

# EMLYN HOOSON

Dr J. Graham Jones examines the career of Emlyn Hooson, a respected Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire



**E**MLYN HUGH HOOSON was born on 26 March 1925, the son of Hugh and Elsie Hooson of Colomendy, Denbighshire, to a notable local family, well known in their locality. He was educated at Denbigh Grammar School. Hooson, operating on a corvette in the north Atlantic, had served in the Royal Navy (Fleet

Air Arm) from 1943 until 1946. He then became a student at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he graduated in law in 1949 and also served as president of the college's thriving debating union. Whilst at Aberystwyth he helped to reform the University College Liberal Society, which soon became the strongest political

club within the university college, and he also acted as joint-editor of the magazine *The New Radical*. Hooson was also awarded university colours in boxing and he played for his university college in soccer and rugby football. (He was, years later, to be appointed a Professorial Fellow of Aberystwyth University in 1997).

# N (1925 – 2012)

re 1962–1979, later a prominent Liberal Democrat peer, and Welsh public figure and businessman.

In 1950 he married Shirley Margaret Wynne Hamer, the daughter of Sir George Hamer CBE of Llanidloes, a prominent and influential figure in the locality and a powerful Liberal in the politics of Montgomeryshire where he served as its Lord Lieutenant. There were to be two daughters of the marriage, Sioned and Lowri, both educated at the Welsh School at London, where their father became the chairman of the governing body. There were also in due course to be two grandchildren. Emlyn Hooson was a native and natural Welsh speaker, and a fervent supporter of Welsh causes and the national rights of Wales, including devolutionary initiatives, throughout his life.

Hooson was called to the Bar at Grays Inn in 1949, and was appointed QC in 1960 at the age of just 35, the youngest such appointment for decades, and one of the youngest ever. (He subsequently became a bencher of Grays Inn in 1968, and served as vice-treasurer there in 1985, and treasurer in 1986). At the Bar, Hooson earned a reputation as a cool, clear thinker and lucid advocate. His especial strengths before a judge and jury were the thoroughness of his preparation, the clarity and sharpness of his arguments, and his ability to get to the heart of any legal argument – together with his persuasive, attractive personality and unflinching eloquence.

As QC, Hooson represented Ian Brady, one of the ‘Moors Murderers’ along with Myra Hindley, when Brady was tried and convicted on three murder charges at Chester Crown Court in the spring

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of 1966. In December 1965 Hooson had been appointed to lead Ian Brady’s defence; Brady was charged with murdering Lesley Anne Downey (10), John Kilbride (12) and Edward Evans (17), (Myra Hindley was also charged with killing Lesley Anne and John). When the trial opened the following April, the evidence left Hooson little to work with. Brady admitted having wielded the axe against Evans, and although Hooson insisted there was only the ‘flimsiest evidence’ against him over the deaths of the two children, Brady and Hindley were convicted on all counts and sentenced to life imprisonment; Brady remains behind bars.

Emlyn Hooson became ever more convinced that the death penalty would not have deterred the Moors Murderers. When in the autumn of 1967, three years after its abolition, Duncan Sandys moved to reintroduce it because of a sharp increase in murder convictions, Hooson told him this was because juries were now readier to convict for murder given that the death penalty no longer existed. Otherwise, Hooson was generally a legal conservative who did not favour sweeping changes in the British legal system. He opposed the introduction of majority verdicts and, in the Lords, he resisted far-reaching reforms proposed by the Conservative Lord Chancellor, Lord MacKay, fearing they would undermine the independence of the judiciary and the Bar.

In 1970 Hooson appeared for the Ministry of Defence at a public inquiry over plans to move its experimental range from

Shoeburyness to Pembrey, near Carmarthen. Local Liberals, who hotly opposed the plan, were aghast. In February 1974, he had to pull out of a lucrative two-month bank robbery case at the Old Bailey when Edward Heath called a snap election. He was the deputy chairman of the Flintshire Quarter Sessions, 1960–72, deputy chairman of the Merionethshire Quarter Sessions, 1960–67, and then its chairman, 1967–72. He was appointed Recorder of Merthyr Tydfil early in 1971 and Recorder of Swansea in July of the same year. He was elected Leader of the Wales and Chester Circuit, 1971–74.

Having first been adopted as the Liberal candidate for Lloyd George’s old seat, the Carnarvon Boroughs (which was then abolished by the Boundary Commissioners in 1950), Emlyn Hooson had already contested Conway unsuccessfully for the party in the general elections of both 1950, when he lost to the Labour candidate, and 1951, when he was defeated by a Conservative. On both occasions he came third. He played little part in the 1955 general election campaign, but did speak at some Liberal meetings during the 1959 campaign. Then, doubtless with his father-in-law’s ready assistance, he had become the anointed heir for Montgomeryshire, the seat held ever since 1929 by the former Liberal Party leader, E. Clement Davies. When the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association had invited nominations for the vacancy in July 1960 (a course of events which had not occurred in the county since 1927), no fewer than seventeen names

had come to hand. This was later reduced to a short-list of just three – Stanley Clement-Davies (the only surviving child of the sitting MP for the county), Lt Colonel Patrick Lort-Phillips, and Emlyn Hooson. The withdrawal of the first named on grounds of ill health led to the selection of Hooson whose political and professional pedigree was impeccable. Welsh speaking and involved in an array of Welsh language cultural activities, professionally accomplished as a lawyer, the son of rural Denbighshire, and chairman of the Welsh Liberal organisation since 1956, he had received the fulsome blessing of Clement Davies. Moreover, he had earned his spurs in the Conway constituency in the general elections of 1950 and 1951 when he had much impressed local Liberals.<sup>1</sup>

Hooson was elected Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire following a keenly contested by-election campaign in May 1962 caused by the death of Clement Davies. Local farmers proudly carried him shoulder-high through Welshpool following his dramatic victory at the polls. His initial majority there was a surprisingly high 7,549 votes. He had trebled the Liberals' majority in the by-election, at a stroke dispelling the widely held local myth (believed by all three local parties in the constituency) that Clement Davies had been the beneficiary of a most substantial personal vote in Montgomeryshire.

During the early 1960s the Liberal Party was experiencing something of a minor national revival encapsulated above all in the sensational victory in the Orpington by-election in March 1962. Hooson's shrewd policies urged rural and road development to reverse Welsh depopulation, demanding the Liberals become a 'wholly modern, radical and classless party'. By 1964 he was elected to the Liberal Party national executive. Although he continued his professional activities as a barrister (a preoccupation which invited sharp criticism from some sections of the party), Emlyn Hooson was much involved in the revival and reorganisation of his party in Wales in the mid-1960s. He was (in striking contrast to his party leader Jo Grimond) doggedly determined that the Liberals should reach no formal agreement with Harold Wilson's

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Labour government elected in October 1964, and he imaginatively depicted a distinct future for the Liberal Party as 'a radical, non-Socialist party in Britain'. Hooson was not wholly welcoming to the new Wilson government, demanding that they should abandon steel nationalisation. But he backed the Labour left-winger Sydney Silverman's effort to abolish capital punishment, on the basis of the score of capital cases in which he had been involved (including that of Ian Brady who, as already noted, remains behind bars to this very day).

Subsequently, as a warm admirer of Lyndon Johnson's Appalachian Bill in the USA, Emlyn Hooson devoted his energies to preparing a Liberal economic plan for Wales. He was also much involved in the negotiations which preceded the setting up in September 1966 of the independent Welsh Liberal Party, a step which he applauded with gusto, and he then served devotedly as chairman of the new party right through until 1979. Emlyn Hooson certainly occupied a quite distinctive niche within the Welsh and British political spectrum. Following the setting up of the quasi-independent Welsh Liberal Party, he was described by one political commentator the following spring at Westminster as 'a kind of one-man parliamentary party like Mr Gwynfor Evans, the solitary Welsh Nationalist at Westminster. ... There Mr Hooson sits, the solitary pride and joy of all that is left of the glorious Welsh Liberalism of years gone by'.<sup>2</sup> At the second annual conference of the Welsh Liberal Party convened at Llandrindod Wells in 1968, Emlyn Hooson claimed that by this time 'all internal criticism' of the once contentious decision to set up an autonomous Welsh party had been 'stilled'. The new party, he asserted with gusto, had become in a very short time 'the thinking party in Wales ... the think tank of Welsh politics. ... Liberalism ... is more thrustful, it is attracting more people. ... We must avoid the deadening hand of consensus politics if we are to have thrust and determination'.<sup>3</sup> Prior to 1967, many influential Liberals in Wales had not approved of the idea to establish a separate Welsh party, preferring to retain the status quo and a

party which was wholly Westminster focused. Other Welsh Liberals, Emlyn Hooson among them, rejoiced that the deeply cherished dream of Lloyd George for Cymru Fydd in the 1890s had at long last become a reality with the creation of a single Welsh Liberal Party.

During the 1960s, Hooson was very conscious of a seemingly ever more menacing Plaid Cymru challenge. On 1 March 1967 he introduced in the House of Commons a Government of Wales Bill, which proposed an all-Wales Senate of eighty-eight members. He also introduced in the Commons a succession of measures to tackle depopulation, and various bills in support of the Welsh language. He resolutely refused to countenance any kind of agreement or electoral pact with Plaid Cymru. Hooson the QC defended nationalists accused of terrorism, but Hooson the politician trenchantly opposed 'Welsh extremism'. In 1968 he demanded concerted action to halt Welsh terrorists after a series of bombings. After twelve Welsh students were jailed in 1970 for invading a High Court case in London, Hooson said the Welsh were fed up with people who broke the law then whined about the consequences.

He had meanwhile, still politically ambitious, stood unsuccessfully against Jeremy Thorpe and Eric Lubbock for the party leadership in January 1967 following Jo Grimond's retirement. Defeat on the first ballot saw Hooson give his support to Thorpe formally. Emlyn Hooson was never to be a strong supporter of Thorpe as party leader throughout, but there was certainly no real possibility that he might rebel publicly against his party leader. It was widely felt at the time and subsequently that if Emlyn Hooson had been less brilliant and busy as a barrister and judge, he might well have succeeded Jo Grimond as leader of the Liberal Party in 1967.<sup>4</sup> There were certainly rather unpleasant undertones surrounding the leadership contest. Almost forty years later Hooson was to claim that Laura Grimond, Jo Grimond's wife, had urged one of their Scottish colleagues not to give support to 'that Welshman' – evidence of, for whatever reason, a hostility towards Hooson north of the border.<sup>5</sup> Grimond had also let it be known quite clearly that Jeremy

Thorpe was indeed his chosen successor as party leader. Had Grimond stood down earlier, between 1964 and 1966, which he had certainly been considering, then Hooson might have had a better chance of becoming leader, since there have been suggestions that the two Scottish MPs who lost their seats in the general election of March 1966, George Mackie and Alisdair MacKenzie, might well have supported him in a leadership ballot.

Later on, many within the Liberal Party came to believe that their party would have been better served in the long term by a Hooson or a Lubbock leadership. Had Hooson succeeded, he would certainly have been a more right-wing leader, more willing to fight the Labour Party as fiercely as the Tories. Behind the scenes at least during the late 1960s, Emlyn Hooson had given some support to the attempt by leading Liberal Party officials in the country at large like Tim Beaumont and Gruffydd Evans to put pressure on Jeremy Thorpe to stand down, or at least to agree to a collegiate form of party leadership. His distaste for the party leadership did at least enable Hooson to maintain a generally amicable relationship with the prospering Young Liberal movement during this crucial period in the party's history.

Being initially Eurosceptic, he would have wanted the Liberals to take a less pro-European line. He was the only Liberal to vote against Britain joining the European Community. But he was more anti-imperialist than others, fiercely opposing the Vietnam War in the 1960s. During the course of his speech at the 1967 Liberal Party Assembly at Blackpool, Emlyn Hooson opposed an amendment calling for the gradual reduction of economic links between United Nations members and apartheid South Africa. He specifically argued against trade boycotts in general. When, in March 1968, two leading Young Liberals were arrested for allegedly 'obstructing the police in the execution of their duties' outside the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square, one of those arrested (who was acquitted of the charge) was authorised by Emlyn Hooson to tell the court that he had been observing police behaviour to prepare a report for



Hooson (which, given Hooson's reputation in legal circles, may well have contributed to his acquittal). Generally he maintained an amicable relationship with the Young Liberal movement throughout.

Emlyn Hooson reckoned his suspicions about Jeremy Thorpe had been justified when, in 1971, the former male model Norman Scott arrived at Westminster and claimed to Hooson, David Steel and Lord Byers that Thorpe had had a homosexual relationship with him. Thorpe denied the allegations, but Hooson conducted an investigation that triggered a party inquiry. Although this cleared Thorpe, Hooson told Thorpe he should consider resigning the leadership and his seat and asked another Liberal MP, Peter Bessell, if he would back him for the job should Thorpe quit. Thorpe got to hear of this, and accused Hooson of running around 'trying to stir up something'.<sup>6</sup>

Jeremy Thorpe was forced out of the party leadership in 1976 after the affair became public and subsequently tried for incitement and conspiracy to murder Scott. Bessell testified that Hooson – who was not called as a witness – knew of 'retainer payments' of up to £700 made to Scott, and feared he might be accused of a cover-up. The court also heard a tape recording in which David Holmes, one of Thorpe's codefendants, told Bessell that Hooson had been 'firmly sat on' for

Hooson in 1962, the year in which he won the Montgomeryshire by-election

trying to force Thorpe out. Thorpe was cleared.

Hooson retained Montgomeryshire in five successive general elections, winning a handsome, substantially increased majority of 4,651 votes in the general election of February 1974, an election which witnessed something of a national Liberal revival. From 1966 (when Elystan Morgan defeated Roderic Bowen in Cardiganshire) until February 1974 (when Geraint Howells recaptured the division), he had been the only parliamentary representative of Welsh Liberalism. Following the near decimation of the Liberal Party in the general election of June 1970, Emlyn Hooson returned to Westminster with a heavy heart as one of only six Liberal MPs in the new House of Commons (his colleagues were Jo Grimond, Russell Johnstone, John Pardoe, David Steel and Jeremy Thorpe), and it seemed to many that the party's days were now numbered as a leading political player. Only Hooson and Grimond had anything resembling comfortable majorities. The very small number of Liberal MPs in the new house (almost a record low in the history of the party) inevitably led to bitter recriminations within the party.

Most of his English, more radical MP colleagues like Pardoe and Thorpe, perched firmly on the left wing of the Liberal Party, tended to view Emlyn Hooson as a

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<b>Parliamentary elections in Montgomeryshire, 1962–79</b>				
<b>Party</b>	<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>±%</b>
<b>General election 1979</b>				
Conservative	Delwyn Williams	11,751	40.3	+11.9
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	10,158	34.9	–8.2
Labour	J. Price	4,751	16.3	–2.9
Plaid Cymru	C. Clowes	2,474	8.5	–0.8
<i>Majority</i>		1,593	5.5	
<i>Turnout</i>		29,134	81.4	+1.5
<b>General election October 1974</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	11,280	43.1	–2.3
Conservative	W. R. C. Williams-Wynne	7,421	28.4	–0.5
Labour	P. W. Harris	5,031	19.2	+1.4
Plaid Cymru	A. P. Jones	2,440	9.3	+1.0
<i>Majority</i>		3,859	14.7	–2.2
<i>Turnout</i>		26,172	77.9	–4.7
<b>General election February 1974</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	12,495	45.4	+7.0
Conservative	W. R. C. Williams-Wynne	7,844	28.5	–1.2
Labour	P. W. Harris	4,888	17.8	–2.3
Plaid Cymru	A. P. Jones	2,274	8.3	–3.5
<i>Majority</i>		4,651	16.9	+8.2
<i>Turnout</i>		27,501	82.6	+0.3
<b>General election 1970</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	10,202	38.4	–3.1
Conservative	Delwyn Williams	7,891	29.7	+2.3
Labour	D. W. Thomas	5,335	20.1	–3.7
Plaid Cymru	E. J. Millward	3,145	11.8	+4.4
<i>Majority</i>		2,311	8.7	–5.4
<i>Turnout</i>		26,573	82.3	–0.5
<b>General election 1966</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	10,278	41.5	–0.8
Conservative	A. W. Wiggan	6,784	27.4	+0.7
Labour	G. M. Evans	5,891	23.8	+1.3
Plaid Cymru	T. Edwards	1,841	7.4	–1.1
<i>Majority</i>		3,494	14.1	–1.5
<i>Turnout</i>		24,794	82.8	–1.3
<b>General election 1964</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	10,738	42.3	+0.3
Conservative	A. W. Wiggan	6,768	26.7	–4.7
Labour	G. M. Evans	5,696	22.5	–4.1
Plaid Cymru	Islwyn Ffowc Elis	2,167	8.5	N/A
<i>Majority</i>		3,970	15.6	+4.9
<i>Turnout</i>		25,369	84.1	+0.3
<b>By-election 1962</b>				
Liberal	Emlyn Hooson	13,181	51.3	+9.2
Conservative	Robert H. Dawson	5,632	21.9	–9.4
Labour	Tudor Davies	5,299	20.6	–6.0
Plaid Cymru	Islwyn Ffowc Elis	1,594	6.2	N/A
<i>Majority</i>		7,549	29.4	+18.6
<i>Turnout</i>		25,706	85.1	+1.3

conservative-minded Liberal confined mainly to the Welsh political stage, and consequently somewhat remote from the Westminster vortex. But on occasion Hooson did adopt a notably forward, progressive stand on domestic matters, and he was undoubtedly the most fervent assailant within the Parliamentary Liberal Party of the centralising measures of the Heath government. He encapsulated the progressive Welsh Liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s, looking increasingly to the ‘second coming’ of the Liberal Party in Wales as a worthy successor to the rather declining Labour Party. At the same time he remained a warm admirer of Lloyd George and the radical ‘Yellow Book’ proposals of the late 1920s. After the heavy Liberal losses in the 1970 election, Hooson told the Liberal Assembly that the public wanted a middle-of-the-road party, blaming Jo Grimond and Jeremy Thorpe for trying to take it overtly leftward.

The traditional socio-cultural divide in Montgomeryshire politics was still very much apparent. Hooson was clearly most secure in those areas well removed from the English border, the Welsh-speaking parts of Montgomeryshire, the rural uplands and in market towns like Machynlleth, Llanfyllin, Llanbryn-mair and Llanidloes. At Newtown there was a delicate balance in the support for the political parties, while Welshpool clearly contained significant pockets of Conservative support. The farming communities generally still continued to rally to the Liberal banner, encouraged by their MP’s ongoing part-time role as a practising farmer at Summerfield Park, Llanidloes and ready sympathy for the problems of these agrarian communities. The county, with a population of about 45,000 people, remained one of the most intensely agricultural constituencies in the whole of the United Kingdom, containing over 7,000 individual holdings, some as tiny as one acre in size. But there were also significant social changes afoot: the introduction of light industries had meant that by 1974 there were some 2,000 new voters in the Newtown wards alone, and there was further suburban growth at Welshpool, particularly in the Guilsfield locality. To survive, it was imperative for Montgomeryshire Liberalism

to adapt to the new social admixture within the county. Many of the immigrants into the county had absolutely no tradition of voting Liberal or interest in Liberal politics.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, Emlyn Hooson was a notably cautious advocate of the ‘Lib–Lab’ pact concluded between Prime Minister James Callaghan and Liberal Party leader David Steel in March 1977, a step which he grudgingly tolerated as a necessary evil. He even played an active role on the Liberal-government Consultative Committee which, he felt, gave his party a much need opportunity to destroy the ‘wilderness complex’ disadvantage. Many within the ranks of the Liberal Party (including a substantial innately ‘conservative’ element within Montgomeryshire) were highly critical of their leaders’ apparent readiness to keep in office a Labour government so clearly on the brink of ejection, and Hooson himself tended to favour bringing the highly contentious ‘Lib–Lab’ pact to an end in the autumn of 1978.

The Liberals in May 1978 unveiled what was expected to become a major plank in the party’s general election platform – the case for adopting the European Convention on Human Rights as Britain’s own Bill of Rights. After a complete review of the arguments, Emlyn Hooson, acting as his party’s home affairs spokesman, who had previously tried to introduce his own Bill of Rights in the Commons in 1969, had changed his mind and concluded that the European Convention provided the most effective means of bringing about what he called ‘a powerful weapon for the protection of civil liberties and for law reform – and, not least, an educative force of great potential’.<sup>8</sup>

As the period of the Lib–Lab pact drew to a close during the course of 1978, Hooson remained convinced that the experience had proved highly beneficial both to the Liberal Party and the country, although he now anticipated a ‘return to that position of complete independence and freedom of manoeuvre which we all so rightly value’.<sup>9</sup> Hooson continued to portray himself as an active politician, one who had delivered more than forty major speeches in the

Commons during the period of the Lib–Lab pact and had also asked forty-two oral questions on a very wide range of issues to government ministers during the same period.

It was sometimes hard at times to see what Hooson had in common with his party’s radical mainstream. He saw the Labour Party as the main enemy, and after Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, he upset David Steel by telling constituents he could see nothing wrong with assisting immigrants who sought repatriation. Yet he had no truck with Margaret Thatcher, saying in 1978: ‘People are superficially attracted by her violent swing to the Right, but she cannot even work with Conservatives like Mr Heath and Peter Walker’.<sup>10</sup>

Nor did Hooson reap any personal benefit from his warm advocacy of a Welsh Assembly during 1978–79. Powys recorded the highest ‘No’ vote of all the Welsh counties in the referendum of 1 March 1979, and a dejected Emlyn Hooson could only comment that Welsh devolution was ‘a dead duck for this decade’.<sup>11</sup> A long-anticipated general election was also on the horizon. Since October 1974, their MP had written more than 5,500 letters on behalf of the people of Montgomeryshire – ‘*Everyone knows someone who has been helped by Emlyn Hooson*’.<sup>12</sup> But during the same period, too, far-reaching social changes had taken place, the county’s electorate had increased by 2,200 since October 1974 and the constituency had become much more anglicised. It was calculated that, of the 888 new families living in housing estates built by the local Newtown corporation, 435 of these had moved there from England. Many of these migrants had disapproved strongly of their MP’s hands-on active support for the cause of devolution and his recent commitment to the Lib–Lab pact of 1977–78. Local Conservative canvassers in the county were not slow to remind the electors of Montgomeryshire of the scandals, ranging from homosexuality to attempted murder, which had recently beset the Liberals’ former leader Jeremy Thorpe.<sup>13</sup> Some electors had undoubtedly begun to feel that Hooson’s continuing devotion to his legal work meant that he was not wholly dedicated

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to the needs of his constituency, and inevitably the appeal of right-wing Thatcherism was beginning to be experienced even within Montgomeryshire.

And in the general election which ensued in May, when the Liberal vote slumped badly, the seemingly impregnable ‘man for Montgomeryshire’ unexpectedly lost his seat to the Conservative candidate Delwyn Williams by a margin of 1,593 votes. A ninety-nine year Liberal tenure of the seat thus dramatically came to an end – to the intense chagrin of the party faithful in Wales. Apart from the four years which followed his defeat (1979 to 1983), and again at the 2010 general election (when Lembit Opik lost the seat to the Conservative Glyn Davies), Montgomeryshire has elected Liberal or Liberal-affiliated candidates ever since 1880. Shortly afterwards Emlyn Hooson entered the House of Lords as life peer Baron Hooson of Montgomery and Colomendy in Denbighshire, at once becoming prominent in the affairs of the Upper House, where he was to prove active in improving the Mental Health Act, urged police reforms and spoke on law reform and drug trafficking.

Emlyn Hooson was also strongly opposed to the British pursuit of the Falklands War in 1982. Speaking in the Lords on 20 May, he was outspoken:

My Lords, it is with the greatest regret that I must dissociate myself from the support for the Government expressed by my noble Leader and friend Lord Byers. I find it impossible to support him. I am totally against any military escalation in the present situation, and I speak not as a pacifist but as one expressing quite the opposite viewpoint. I have for years been a defence spokesman for

my party. ... I believe we are, as a country, embarking on a route which could take us into the kind of extremism which the United States found in Vietnam. ... I am against the military escalation of the present situation because, first, I do not think it is in this country's interests; secondly, I do not believe it is in the interests of the Falkland islanders; and thirdly, I do not think it is in the interests of the free world. ... I am bound to say that I have been dismayed by the wave of emotionalism that has gone through this House this afternoon.<sup>14</sup>

Hooson remained a prominent Liberal Democrat and public figure in Welsh life until his death. He was for many years his party's spokesman in the Lords at various times on Welsh affairs, legal affairs, agriculture and European affairs. He served as president of the Welsh Liberal Party from 1983 until 1986. When the Liberals merged with the SDP in 1988, he backed Alan Beith for the leadership against the less cautious figure of Paddy Ashdown. Hooson was, predictably, to give full support to the establishment and development of the National Assembly for Wales set up in 1999. Both as a lawyer and a politician, he was strongly enthusiastic in his pursuit of civil liberty issues, urging a Freedom of Information Act from 1985. During his later years, his position on Europe softened: he was anxious to overcome ‘the baleful influence of the Eurosceptics’ among the Tories. Speaking ‘as one who represents a minority culture’, this Welsh-speaker said, ‘It seems to me that aggressive and self-glorifying nationalism is still one of the great curses of our century’.<sup>15</sup>

Among his numerous business interests were his chairmanship

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of the Trustees of the Laura Ashley Foundation, 1986–97, and his assiduous membership from 1991 of the Severn River Crossing Plc. He continued to farm at Pen-rhiw farm, Llanidloes, and lived at Summerfield Park, Llanidloes. He always encouraged help for small businesses in Wales. He had made in the mid-1950s a concerted effort to save Gwasg Gee, one of the most important Welsh language printing presses and based at Denbigh in north-east Wales, which was responsible for the publication of large numbers of Welsh books and the influential Welsh newspaper *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*. He was also constantly loyal to the Llangollen International Eisteddfod which he served as president between 1987 and 1993, and he supported a multitude of societies in Montgomeryshire and beyond. Lord Hooson had a close interest in the cultural and musical life of Wales, and was president of the National Eisteddfod of Wales at Newtown. In 1966 and the following year, he was made an Honorary White Bard of the National Gorsedd of Bards.

Having suffered increasing ill health during recent years, Emlyn Hooson died on 21 February 2012. On the day of his funeral, many hundreds of mourners lined the streets of Llanidloes to pay their respects to a man described as ‘a great servant to the people of Montgomeryshire’. The funeral service was held at China Street chapel, Llanidloes and was followed by a procession to the local cemetery.<sup>16</sup> He was a first cousin (and political opponent) of Tom Hooson, the Conservative MP for the Brecon and Radnor division, who died in 1985. A large archive of his papers is in the custody of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales.

The tribute of Kirsty Williams, leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, at the time of Lord Hooson's death, eloquently sums up his immense contribution:

Emlyn Hooson was respected in the House of Lords and the wider political community for his passionate liberalism, his love of Wales and his sharp intellect. Not only will he be remembered for his high profile legal work, he will also be remembered for

## Sources

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establishing the Welsh Liberal Party in Wales – something we are still proud of today. He was a steadfast Liberal who cared for the people of Montgomeryshire and Wales. Emlyn was also a fervent advocate of Welsh culture and music having been President of both the national and international Eisteddfod.<sup>17</sup>

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- 1 See J. Graham Jones, 'Emlyn Hooson's parliamentary debut: the Montgomeryshire by-election of March 1962', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 81 (1993), pp. 121–29.
- 2 Norman Cook in his final article in the tour of the Welsh constituencies published in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15 April 1967.
- 3 NLW, Lord Hooson Papers, box 42, press cutting entitled 'The Assize of Youth'.
- 4 See the obituary in *The Guardian*, 26 February 2012.
- 5 See the reports in *The Times*, 18 and 19 January 1967; *The Guardian*, 19 January 1967; and Peter Barberis, *Liberal Lion Jo Grimond: a Political Life* (I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 139.
- 6 Cited in Hooson's obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 2012.
- 7 See the penetrating analysis in Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Montgomeryshire's Liberal century: Rendel to Hooson, 1880–1979', *Welsh History Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (June 1992), pp. 106–7.
- 8 *The Guardian*, 4 May 1978.
- 9 NLW, Lord Hooson Papers, box 45, PLP press release dated 15 April 1978, Emlyn Hooson's speech to the annual conference of the Welsh Liberal Party at the Commodore Conference Centre, Aberystwyth.
- 10 *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 2012.
- 11 *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1979.
- 12 Election address of Emlyn Hooson, May 1979.
- 13 See Morgan, 'Montgomeryshire's Liberal century', pp. 107–8.
- 14 *House of Lords Debates*, vol. 430, c. 838 (20 May 1982).
- 15 See the obituary in *The Guardian*, 26 February 2012.
- 16 See the funeral report in the *Cambrian News*, 7 March 2012.
- 17 Wales Online website, consulted 16 May 2013.

# REPORT

## The Liberal–Tory Coalition of 1915

Evening meeting, 26 January 2015, with Ian Packer and Nigel Keohane; chair: Raymond Asquith (Earl of Oxford and Asquith and great-grandson of Herbert Asquith)

Report by **David Cloke**

**I**N MAY 1915, following political and military setbacks, Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith brought senior figures from the opposition parties into his government – thus marking the end of the last solely Liberal government of Britain. Dr Ian Packer, Acting Head of the School of History and Heritage at Lincoln University and author of a number of books on Edwardian and Liberal politics, outlined the events that led to the formation of the Coalition, and went on to describe the difficulties that it faced and what eventually brought it down. He did this very much from the Liberal perspective. He was followed by Dr Nigel Keohane from the Social Market Foundation, author of *The Conservative Party and the First World War*, who provided further narrative as well as a commentary on the events described by Packer from a Conservative perspective.

Packer began by noting that the first wartime coalition formed in May 1915 had not received a very good press. Liberals disliked it as representing the end of the last Liberal government, and it was generally judged a failure for not securing military victory and the end of the First World War. However, he argued that it was not a particularly incompetent government and neither did it demonstrate that the Liberals were unable to adapt their ideology to fighting a modern war. Its problem was that it was in power during some of the most desperate times of the war.

The possibility of coalition had hung over British politics since the start of the war in August 1914. The period up until then has been seen as a classic period of two-party politics, but in fact most of the governments of the preceding thirty years had either been coalitions (Conservative and Liberal Unionist) or

minority governments, as had been the case from 1910. Hence, Packer suggested, there was not necessarily an aversion to coalitions. When the war began there was a possibility that a coalition could be formed immediately, as the Liberal Party was not wholly united over fighting the war. Packer argued that if a whole raft of cabinet ministers had resigned, the Prime Minister and the pro-intervention ministers might have entered into a coalition with the Conservatives then. However, Asquith's customary tact held his colleagues together.

Once through this difficulty things seemed brighter for the government. Despite having 25 fewer MPs than the Conservatives, the Liberals enjoyed a secure Commons majority through the support of the Irish Nationalists and the Labour Party. Although both parties included opponents of the decision to enter the war, both officially supported it. In Packer's view this bound them closer to the Liberals and made them fear a possible Liberal-Conservative coalition: the Labour Party because of the threat it might pose to trade union privileges, and the Irish Nationalists for fear it would block home rule. The Conservatives also had to be careful not to be seen to be criticising the government excessively, for fear of being seen as unpatriotic – a concern reinforced by Asquith's masterstroke of appointing Field Marshal Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. The Liberals, therefore, seemed safe.

Packer noted that the discussions within the cabinet regarding the conduct of the war did not appear to affect the cohesion developed over the course of the Liberal Party's nine years in government. The crucial conflict came over how much of the country's economic and manpower resources should

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