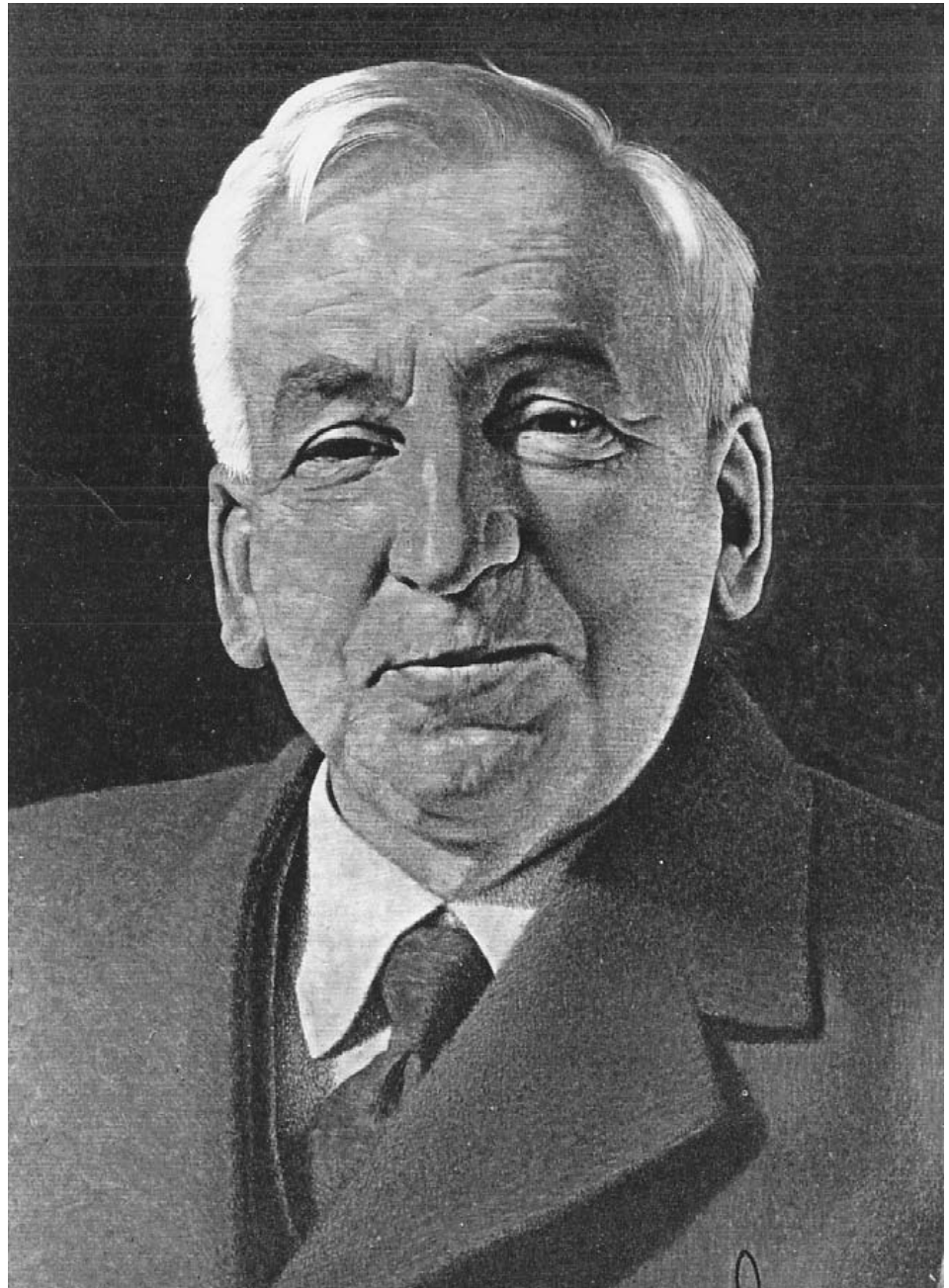


THOMAS JONES'

Dr J. Graham Jones discusses the classic biography of Lloyd George written by Thomas Jones, the eminent Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet from 1916 until 1930. In this unique capacity he served four very different Prime Ministers at the hub of British political life. His closeness to Lloyd George (and Baldwin) was proverbial – yet his biography was unpopular with Frances, Lloyd George's wife. Published by Oxford University Press in 1951, how has Jones's *Lloyd George* stood the test of time?



S LLOYD GEORGE

THOMAS JONES (1870–1955), a notable civil servant and public benefactor, was born at Rhymney in north-west Monmouthshire on 27 September 1870.¹ He received his early education at the Upper Rhymney board school and the fee-paying Lewis School, Pengam. His undoubted early academic promise seemed to come to an abrupt end when, at just fourteen years of age, he left school to take up a position as a clerk in the local ironworks. But the young Tom Jones continued reading avidly and excelled at scripture examinations, eventually winning the highly-coveted ‘Gold Medal’ of the Calvinistic Methodist denomination.

In the autumn of 1890, with the avowed aim of becoming a nonconformist minister, he entered the relatively new (it had been established in 1872) University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Ironically, however, although displaying academic potential, Jones’s abject failure in mathematics, a core subject, meant that he could not graduate from Aberystwyth. Eventually he secured a highly-distinguished first class honours degree in philosophy and economics from Glasgow University in 1901, where his mentor was the renowned Welsh

philosopher Sir Henry Jones. During his period at Glasgow he joined the Independent Labour Party and helped to found the local Fabian Society. In December 1902, Jones married Eirene Theodora Lloyd, one of his fellow students at Aberystwyth. The marriage was to produce three children, one of whom, Mrs Eirene White, served as the Labour MP for Flintshire East from 1950 until 1970.

Although the strength of Tom Jones’s religious beliefs waned somewhat during his years at Aberystwyth and Glasgow, his social conscience grew and convinced him of the importance of social improvement work. His close friends included Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw. In 1909 he became the first Professor of Political Economy at Queen’s University, Belfast, but he was soon to be persuaded by David Davies, of Llandinam, to return to Wales to take up the post of Secretary of the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association, which the multi-millionaire Davies had set up and financed to tackle the dreadful scourge of tuberculosis. Between 1912 and 1916 Jones then served as Secretary of the Welsh Insurance Commission, based in Cardiff, in which position he came into contact with

David Lloyd George, since 1908 the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Asquith’s government. When Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister in December 1916, Tom Jones was appointed first a member, and subsequently Deputy Secretary, of the Cabinet Secretariat, where he was to remain until 1930. His original hope for the position was to develop himself into ‘a fluid person moving among people who mattered and keeping the PM on the right path as far as is possible’.² In this unique capacity he was to serve four very different Prime Ministers – David Lloyd George, Andrew Bonar Law, Stanley Baldwin and James Ramsay MacDonald – at the hub of British political life. During the post-war coalition government, Jones dealt especially with industrial and labour questions and also played a key role in achieving the partial settlement of the vexed Irish question in 1921. He was also a trusted adviser to Baldwin at the time of the General Strike of May 1926. His closeness to both Lloyd George and Baldwin was proverbial. That a man originally firmly on the left of the political spectrum could end up as a close friend and trusted adviser to Stanley Baldwin, even drafting his political speeches, seems rather bizarre, but it would seem

Thomas Jones in
1937

that Jones's opinions had been transcended somewhat over the years by his deep admiration for Baldwin as an individual.

Jones's retirement from this position in 1930 certainly did not mark a retreat from public life. He continued to engage in a vast range of activities and built up a huge number of friends and associates. He still moved in political circles and was consulted regularly on appointments and the award of honours, especially in Wales. He continued to serve Stanley Baldwin in the latter's role as Prime Minister of the so-called 'National Government' (even drafting his 1935 general election speeches), made numerous trips abroad (including two controversial visits to Nazi Chancellor Adolf Hitler at Berchtesgaden), and was an active member of the Unemployment Assistance Board set up in 1935 with the aim of taking the vexed question of unemployment relief out of politics. His main preoccupation from 1930 onwards, however, was as the linchpin of an array of philanthropic, cultural and educational activities, particularly within Wales. To this end he served from 1930 until 1945 as Secretary to the Pilgrim Trust (originally financed by the American oil tycoon Edward Harkness) which distributed more than £2,000,000 during the long 1930s for the relief of the unemployed and for heritage protection. Jones was also a member of many of the committees of the National Council of Social Service.

Tom Jones's formidable contribution to educational concerns ran parallel to these activities. He was for more than half a century a pillar of the Workers' Educational Association, and gave exemplary support to the University of Wales (most especially the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth), the National Library and the National Museum of Wales. Failure to secure the position of Principal at Aberystwyth in 1919

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had left a sore which continued to fester for the rest of his life – even after he had been elected President there in 1944. But the initiative with which Jones seemed 'divinely obsessed'³ was the establishment in 1927 of Coleg Harlech in north-west Wales, a pioneering residential adult education college to provide a unique opportunity for working-class young men. Before the Second World War, more than 220 young men passed through its doors. Parallel to this dynamic initiative was Jones's staunch support for the Educational Settlement Movement in south Wales. His loyalty to Wales was always unquestionable.

In the spring of 1945, Thomas Jones, accompanied by his unmarried sister Liz, leased a house at Aberystwyth, initially for a period of fifteen months. By this time he was a widower; his wife Rene, to whom he was totally devoted, had died, after a brief illness, in July 1935. The main reason for the move to Aberystwyth was that he had recently accepted a commission from Harvard University Press in the US to write a life of Lloyd George, and was anxious to make full use of the resources of the National Library of Wales: 'We have taken it from May 1st unfurnished. Its attraction for me is its nearness (5 minutes) to the National Library.'⁴ In 1946 he moved into another property owned by the National Library, situated at the end of its drive. This was to be his main base until 1954. A second reason for the migration to Aberystwyth in 1945 was Jones's election the previous year as President of the local University College. Now he was to be 'a President of the College in residence'.⁵ This followed his recent resignation as the long-term Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust. Although he had enjoyed his work for the Trust immensely, he was now in his seventy-fifth year and had become very much aware of the inevitable ageing process,

writing privately to a friend at the beginning of March, 'I'm less and less equal to things and problems. Signs of old age and decay of body rapidly multiplying now.'⁶

The prospect of researching and writing a biography of Lloyd George proved enticing. He had developed a great deal of admiration for Lloyd George from 1916 until at least about 1940. But he had looked askance at the former Prime Minister's obstinate refusal even to contemplate joining Churchill's coalition government in 1940 (or even to lend general support to the conduct of the allied war effort), and he had listened sorrowfully to A. J. Sylvester's incessant tales of the bitter family quarrels which had erupted during the build-up to Lloyd George's second marriage to his private secretary Frances Stevenson in October 1943. Lloyd George's acceptance of a peerage in January 1945 was a further thorn in Jones's flesh. On 2 February he had written to his old friend Violet Markham, a prominent long-term Liberal activist and public servant:

When criticising the Earldom I was not thinking of this aspect of his story, as of the deep & widespread disappointment in Wales with one who has been proud always to keep close to the common people & who did boldly always stand up to the land & money, power & privilege in the countryside. Now he & F[rances] play the local squire & lady bountiful, which is rather nauseating. I could not get myself to write congratulations on his marriage or peerage, partly because I did not want to take sides in the family squabble & I have a warm corner for Megan & admiration for Dame Margaret's dignified silence through twenty years of humiliation.⁷

Just eight short weeks later Lloyd George died at his new north Wales home, Ty

Newydd, Llanystumdwy. The BBC broadcast a tribute by Tom Jones on the day of Lloyd George's death, and an obituary penned by him was also published in *The Observer*.⁸ The Lloyd George family generally considered Jones's assessments to be too impersonal, clinical and detached, and it was widely felt that his relative detachment from his subject during the last five years of his life had coloured his judgement – for the worse. The day following the broadcast, Violet Markham wrote to Jones, 'I felt that subconsciously at the back of your broadcast lay something of the nausea you have experienced of late over the affairs of LG & his family & the sordid turns they have taken. You were so anxious to avoid anything of fulsome eulogy that perhaps you a little underplayed your hand.' She went on:

The Earldom is a great misfortune as it has turned out. You know I defended LG's action on the ground that a seat in the Lords would keep him in public life & give him a platform from which his voice could still be heard. But to take a title & die on it is to have the worst of all worlds. Frances as a dowager countess is ridiculous, so are the rest of the family. I wonder whether Megan will drop the 'lady'. I should do so in her place.⁹

Yet, in the immediate aftermath of Lloyd George's death, Tom Jones succeeded in convincing himself that, 'now that one has the freedom of history', it was possible to be relatively 'detached' and objective in writing a biography of Lloyd George. Hence his decision to accept the invitation of Harvard University Press.¹⁰ Within a month he had made contact with Frances, now the Dowager Countess Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, who responded that it would be 'a great pleasure' for her to welcome Tom Jones to Ty Newydd, although adding rather tartly, 'It would

have been a pleasure for LG also, and I do not know how you got hold of any idea to the contrary.'¹¹ Following their meeting (during which they went together amicably enough to see Lloyd George's impressively simple grave on the banks of the river Dwyfor), however, Frances refused to lend any help or support to Jones's venture: 'I do not feel very happy about the book which you say you are proposing to write on LG ... It cuts right across the book for which I am negotiating ... which I would personally supervise, providing, of course, new material and all the necessary documents.' She went on,

During these latter years you were engaged in serving his political opponents, whose chief aim, at whatever cost to the country's welfare, was to keep LG out of office. Quite frankly, therefore, I do not think, if you will pardon my saying so, that you would be the best biographer of this period. In any case, I am sure you will understand that under the circumstances it would be difficult for me to give you any help or material for your book.¹²

In response, Jones attempted to be conciliatory:

LG ... is big enough to have many more books written about him without exhausting the subject. ... I am only too conscious of my imperfections as a possible student of any period of LG's life, but perhaps I can say with complete truth that in serving his political opponents I did not entirely forget that I had served him. Indeed the charge against me as a civil servant might well be that I carried any old loyalty to him to extreme lengths!¹³

Other members of the Lloyd George family were, however, predictably more supportive. During the following November, Jones spent 'an hilarious

evening' over dinner with Lady Megan Lloyd George and his daughter Eirene. He at once found Megan 'most approving of the notion' that he should write her father's life '& very willing to help. I don't imagine she has any documents, only her own personal impressions.'¹⁴

Before the end of the same month, an announcement had been made that an 'official life' of Lloyd George was to be written by 'Mr Malcolm Thompson, for many years on the staff of the Liberal Party Organisation'. The announcement was greeted, it was noted, 'with considerable surprise'. Was not Dr Thomas Jones 'the name that most naturally occurs' in any consideration of the most suitable biographer for Lloyd George? Jones, it was widely known, was engaged in his own biography, 'but without access to the public and private papers in the Dowager Countess Lloyd George's possession. For it is the Dowager Countess who controls the situation as regards material for the biography.'¹⁵

Both Malcolm Thompson and Dr Thomas Jones CH were the latest in a long line of Lloyd George biographers and chroniclers.¹⁶ His earliest biographers had been Welshmen like J. Hugh Edwards and Beriah Gwynfe Evans, staunch Liberals, steeped in the ethos of Cymru Fydd, who tended to eulogise their subject somewhat uncritically. English writers from the same period like Herbert du Parcq (who published a four-volume multi-biography in 1912), Harold Spender and E. T. Raymond also tended to sympathise with Lloyd George. A new phase was, however, inaugurated following the collapse of the post-war coalition government in October 1922 and the subsequent beginning of Lloyd George's so-called 'wilderness years'. Disillusioned Asquithian loyalists like J. A. Spender, A. G. Gardiner and Charles Mallet all relished the opportunity to denigrate Lloyd George's good name,

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a trend reinforced by the verdict of the economist J. M. Keynes in his bitter 'essay in biography' published in 1933. The same year had seen the publication of Lord Riddell's *War Diary*, a highly revealing source which did not always portray Lloyd George in a favourable light.¹⁷ On the eve of the Second World War there appeared W. Watkin Davies's *Lloyd George, 1863–1914* (London: Constable, 1939), the most valuable account to date of Lloyd George's life and career up to the First World War, a study which contemptuously dismissed Lloyd George's post-1914 political career as 'purposeless', a period when he had been 'left to his own devices and seconded by charlatans whose grip of political principles was even weaker than his own'.¹⁸ The image of Lloyd George which emerged from Lord Beaverbrook's *Politicians and the War, 1914–1916* (2 vols, London: Butterworth, 1928 and 1932), too, was at best mixed. He emerged as power-crazy and anxious only to assume the premiership.

Thomas Jones (and indeed Malcolm Thompson) had the advantage of undertaking their research at a greater remove from the events which they were describing and after their subject's death. Jones at least savoured the many long hours which he spent researching at the National Library of Wales. He soon became a familiar figure in the little seaside town, habitually clad in a grey or fawn cloak and a battered deerstalker hat. On 1 April 1946, he wrote to Violet Markham, 'I have no news in this remote region, where the sun shines daily & diffuses most welcome warmth. I am carried daily by your benevolence to the [National] Library where I try to read fifty books at once in an effort to keep track of the elusive LG.'¹⁹ Between 1945 and 1950 researching and drafting the book were to prove his main preoccupations. Early on in the extended enterprise

(which he declared to be 'a judicial attempt at interpreting a genius'²⁰), he resolved to shun the use of private papers and official documents other than those already available in print. 'I am sure the job of writing a life must be terribly difficult to do without papers', wrote Lady Megan Lloyd George consolingly in May 1946, 'but it may end in a much more human narrative. What is needed is a live portrait – and that I feel sure you will give.'²¹ To compensate for the lack of primary source materials, Jones requested memoranda from individuals who had worked closely with Lloyd George or who had a specialist knowledge of important events.

During 1946 it became more widely known that Tom Jones was engaged in preparing a life of Lloyd George. The news at once gave rise to 'much enthusiasm' for the 'intrinsic interest' of the proposed work and as a potentially 'fascinating display by a master in the art of walking the tight rope'.²² The author was, however, reminded that constraints existed on the freedom of former civil servants to publish.²³ This thorny question had already been raised in the House of Commons on 1 August 1946, and was relevant at the time in the context of the proposed biography of Lord Baldwin being written by G. M. Young and the publication of the diaries of Lord Hankey, the first ever Cabinet Secretary back in 1916. At the end of the year, Jones read in the press that *The Real Lloyd George*, authored by Lloyd George's former Principal Private Secretary A. J. Sylvester (an old acquaintance of Jones's) was to be published during 1947. Although he must have felt some resentment that Sylvester had to some extent 'stolen his thunder' by bringing out his book so promptly, Jones wrote to him, 'You must have worked very hard on it & it is sure to meet with great success. For myself my pace is that

of a septuagenarian & a slow one at that.'²⁴ In response, Sylvester anticipated Jones's 'frank expression of opinion on the work which has been executed against time', and continued, 'But I am waiting for your Life, for you can give the Celtic touch, with your knowledge and experience of the subject, which no other can excel.'²⁵ During February and March 1947, lengthy, potentially sensational extracts from Sylvester's forthcoming book were published in the *Sunday Dispatch* and gave rise to much interest and, by and large, commendation.²⁶

Thomas Jones, undaunted, plodded on resolutely with the task in hand. 'I go to the [National] Library almost daily', he wrote to his old friend Abraham Flexner at the end of April, 'but am experiencing a great decline in my powers of work which I suppose is to be expected!'²⁷ He was somewhat frustrated by the long delay in the appearance of Sylvester's eagerly-anticipated *The Real Lloyd George*, caused by an acute paper shortage, problems over binding, and the austerity which inevitably reigned in post-war Britain. He arranged to meet Sylvester in London at the beginning of July: 'I wish I had gone into partnership with you over it – sharing the profits and supplying the ballast! My effort makes slow progress and of course I blame the weather.' Both men were much annoyed by the lack of availability of pre-publication copies of Sylvester's tome, the author responding to Jones, 'When I think how I sweated and rushed everything through, and how long I have waited – well, it's just too bad.' Sylvester was apparently most anxious that Tom Jones, whose views and opinions he respected, should write a full review of the volume.²⁸ By September, Jones had evidently received an advance copy of *The Real Lloyd George* and sent an effusive congratulatory message to his old

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associate who replied, 'Coming from an old friend and colleague, who knew Lloyd George so well, I value it all the more.' Sylvester would feel 'honoured' should Jones wish to quote from the book in his own writings.²⁹ Within a week, Jones had sent to Sylvester a list of minor factual errors within the volume, expressing the hope that they might perhaps be corrected in a second edition.³⁰

Sir Robert Horne, David Lloyd George and Thomas Jones at the Cannes conference in 1922.

On the face of it, relations between the two authors were amicable and harmonious enough. But the following July, by which time Jones had already drafted a considerable part of his proposed biography, he did not mince his words in a private letter to Violet Markham: 'I had such a revulsion reading Sylvester on Sylvester that I was determined mine should not be TJ on TJ. I've probably gone

too far in the other direction.'³¹ Reading Sylvester's tome had clearly induced him ruthlessly to eschew much of his personal knowledge of Lloyd George which he had originally planned to include. Now he was very conscious of the potential risks of submitting to excessive personal prejudice.

At about this time there was an attempt to revive the idea of a national memorial to Lloyd

George, first mooted by Frances during April and May 1945. Then, in the immediate aftermath of Lloyd George's death, recalled Jones, 'I [had] tried to dissuade her, as I knew that attempts to do him honour in his lifetime had to be artificially buttressed.' Frances had retorted sharply by stating her intention to request that Winston Churchill launch the appeal. Jones went on, 'I [had] tried hard to get LG to subscribe to [Coleg] Harlech in vain!' By now, Frances had already disposed of their north Wales home, Ty Newydd – 'the house that I went over with Dame Margaret when it was destined for Lady Carey Evans. You see what a nasty mind I have. How much are the LG family subscribing? They are notorious for giving nothing to anything or anybody.' On reflection, he readily admitted that, in relation to the proposed Lloyd George memorial, 'I am much too prejudiced to be fair to it.'³²

By this time, Sylvester's *The Real Lloyd George* had captured the popular imagination and had gone out of print within weeks of publication. Severe paper shortages had made a second edition impossible. Some members of the Lloyd George family had generally welcomed the book – with the predictable exception of Frances. One of the admirers within the family was Richard Lloyd George, now the second Earl, who had himself published *Dame Margaret: the Life Story of his Mother* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1947).³³ At the beginning of November, Tom Jones wrote to Violet Markham:

I came up on Tuesday to the Athenaeum with Irvine & found Baldwin there. He had come up for the unveiling of the statue to George V. He asked me at once what I thought of Sylvester's book with its revelation of the autocratic chief. Later in the week Sylvester came to see me for half an hour & said the book was having a

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great sale, but that the American agent was discouraging about an edition in that country as no one was interested in LG. The family dislike the book. I am to dine at the House with Megan on Wednesday next & shall hear what she thinks. Nothing approaching the truth can be expected to please her. Not one of the family, nor the Countess, has acknowledged the presentation copies sent by the author.³⁴

A week later he spent an evening at the House of Commons with Lady Megan Lloyd George, the Liberal MP for Anglesey since 1929, an interlude which he felt to be 'more enjoyable than profitable'. He found her to be 'furious with Sylvester & I cannot hope that my objective treatment of her father will not deeply disappoint the family. I tried hard to prepare her for this but I made little or no impression.' There followed two meetings with A. J. Sylvester: 'His bitterness is reserved for the Countess who seems to have promised at first to use him in connexion with the Life of LG, & then to have dropped him completely in favour of Malcolm Thompson – hence [Sylvester]'s speed in rushing out his book to get his blow in first.'³⁵

Shortly afterwards Jones sent the first 126 pages of his manuscript to the officials at Treasury Chambers for their approval. As they dealt with the period before his appointment to the Cabinet Secretariat, no objection was raised.³⁶ Before the end of 1947 he was reasonably satisfied with the writing of the book: 'I ... have made enough progress with it, in my slow fashion, to see the end approaching.' He then anticipated a volume of some 150,000 words which he hoped to complete by the spring of 1948. The final product would be 'more a class text book than a sensational story, with LG against the background of events in which he played a part'. At this point, the death of Earl Baldwin and

the publication in *The Times*, in a much-truncated form, of a lengthy obituary which he had prepared several years earlier led Tom Jones to reflection. The biography of Baldwin then being written by G. M. Young, Jones anticipated, would be 'a first rate job of work'. He mused on the four premiers whom he had served between 1916 and 1930:

Of the four PMs for whom I worked SB was the most considerate & grateful chief & the best friend in all weathers. His religion had given him a quality of modesty & forbearance & forgiveness of human frailties & he had a more intense love of the countryside & its beauty than had LG; Bonar [Law] had none. But I must not wander on like this. I can sum up by saying how greatly I prize the two words he [Baldwin] several times inscribed on books he gave me: 'With gratitude & affection.'³⁷

He plodded on with his writing as 1947 gave way to 1948 and still corresponded widely. A. J. Sylvester proudly recalled his own role in securing the indexing of the massive archive of Lloyd George's papers and in the researching of the *War Memoirs* in the 1930s: 'May your book be a best seller, and I shall be one of the first to purchase it when it is out. Whatever you do get it out before Frances.'³⁸ (This was presumably a reference to the 'official biography' by Malcolm Thompson, then known to be in an advanced stage of preparation.) A large number of associates commented in detail on the first draft of Jones's book during the spring of 1948, and their observations were then incorporated in subsequent revisions.³⁹ Sylvester, simply one of many to lend assistance in this connection, found the experience 'very interesting. It has whetted my appetite to read the book when it is ready. One thing only do I wish to say: Let URGENCY

be your motto. If you intend to publish it in this country, there is not a minute to lose.³⁰

Mastering the array of printed sources alone had proved a formidable task. But in the summer of 1948, the full text of the book, running to some 170,000 words, had been sent off to its American publishers. It was generally well received, but the company's rather patronising reader in the US eventually concluded that the text had to be pruned 'rather extensively'. The coverage of the period before 1914 needed to be abbreviated, and the chapters devoted to the years after 1922 axed ruthlessly: 'They all deal with Lloyd George's failures when he was out of power. ... The details are certainly of less interest to an American audience than to a British one.'³¹ Jones dutifully tackled the task of extensive revision which he found irksome and laborious. In November he opened his heart once more to Violet Markham: 'I've reached the stage when I think the LG book is "rotten" & ought to be completely rewritten. I had no business to attempt it knowing the strict conditions laid down for civil servants. ... What a number of snags & slips I find in this attempt at a final revision. ... So much of what I've written is stale for scholars & dull for the general reader.'³² He had long since concluded that accepting the commission to write the book was 'a piece of impertinence because of its extraordinary difficulty'.³³ His negative feelings were accentuated by the appearance in December of Malcolm Thompson's 'official biography' of Lloyd George. As he put it to his daughter Eirene:

The LG 'Official' Life came today & first impressions are very favourable. It is v. well produced, easy to handle, & well illustrated. Have only just savoured the text, which is fluent & readable, & if on the

partial side that is what one would expect. Of course it overlaps my effort in all sorts of ways & from sales standpoint it w[oul]d have been well if I had hurried a bit to be out first, but I don't find hurrying easy any more. Looking back I wish I had thought of doing the book or preparing to do it when I went to the P[ilgrim] T[rust] in 1930 & had some surplus energy. I think this publication may confine mine to USA. We'll see. And anyway I've thoroughly enjoyed the National Library.⁴⁴

(Even after the eventual publication of his own volume in the autumn of 1951, these emotions did not disappear. As he then wrote to an associate, 'I often wished in writing the LG that I had made the other choice', a reference to the possibility of preparing a biography of Stanley Baldwin rather than Lloyd George.⁴⁵) Just before Christmas 1948 he submitted his 'final script' of the Lloyd George biography 'reluctantly – should like now to rewrite it and properly, but unequal to it at seventy-nine. Should have started when I went to the P[ilgrim] T[rust]. I hope G. M. Y[oung]'s opus [on Baldwin] progresses towards perfection.'⁴⁶

In January 1949 Tom Jones sought the permission of Lloyd George's elder daughter Lady Olwen Carey-Evans to include in the book a full-page photograph of her mother Dame Margaret, continuing:

I have purposely avoided consulting you, Gwilym and Megan closely so that you may truthfully say when it appears that none of you has any responsibility for what I have written. I confess I had no idea when I lightly promised to do the book how difficult I should find the task at my age. Had I started twenty years ago it would be far more adequate than it is.⁴⁷

It was generally well received, but the company's rather patronising reader in the US eventually concluded that the text had to be pruned 'rather extensively'.

Lady Megan also assisted in the selection of illustrations and provided Jones with some of her father's original speech notes, commenting, 'Blessed is he who can read them in the original.'⁴⁸ The winter of 1949–50 saw Jones put the finishing touches to his text, responding to comments from friends and associates, among them Violet Markham, to whom the author observed, 'Re-reading it I feel it is more political history than personal biography, & far too much like a memorandum by a civil servant, as I think you said. Anyway I can't attempt to rewrite it, nor do I suppose I should succeed any better.'⁴⁹ Later the same month saw the aged patriarch dutifully plodding up to the National Library of Wales to make the final amendments, lamenting, 'There is loss as well as gain. They [the American publisher's readers] fight shy of human touches & points of interest to us in this country. Some I am re-inserting.' He anticipated that this thankless task would continue for several weeks. Jones then reflected on a curious plan hatched in 1922, when the coalition government was conspicuously tottering, for the well-heeled Davies family of Llandinam to purchase *The Times* newspaper and install Lloyd George as editor:

I am in correspondence with Stanley Morrison on the negotiations for the sale of *The Times* in 1922 which took place before it was bought by J. J. Astor. I went for LG to Scotland to see DD [David Davies, of Llandinam], Gwen & Daisy with a view to their buying it & making LG editor!! on the fall of the coalition. DD & G[wen] were willing but Daisy objected on the advice of their stockbroker. DD & LG as owner & editor would not have lasted a month together.⁵⁰

At this point he still hoped that the book would appear in the

autumn of 1950, at least on the other side of the Atlantic: 'At the moment I am checking bibliographical references, & taking out commas with which they have plastered its pages in USA! I don't like these three first months of the year & prefer to hug the blankets, but I can't complain.'⁵¹ His attention was absorbed, too, by the progress of the February 1950 general election campaign, in which his adored daughter Eirene was the Labour candidate at highly-marginal Flintshire East. In March Churchill was approached to write a foreword to the volume – 'So far as he [Lloyd George] ever had a political friend you were that friend' – but the Tory leader rather churlishly responded, 'Alas, I cannot add to my tasks at the present time', adding, 'I shall await the publication with great interest!'⁵² At the end of November, Jones was delighted to receive from Harvard the final, complete typescript text of his biography – 'It begins at last to look like a book' – which had been quite savagely pruned to some 120,000 words (a cut in the region of 50,000 words) and contained just six illustrations. The volume was expected to sell at fifteen shillings. On 1 December the text was returned to Oxford to be converted into long galley proofs.⁵³

In fact, the rewriting and elimination of material had been much more ruthless than Tom Jones had suggested in his correspondence to friends and associates – to the immense loss of historians of modern Wales. The eventual published volume focused primarily on the period from 1914 to 1922, although the blame for this did not lie with Jones. A great deal of important early Welsh material was cut out. A whole chapter on the campaign to secure the disestablishment of the Welsh church between 1886 and 1914 re-emerged as just one brief paragraph. Although Jones had been close to Lloyd George during the period after 1922,

the chapters on these years were again cut back quite substantially – as the result of the directives of the reader employed by the Harvard University Press who had insisted that the American readership at least would not be 'much excited by the long drawn-out demise of the Liberal Party and Lloyd George's part in it'.⁵⁴

The dawn of the new year – 1951 – saw poor Tom Jones, now fully eighty years of age, literally 'up to the eyes with LG proofs'. What an exacting & exhausting job it is – grammar, punctuation, capitals, quotations. I go daily to the NLW. ... I have 176 pages out of 300 in page form.' At this late stage, a further cruel blow was received when Lord Beaverbrook, by then the owner of the copyright for the Lloyd George Papers, obstinately refused permission to Thomas Jones even to quote passages from the published *War Memoirs* on the rather spurious grounds that he [Beaverbrook] had already commissioned Robert Sherwood to write a biography of Lloyd George. 'I'm having lots of bothers over the LG book', lamented Jones at the end of the month, attributing at least some of his difficulties to the fact that 'I am not one of the favourites of the Countess'.⁵⁵ The refusal to allow him to quote from the Lloyd George *War Memoirs* in particular he felt to be 'a nasty set-back', and his publishers considered Beaverbrook's churlish obstinacy 'unprecedented in their experience', but Jones resolved not to challenge the press magnate's decision as:

Beaverbrook is so incalculable that I decided not to write to him. I suspect the refusal comes from another source. So I set to & have eliminated several quotations & traced several to their sources from wh[ich] LG took them & altered footnotes &c – a great costly nuisance. The incident quite upset me. However I am now recovered & C. is satisfied that Beaverbrook

will not have any ground for a prosecution.⁵⁶

The proofs were duly returned to the printers on 12 February, and the final pages were printed and numbered by 22 April, by which time Sir Geoffrey Whitehead, a former civil service mandarin at Whitehall, was busily at work preparing the index.⁵⁷ Whitehead had completed his laborious chore by 10 May and lavished praise on Jones's ability as a biographer 'to pack [in] an extraordinary amount of matter and at the same time to keep [the chapters] most readable', while the final chapter surveying Lloyd George's character had emerged as 'a really balanced and fair estimate of a fascinating and complex character'.⁵⁸

On 20 August 1951 Tom Jones was thrilled to receive his first advance copy of the final published tome, now due to be published simultaneously in Britain and America on 4 October. Its proud author considered the bound volume 'an admirable piece of bookcraft & worthy of the Press. ... I am most proud of the Index!!' He much regretted, however, the decision to charge one guinea for each copy rather than fifteen shillings – 'few buyers in Wales I imagine will stretch to a guinea for any book'.⁵⁹ The final volume ran to 330 pages and contained a full bibliography of the sources used and a magnificently detailed index. Ironically, as the publication of the book approached, the indefatigable Jones was busy at work on the final proofs of his autobiographical volume *Welsh Broth* ' & feeling rather sorry that I ever bothered to print it. I could have had a few copies typed for circulation "within the family"'. But I've gone too far with the publishers to draw back now.⁶⁰ He regretted that the official launch of the Lloyd George biography coincided with the beginning of the October 1951 general election campaign, '& its sales will be damaged for the

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moment at any rate'. But he was 'much comforted' by the generous letters which he received from friends and reviewers who had been given advance copies of the book.⁶¹

Generally, indeed, the response of the reviewers was most gratifying. The Countess Lloyd-George, however, was predictably unimpressed. As she wrote privately to Ann Parry, Lloyd George's former 'Welsh secretary' and now the curator of the new Lloyd George Museum at Llanystumdwy:

Have you seen Tom Jones' book? I just glanced at it & don't think much of it, & I am told that apart from the papers where he has a pull, it has not had very good notices, & that it is *not* a good book. Beaverbrook asked me: 'What was Tom Jones' quarrel with LG?' That will give you an idea of the tone of the book. Do you think we ought to have a copy for the Museum?⁶²

But the reviews which appeared in print from reputable, unbiased reviewers were encouraging. Perhaps the most welcome was that of Robert Blake, a future doyen of political biographers, in 1951 a thirty-four-year old tutor in modern history at Oxford University, who was himself writing a life of Andrew Bonar Law. In the pages of the *Evening Standard*, he hailed Jones's work as 'the clearest and most authoritative account ... of the greatest interest. ... In less than 300 pages Dr Jones has been able to describe nearly everything that matters.' Inevitably, claimed Blake, the severely-compressed narrative degenerated into 'a crowded catalogue of events – and catalogues are often dull', and Jones tended to play down the importance of Bonar Law in Lloyd George's life and was notably 'sparing of personal reminiscences' such as the celebrated visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden in the autumn of 1936

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when Jones himself was actually present. The final chapter was 'the best', and throughout his study Jones had been impressively 'wise. Political biography has in the past suffered from too much sugar. A dash of vinegar is a welcome change.'⁶³ In *The Observer*, Dingle Foot hailed the book as 'a remarkable achievement' where 'the controversies of 1916 to 1922' were 'recorded and analysed with a high degree of objectivity', whereas a review in the *Manchester Guardian* concluded that Jones had 'come nearer grasping the man entire than any previous biographer'. In *The Spectator*, the respected Welsh academic (and former Liberal MP for the University of Wales) W. J. Gruffydd welcomed the volume as 'an impressive attempt' to write 'an excellent text-book ... indispensable for the student of modern politics – but the student of society must turn elsewhere. ... For reliability and accuracy, no other biography of Lloyd George can compare with this work.' Gruffydd did, however, criticise Jones for being 'unduly circumspect', tending to 'skim over' discreditable episodes in Lloyd George's career such as the Marconi affair and the use of the Black and Tans in Ireland after the war. In the *Daily Telegraph*, Lord Birkenhead described Tom Jones's volume as 'the best and most objective book on Lloyd George ... scholarly and erudite ... painstaking without being dull. ... He has austere refrained from idolatry', while 'discuss[ing] with candour ... the more dubious aspects of Lloyd George's public conduct'. Although he felt compelled to stop short of hailing the work as 'a great biography', Birkenhead welcomed it gladly as a 'restrained and able book ... a true step forward in the attempt to assess this fascinating and baffling character'.⁶⁴

Some critics, inevitably, were not so generous. Frank Owen, himself at work on a massive volume on Lloyd George

(eventually to be published as *Tempestuous Journey* by Hutchinson in 1954), suggested that Jones had been far too guarded and over-cautious – 'What a story Tom Jones hasn't told!' Owen himself was to make very extensive use of the massive archive of Lloyd George's papers sold by the Countess to Beaverbrook in 1949. A. J. Cummings wrote of Jones's biography as 'competent, clear-cut, critical, with an air of scrupulous fairness ... but it is not by a long way – and could not very well be – the whole of Lloyd George'.⁶⁵ Such critical views were, however, very much in the minority.

On the whole, Jones himself was 'quite satisfied with the reception. It's amusing to watch what is quoted', while recognising that, 'Future *Lives* will do more than I have to stress the greatness & the warts.' He hoped that readers would 'read the book straight through & not in snippets'. By 9 October the Oxford University Press had resolved to initiate a second print-run of 3,500 copies. A full 4,000 copies had already been sent to the US.⁶⁶ The flood of reviews extending over several weeks continued to prove 'most diverting' to the aged author, although many reviewers felt that he should have been 'more expansive. I couldn't if I tried. I've forgotten the good stories. ... Meanwhile my secret service tells me that Beaverbrook paid the Countess £18,000 for the LG papers. They show that LG had been involved in four divorce suits, but had managed to extricate himself from all of them.'⁶⁷

Encouraged by the reception accorded to the Lloyd George biography, Tom Jones then began to consider publishing lengthy extracts from the detailed diaries which he had kept throughout his period in public life. He recognised from the outset, however, that publishing the diary material was 'a most difficult proposition *in my life time*. I am toying with its

preparation but the task of selection is a nightmare – so many people are alive – & kicking. I hope to manage one if not two volumes.⁶⁸ Indeed, after the publication of his biography of Lloyd George in the autumn of 1951, Jones devoted much of his time and energy during 1952 and 1953 to the preparation of a volume of his diaries interspersed with correspondence. Oxford University Press had again agreed to publish. The task kept him ‘fairly alive & active at Aberystwyth’ throughout 1953.⁶⁹ The selection of photographs for the volume proved an immensely difficult task, as its author had studiously avoided being photographed with the Prime Ministers whom he had served. The book, *A Diary with Letters, 1931–1950*, was eventually published by OUP on 21 October 1954 and was dedicated to Jones’s wife Eirene Theodora Jones (1875–1935). A most substantial volume running to no fewer than 582 pages and priced at thirty shillings, its author considered it ‘too dear to give away’. Within a month, Frank Owen’s biography of Lloyd George, *Tempestuous Journey*, had also seen the light of day, a mammoth study which Jones was quick to dismiss as mere ‘first rate journalism’.⁷⁰

By this time Tom Jones was in his eighty-fifth year and his health had begun to fail. Consequently he resolved to resign the Presidency of UCW, Aberystwyth and Coleg Harlech and the Chairmanship of the Pilgrim Trust. He decided to leave Aberystwyth and move to Manor End near Birchington in Kent which was just ten minutes’ journey away from his son Tristan and his family, and where he might see more of his daughter Eirene, since February 1950 – to Jones’s great delight – the Labour MP for Flintshire East in north-east Wales. Her second re-election in this marginal constituency in May 1955 brought much joy to her ailing father, who eventually died on 15 October 1955,

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just three weeks after his 85th birthday.

Tom Jones’s biography of Lloyd George, published as long ago as the autumn of 1951, has stood the test of time, regularly being cited and quoted by authors and scholars ever since. In February 1972, Kenneth O. Morgan, in a marvellous survey of the historiography of Lloyd George, still referred to the book as ‘by far the best one-volume study of Lloyd George to date’.⁷¹ Although it is probably fair to say that that accolade was subsequently taken by Peter Rowland in his magisterial biography published three years later – *Lloyd George* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975), running to 872 fact-packed pages – Jones’s volume certainly remains a most concise and useful source, an essential short guide for the student of Lloyd George.

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- 1 A superbly authoritative and scholarly biography of Dr Thomas Jones CH is available in E. L. Ellis, *T.J.: a Life of Dr Thomas Jones CH* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992). The contents of this volume were subsequently summarised in E. L. Ellis, ‘Dr. Thomas Jones, CH, of Rhymney: a many-sided Welshman’, in the *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1992, pp. 183–97. See also the helpful article by Rodney Lowe in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 30 (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp. 649–52.
- 2 Keith Middlemas (ed.), *Thomas Jones, Whitehall Diary, Vol. I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 15.
- 3 Ellis, *T.J.*, p. 299.
- 4 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T7/40, TJ to Violet Markham, 30 March 1945.
- 5 The phrase is that used in Ellis, *T.J.*, p. 471.
- 6 Thomas Jones to David Astor, 3

- March 1945 (private collection).
- 7 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T7/131, TJ to Violet Markham, 2 February 1945.
- 8 A transcript of the broadcast was published in *The Listener*, March 1945, and was also made available in pamphlet form. There is a copy in the NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers, file 7/58. The obituary appeared in *The Observer*, 1 April 1945. See also Thomas Jones, ‘Lloyd George: some personal memories’, *Contemporary Review*, May 1948, pp. 260–64. Jones had received ‘a sudden and urgent request’ to prepare an obituary notice for Lloyd George as early as April 1943: see NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T7/79, TJ to A. J. Sylvester, 16 April 1943 (‘Private and Personal’) (copy), and Sylvester to TJ, 19 April 1943 (‘Private and Personal’).
- 9 *Ibid.*, T3/55, Violet Markham to TJ, 27 March 1945.
- 10 *Ibid.*, T7/40, TJ to Violet Markham, 30 March 1945.
- 11 *Ibid.*, A1/69, Frances Lloyd-George, T Newydd, Llanystumdwy, to TJ, 26 April 1945.
- 12 *Ibid.*, A1/70, Frances Lloyd-George to TJ, 20 May 1945.
- 13 *Ibid.*, A1/71, TJ to Frances Lloyd-George, 22 May 1945 (copy).
- 14 *Ibid.*, T7/154, TJ to Violet Markham, 10 November 1945.
- 15 *The Spectator*, 30 November 1945.
- 16 A most helpful survey, written from the vantage point of the early 1970s, is Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Lloyd George and the historians’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 1971, Part I (1972), pp. 65–85. This was originally given as a lecture at the House of Commons on 22 February 1972.
- 17 See the review in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 June 1933.
- 18 W. Watkin Davies, *Lloyd George, 1863–1914* (London: Constable, 1939), pp. 279–81 and 289. See also the review by R. H. S. Crossman in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 March 1939.
- 19 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T8/8, TJ to Violet Markham, 1 April 1946.
- 20 Cited in Ellis, *T.J.*, p. 494.
- 21 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers A1/72, Lady Megan Lloyd George

- to TJ, 31 May 1946.
- 22 Ibid., A1/73, J. A. Barlow, Treasury Chambers, to TJ, 25 November 1946.
- 23 Ibid., A1/74, TJ to Sir Edward Bridges, Treasury Chambers, 27 November 1946; *ibid.*, A1/75, Bridges to TJ, 2 December 1946. In the former letter TJ added, 'PS. Perhaps I should add that I have not sought access to the Official Papers in the keeping of Countess Lloyd-George'.
- 24 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers, file D6, TJ to Sylvester, 23 December 1946.
- 25 Ibid., Sylvester to TJ, 29 December 1946 (copy).
- 26 See J. Graham Jones, 'The Real Lloyd George', *Journal of Liberal History* 51 (Summer 2006), pp. 4–12.
- 27 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers S3/81, TJ to Abraham Flexner, 24 April 1947.
- 28 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers, file D6, TJ to Sylvester, 10 June 1947; *ibid.*, Sylvester to TJ, 17 June 1947 (copy).
- 29 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers 7/79, A. J. Sylvester to TJ, 25 September 1947.
- 30 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers, file D6, TJ to Sylvester, 2 October 1947; NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers 7/79, Sylvester to TJ, 7 October 1947.
- 31 Ibid., T8/89, TJ to Violet Markham, 1 July 1948.
- 32 Ibid., T8/83, TJ to Violet Markham, 5 June 1948.
- 33 For reviews of both books, see *The Listener*, 16 October 1947. *The Real Lloyd George* is also extensively reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 October 1947.
- 34 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T8/68, TJ to Violet Markham, 2 November 1947.
- 35 Ibid., T8/69, TJ to VM, 9 November 1947.
- 36 Ibid., A1/76, TJ to Sir Edward Bridges, [13 November 1947] (copy); *ibid.*, A1/77, Bridges to TJ, 1 December 1947.
- 37 Ibid., S3/86, TJ to Abraham Flexner, 28 December 1947.
- 38 Ibid., 7/79, A. J. Sylvester to TJ, 20 December 1947.
- 39 See the correspondence *ibid.*, Class A2.
- 40 Ibid., 7/79, A. J. Sylvester to TJ, 27 February 1948 ('Personal').
- 41 Ibid., A1/79, 'A Second Note on THE LIFE OF DAVID LLOYD GEORGE by President Thomas Jones' by Donald C. McKay, 6 August 1948. Cf. *ibid.*, A1/78 for McKay's preliminary report.
- 42 Ibid., T8/104, TJ to Violet Markham, 9 November 1948.
- 43 Ibid., S3/86, TJ to Abraham Flexner, 28 December 1947.
- 44 Ibid., X10/139, TJ to Eirene Jones, 15 December 1947. On Thompson's volume, see the comments in *The Spectator*, 17 December 1948, and NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers, file C94, Sylvester to TJ, 4 January 1949 ('Personal') (copy).
- 45 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers A7/59, TJ to Geoffrey [?Fry], 9 October 1951 (copy).
- 46 Ibid., W7/158, TJ to Geoffrey Fry, Christmas Eve 1948 (copy).
- 47 Ibid., A1/83, TJ to Lady Olwen Carey-Evans, 25 January 1949 ('Personal').
- 48 Ibid., A1/84, Lady Megan Lloyd George to TJ, 16 June 1949.
- 49 Ibid., T8/147, TJ to Violet Markham, 3 January 1950.
- 50 Ibid., T8/151, TJ to Violet Markham, 23 January 1950.
- 51 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers, file C95, TJ to Sylvester, 27 January 1950.
- 52 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers A1/85, TJ to Sylvester, 13 March 1950 (copy); *ibid.*, A1/86, Churchill to T. J. Wilson, 27 March 1950.
- 53 Ibid., T8/185, TJ to Violet Markham, 26 November 1950.
- 54 Ibid., A1/80, David Owen to T. J. Wilson of the Harvard University Press, 18 August 1948. The final typescript of the volume is available, *ibid.*, A3 and the working proof, *ibid.*, A4. On the final rewriting process, see also Morgan, 'Lloyd George and the historians', 1971, p. 70.
- 55 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T8/189, TJ to Violet Markham, 19 January 1951; *ibid.* file 1/3, Edith Barnes, Curtis Brown Ltd., London WC2, to TJ, 19 January 1951 (copy); *ibid.* W7/160, TJ to Geoffrey Fry, 24 January 1951 (copy).
- 56 Ibid., T8/190, TJ to Violet Markham, 2 February 1951.
- 57 Ibid., T8/192, TJ to VM, 12 February 1951; *ibid.*, T8/196, TJ to VM, 22 April 1951.
- 58 Ibid., A2/28, Geoffrey Whitehead to TJ, 10 May 1951.
- 59 Ibid., T8/207, TJ to VM, 20 August 1951.
- 60 Ibid., T8/208, TJ to VM, 4 September 1951.
- 61 Ibid., T8/209, TJ to VM, 23 September 1951; NLW, Llewelyn Wynn Griffith Papers P1/2, TJ to LIWG, 25 September 1951.
- 62 NLW, Frances Stevenson Family Papers FCG1/3, Frances Lloyd-George to Ann Parry, 11 October 1951.
- 63 *Evening Standard*, 4 October 1951.
- 64 *The Observer*, 7 October 1951; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 October 1951; *The Spectator*, 12 October 1951; *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1951.
- 65 *Daily Express*, 4 October 1951; *News Chronicle*, 4 October 1951.
- 66 NLW, Dr Thomas Jones CH Papers T8/210, TJ to VM, 7 October 1951; *ibid.*, T8/211, TJ to VM, 9 October 1951.
- 67 Ibid., T8/215, TJ to VM, 12 November 1951.
- 68 NLW, Llewelyn Wynn Griffith Papers P1/2, TJ to LIWG, 25 September 1951.
- 69 NLW, A. J. Sylvester Papers file C95, TJ to Sylvester, 11 August 1953.
- 70 Ibid., TJ to Sylvester, 10 November 1954.
- 71 Morgan, 'Lloyd George and the historians', 1971, p. 70.

A Kettner Lunch / Liberal Democrat History Group meeting

David Lloyd George

Owen Lloyd George, the present and 3rd Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, the grandson of Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George, will speak about his famous ancestor at the Kettner Lunch (organised jointly together with the Liberal Democrat History Group) to be held at the National Liberal Club on 15th April.

The lunch takes place at 1.00pm and costs £15 for two courses, followed by coffee and mints. You do not have to be a member of the National Liberal Club or the History Group to attend.

To reserve your place please contact **Peter Whyte** on 01344 423 184.

1.00pm, Tuesday 15 April

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1