, 1970. From left to right: Front row, Dafydd Elis Thomas, Dafydd Wigley, Gwynfor Evans, Euryn Ogwen Williams, Eryl Jones, Wynne Samuel, Stuart Neale; Middle row, Alun Ogwen, Chris Rees, Harri Webb, D.J. Williams, Dafydd Huws, Gwynn Matthews; Back row, Tedi Millward, John Lazurus Williams, Nans Couch, Nans Jones, Elwyn Roberts**

Morgan.<sup>42</sup> Wynne won, proof according to one commentator of his ability to combine a track record of long service to the party with his impatience with the leadership.<sup>43</sup> The reality however is more complex. By the time the ballots were cast and late in the day, Elystan Morgan withdrew his name,

<sup>42</sup> 'Rhaglen Ysgol Haf a Chynhadledd Plaid Cymru' (Plaid Cymru Summer School and Conference Programme). 1962. Plaid Cymru Archive. G55 National Library of Wales. He was nominated by the West Glamorgan Rhanbarth Committee and the Ferndale and Llangennech Branches. However, I see no evidence in the archive for the suggestion that Wynne Samuel ever challenged Gwynfor Evans for the presidency.

<sup>43</sup> Alan Butt Philip. Op. Cit. Page 154.

leaving a clear fight between Wynne and Trefor Morgan.<sup>44</sup> Wynne won convincingly, by a margin of 73 to 23 votes.<sup>45</sup> Evidently impatience with the leadership was no disadvantage in winning support among his fellow members. However not everyone looked on him with favour. A memorandum drawn up two years later, in 1964, for another ginger group, the New Nation Group, described a nightmare scenario that "Elystan Morgan, Wynne Samuel or someone else like them, worse than Gwynfor" would win the presidency.<sup>46</sup> Some years later, in 1968, when the party conference appeared on the verge of adopting a strongly anti-Investiture motion proposed by the Bridgend branch, it was Wynne Samuel and Dr DJ Williams who rode to the rescue to save the day for their President's more nuanced policy,<sup>47</sup>; and again during the Swansea conference in 1978, I heard him speak strongly in defence of the existing wording of the party's constitutional aims. Despite periodic rebellions, there is no doubt that Wynne Samuel was a loyal supporter of Gwynfor Evans. The reality is that it is not possible to fix any label on him.

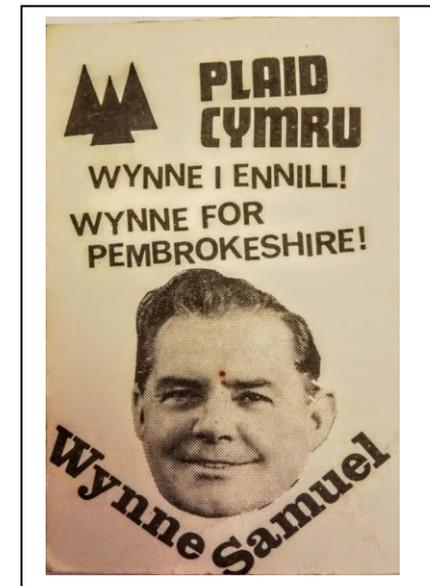
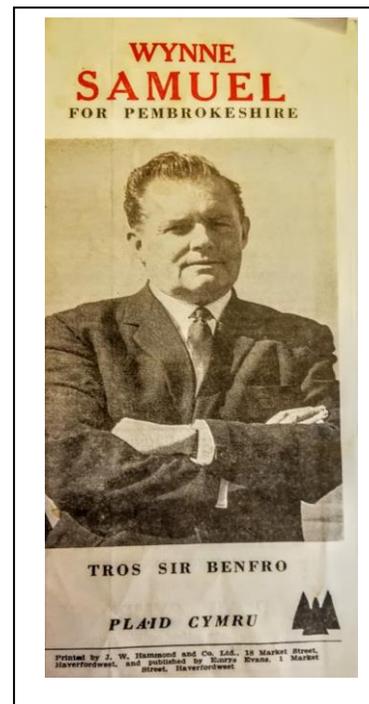
In the wake of the tempestuous period of the Carmarthen by-election and the Investiture, Wynne stood once more as a Plaid Parliamentary candidate, this time in Pembrokeshire. I remember this period well, as I was one of three 'prospective prospective candidates' appearing with Wynne before a selection conference in Haverfordwest (the third was Richard Davies of Johnston, who later became Vice-Chancellor of Swansea University). But Richard and I were well aware that we were there to make up the numbers, and that there was no doubt who the chosen candidate would be!

<sup>44</sup> 'Rhaglen Ysgol Haf a Chynhadledd Plaid Cymru'. (Plaid Cymru Summer School and Conference Programme). 1962. The lecture was delivered at 10am, Tuesday, 7 August 1962.

<sup>45</sup> 'Llyfr Cofnodion y Gynhadledd'. (Conference Minute Book). G194 National Library of Wales. Plaid Cymru Archive. Elystan Morgan's name appears on the official count form but not on the ballot papers, which are still on file.

<sup>46</sup> Rhys Evans. Op Cit. Page 237.

<sup>47</sup> Rhys Evans. Op Cit. Page 295. See also Alan Butt Philip. Op. Cit. Pages 115-116.



## 20. Plaid's Pembrokeshire candidate, 1970

Just over half a century ago, in mid February 1968, the Tenby Observer reported that Wynne, in his role as candidate, had addressed the first ever meeting of Plaid Cymru's Tenby branch in the Royal Lion hotel. There is no doubt of his effectiveness: Councillor Michael Williams relates how Wynne 'wrecked his life' in 1968 by persuading him to stand for Plaid in Tenby!<sup>48</sup> A joke, surely, because half a century on Michael is still an active councillor!

I venture to say that this period saw Wynne at the peak of his powers, both professional and political - leading the staff of a small local authority close to

<sup>48</sup> Recorded conversation between the author and Coun. Michael Williams. Plaid Cymru History Society website ([www.hanesplaidcymru.org](http://www.hanesplaidcymru.org)).

the heart of the community and yet still relatively free to campaign for Plaid Cymru. One day in the late 1960s I saw for myself the combination of all his interests - local government, the law and politics - when dressed in his legal robes he represented the council in Tenby's De Valence Pavilion, fighting, successfully, to keep open the Pembroke Dock railway line.

While Pembrokeshire was the scene of his final parliamentary battle for Plaid Cymru, he remained an influential figure within the party. According to the historian Rhys Evans, his advice to Gwynfor during the February 1974 election count in Carmarthen provided 'priceless wisdom'.<sup>49</sup> At the end of the fifth count, Gwynfor and the Labour candidate Gwynoro Jones, were neck and neck, with Gwynoro ahead by just three votes. At the height of this tense situation, another vote was discovered (for Gwynfor) that had not been placed in the ballot box. Wynne Samuel was persuaded to drive from Tenby to Carmarthen to advise.<sup>50</sup> He was adamant that, given a hung parliament, it was better by far to lose by three votes than win by three - because it was evident that another general election was inevitable within a matter of months. Gwynfor took his advice, accepted the result as it stood at the fifth count, and it was Gwynoro who returned to Westminster - for a few months. But the following October, it was Gwynfor's turn, and by a substantial majority.



**21. In Plaid's Summer School in Newport, 1950 - Top row from the left, Wynne Samuel, J. Gwyn Griffiths, D.J. Williams, Dan Thomas, and seated, J.E. Jones, Gwynfor Evans and O.M. Roberts**

<sup>49</sup> Rhys Evans. 'Rhag Pob Brad'. Y Lolfa (2005) Page 350. The words quoted are translated.

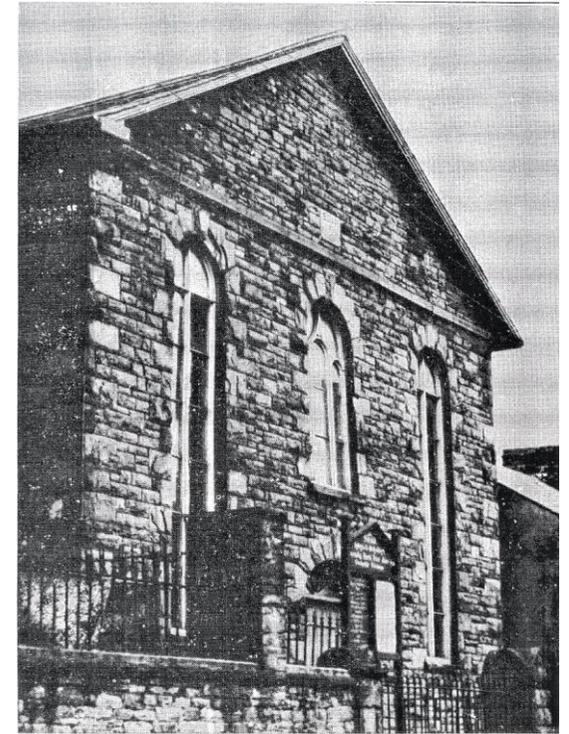
<sup>50</sup> Conversation between the author and Prifardd James Jones, Cardigan, 5 October 2018.

Religion played a major part in Wynne's life since his time as a young boy in the company of his grandfather - he became President of the West Glamorgan Baptist Society in 1950 , and in 1960-61, President of the Welsh Baptists, the youngest person ever to hold that title. Many expected him to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and become a minister of religion; and some, including the minister in Soar, the Reverend Ifor Jones, expressed their disappointment that he did not take that path. Later in his life, he encountered that peculiar phenomenon of Welsh nonconformity, a chapel split in Soar, Ystalyfera. Siân recalls how Wynne sought to reconcile those involved in this sad dispute, but no agreement proved possible; and this probably hastened the closure of the chapel around 1979. Somehow or other, Wynne also managed to fit in service as Secretary of the National Eisteddfod in Ystradgynlais, 1952-54, and later on membership of the BBC's Welsh Council. It is also important to record his lifelong interest in the arts, especially the theatre and opera.



*'The deacons at Soar Church during the Rev. Jones' ministry:  
Back row: Wynne Samuel, John Wadley, John D. Williams, Daniel Thomas, Elwyn Evans, John P. Thomas.  
Front row: Maurice Davies, J. R. Williams, Rev. Ifor Jones, John Maddocks, Evan I. Evans.*

**22. Wynne (top left), a deacon of Soar, Ystalyfera**



**23. Capel Soar, Ystalyfera**

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## Community Councils

Wynne was a passionate advocate of the role of local government, sharing the philosophy of 'government by community' advanced by Ioan Bowen Rees, who like Wynne combined service to local government with active support for Plaid Cymru. The decision by the Tories to get rid of the smaller councils as part of their reorganisation of local government thus came as a heavy blow. Tenby Borough Council was abolished. Wynne continued his work within the new order as a legal consultant to the new Dyfed County Council and South Pembrokeshire District Council from April 1974. But in the view of someone who knew him well, Tenby Plaid Cymru Councillor Michael Williams, his heart was not in it.

Despite this setback, Wynne found a way of fighting back for his principles and for Welsh communities - through his work for the Association of Welsh Community and Town Councils, an independent Welsh body that coordinated the work of hundreds of small councils. Like Wynne, a growing number of people were tired of the failure of NALC, the England and Wales association of local councils that consistently ignored the special needs of Wales. Two community councillors, Gwynn Bowyer from Carmarthen, and the late Isgoed Williams, Trawsfynydd, arranged a meeting to discuss the need for an independent Welsh organisation. Wynne was soon invited to join the national committee, first as Treasurer and later on as secretary.<sup>51</sup> He set about ensuring the growth of this new Welsh organisation from its inauguration in 1976, providing free legal advice and helping the tender new plant to put down roots and flourish.

Here is the evidence of one of those local councillors, Delme Bowen:

"Yes, Wynne Samuel", he said. "When Pontyclun Community Council was set up under Plaid Cymru, first of all Wynne Samuel was appointed as our solicitor. At that time his daughter was living in Miskin. He enabled the saving of £ millions in council costs in a local dispute against the Ove Arap company. A wise man with a penetrating mind." Delme explains how the company sought to blame the council for a landslip into the River Ely in Parc Ivor. Wynne's advice showed clearly that according to the conditions of the gift of land, the council was not responsible; and later on it was revealed that drainage ditches had been incorrectly installed by the developer, thus leading to the landslip.<sup>52</sup> This was just one of numerous cases where Wynne provided free legal advice to community councils the length and breadth of Wales.



**24. Un Llais Cymru /  
One Voice Wales - part  
of Wynne's legacy to  
Wales**

<sup>51</sup> Conversation between the author and Gwynn Bowyer, Carmarthen, 15 September 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Coun Delme Bowen. E-mails to Eluned Bush, Secretary of the Plaid Cymru History Society, 25 and 26 September 2018. The passage in quotation marks is translated.

There is no doubt that he derived great satisfaction from the exciting project presented by the Wales Association of Community and Town Councils and the outlet it provided for his particular talents: during one of their frequent journeys he told Isgoed that he had never been happier politically.<sup>53</sup> Throughout this period NALC refused to loosen its grip. Much later on, however, in 2002, agreement was reached to form one organisation to represent community councils in Wales, and the result was the establishment two years later of Un Llais Cymru / One Voice Wales - a valuable legacy of a lifetime's work promoting government by community.

By then his time had come to an end, before he could witness the fulfilment of his vision for the community councils or his life's work, securing devolution and a Parliament for Wales. Towards the end of his life, Wynne and Phyllis moved to the Roath Park area of Cardiff to live closer to Siân. There he continued his campaigning until a stroke hindered active work. He died there on 5 June, 1989; Phyllis survived him for another ten years.

So who was Wynne Samuel? Without doubt, one of the great characters of Plaid Cymru. JE Jones' description of the early pioneers is fitting: "Many made great sacrifice: giving up hope of better positions because of their allegiance to Plaid Cymru; facing scorn and suffering some obscure discrimination. They were heroes."<sup>54</sup> Rebel or his leader's champion: decide for yourselves. But he deserves and will receive, much more of our attention, and our thanks. His contribution to the public life of Wales and our national movement was enormous. Let us remember him with pride.

<sup>53</sup> Gwynn Bowyer. Op. Cit.

<sup>54</sup> JE Jones. Op. Cit. 162. Translated from Welsh.

*This is an extended and amended version of an illustrated lecture to the Plaid Cymru History Society delivered during the Annual Conference, Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan, Friday, 5 October 2018.*

**Dafydd Williams served as General Secretary of Plaid Cymru between 1971 and 1993 and is Chairman of the Plaid Cymru History Society**



**24. Abergavenny Summer School, 1946, with Wynne in the second row**

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**25. Wynne addressing a Parliament for Wales rally, with Gwynfor and Rhiannon at his side, but who's that enjoying a not so sly fag?**

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