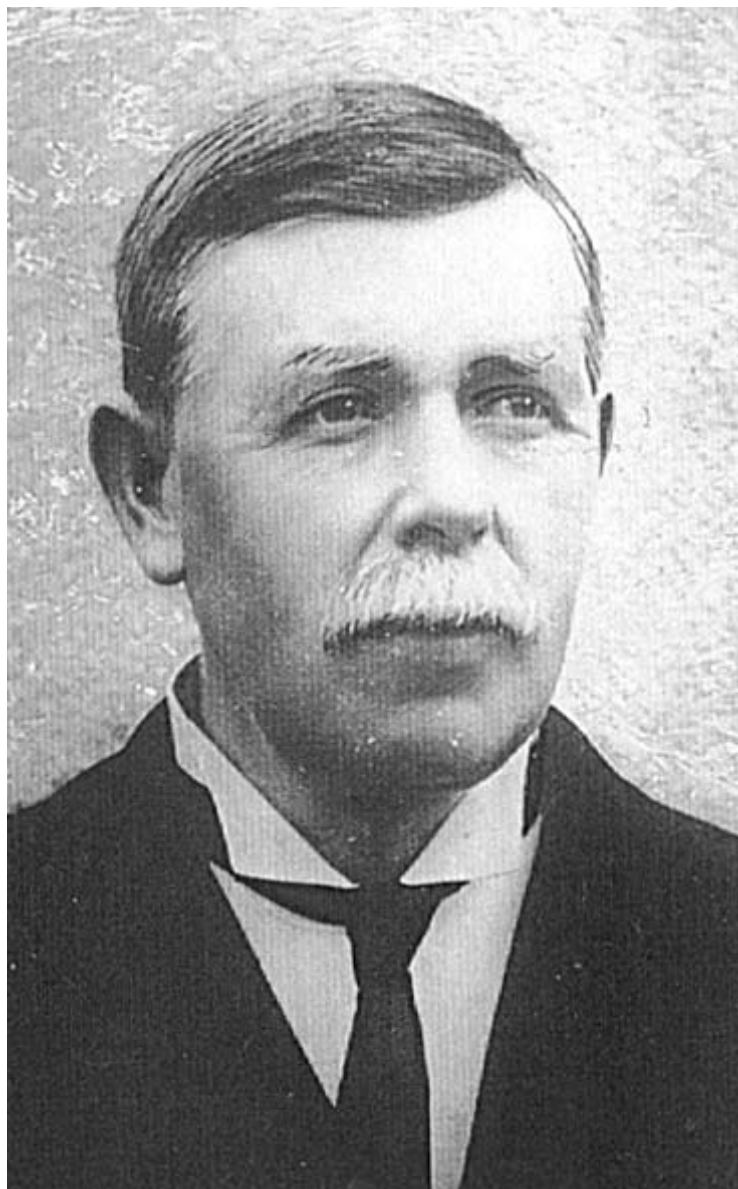


'TO HOLD TH SIR HENRY HAYDN J

The Liberal Democrats, and before them the Liberal Party, has always possessed its share of 'good constituency MPs', those whose career in parliament is undistinguished but who remain devoted to representing their constituency. **Dr J. Graham Jones** looks at the life and political career of one such – Sir Henry Haydn Jones (1863–1950), Liberal MP for Merionethshire from January 1910 until 1945, and the only Asquithian Liberal MP returned in the whole of Wales in the 'coupon' general election of December 1918.

Photos courtesy
of the National
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THE OLD FLAG'

JONES 1863 – 1950

Sir Henry Haydn Jones was born at Ruthin in north-east Wales on 27 December 1863. The premature death of his father when Jones was only ten years of age saw his widowed mother return to her home area – Towyn in Merionethshire in north-west Wales. Jones attended the Towyn Board School and later Edwin Jones's academy in the same town. Upon leaving school, he spent a brief period at his grandparents' farm at Caerlle before becoming part of the iron-mongery business of his uncles Messrs J. and D. Daniel, based in the High Street, Towyn. He was later to assume control of the business on his own account and remained in charge until within a few days of his death.

From early manhood, Jones also took a keen interest in local political life and in 1888, aged only twenty-five, he became a member of the provisional Merionethshire County Council which preceded the first elected county council established in January of the following year. He was returned unopposed for the Towyn Urban division. In 1900 he was elected the Council's chairman, and in 1904 became an alderman. When he finally

resigned office, still an alderman, in March 1949, he could claim sixty-one years of distinguished continuous membership of his county council.

Jones also achieved especial prominence in the field of local education. By the time of the passage of the Balfour Education Act in 1902, he commanded sufficient local respect to speak out in protest against the Lloyd George policy of the 'Welsh Revolt' against the Act's provisions. He led his county's opposition to the 1902 Act by a different route. Following the establishment of the county's education committee in 1902, Jones became its honorary secretary and subsequently its director of education. He had also been one of the leading protagonists of the movement to set up an intermediate school at Towyn under the terms of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. He was still a life governor of the school at his death in 1950, by which time he was the only surviving member of the original governing body of the school. He was also a local magistrate in the county from 1894 until his death – a record fifty-six years. Sir Haydn had also come to further prominence as a result

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of his role in relation to the 1905 Education (Local Authority Default) Act.

He was chosen during 1909 as the Liberal candidate for Merionethshire after A. Osmond Williams, Liberal MP for the county since 1900, had announced his intention to retire from parliament at the next general election. The county was predominantly nonconformist and Welsh-speaking (a massive 93.8 per cent of its population was Welsh-speaking at the time of the 1901 census), and it possessed a distinct industrial base – at the turn of the twentieth century, almost a quarter (23.4 per cent) of its occupied males were employed in the slate and limestone quarries. Ffestiniog and Corwen were the heartland of the slate-quarrying area and considered to be strongly Liberal at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time 24.4 per cent of the occupied male population was engaged in agriculture.

In the general election of January 1910, Jones defeated his sole Conservative opponent, R. Jones Roberts, by 6065 votes to 1873, a considerable personal triumph and a clear demonstration of his personal popularity and esteem in the county. It would appear that



most of Jones's election expenses, thought to total between £800 and £1000, were raised by the herculean efforts of the Merionethshire Liberal Association. This was the first contested election in Merionethshire since 1895.

Jones was, from the outset, to prove a model constituency MP, generally holding court in the famous upstairs office of his Towyn ironmonger's shop, always clad in black striped trousers and frock coat and sitting in his swivel chair: 'Literally surrounded by papers, Sir Haydn transacted a great deal of Big Business in that upstairs room. It was here that he interviewed "his people"'. It was here that many a fight was fought and many a battle lost and won.¹ He always went to a great deal of trouble on behalf of his constituents. But from the time of his first election to Westminster at the beginning of 1910, Jones found it both irksome and demanding that he needed to juggle his parliamentary duties, extensive business and commercial interests and his active role in local government. His health was not robust, and he grew to dislike intensely the constant round of engagements and commitments within his constituency.

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Difficulties were compounded by his uneasy relationship with Lloyd George, since 1908 the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Asquith's government, and by Jones's heartfelt distaste for the rather low-key Welsh home rule campaign launched by E. T. John in the summer of 1910. Much to the relief of both Jones himself and the membership of the Merionethshire Liberal Association, Jones was returned to parliament unopposed in the general election of December 1910. He received a further fillip when MPs began to receive a salary for the first time during 1911. Although Jones evidently received a substantial and growing income from his wide-ranging commercial and industrial concerns (he was to accumulate more than £72,000 by the time of his death in 1950), he still relished the opportunity to receive official remuneration for his parliamentary work.

Some problems, however, persisted. His health remained generally poor, and he found ever more taxing the constant necessity to combine his political work and his business commitments, now exacerbated by the acute difficulties facing the severely depressed north Wales slate industry. The

quarry owners had found it necessary to reduce sharply the price of slates, but sales still continued to plummet.

During the First World War, Jones looked askance at the introduction of the Conscription Bill in January 1916, although he was eventually persuaded to come into line and he reluctantly supported the government in the division lobbies during the measure's second reading later the same month. There was even a real risk that Merionethshire, as a result of its falling population, might cease to exist as a separate parliamentary division in the redistribution of parliamentary constituencies in 1918, but eventually a change in its boundaries was to save the day.

When the war ended in November 1918 and the inevitable general election – the first for eight long years – loomed, Jones was sorely tempted to retire from Westminster: 'I had *quite* made up my mind to retire. I have a happy home, heaps of work & politics are not inviting to a man who plays the game *cleanly*.'² After a great deal of vacillation and heart-searching, and under intense pressure from many quarters, he reluctantly

allowed his better judgement to be overcome. He did so partly because he feared that, if he retired, the seat could well fall to the Conservatives in a contested election. In the event, he secured the distinction of being the only Asquithian Liberal MP returned in the whole of Wales in the 'coupon' general election of December 1918. (David Davies (Llandinam), MP for the neighbouring constituency of Montgomeryshire, was, it seems, given the 'coupon' at the eleventh hour, and appears to have been returned unopposed as the representative of both wings of the Liberal Party.) Half-hearted attempts to find a Coalition Liberal candidate to oppose Jones soon floundered, partly because of political apathy and the conspicuous lack of a tradition of political activity and involvement in Merionethshire. Throughout the lifetime of the post-war Coalition government (1918–22), Jones yearned for the coalition to collapse.

He had his wish in October 1922. He defeated a sole Labour opponent, John Jones Roberts, in the general elections of 1922 and 1923, and won through in a three-cornered fight in 1924. In the autumn of 1924 he returned to parliament inevitably much dejected as one of a small phalanx of just forty Liberal MPs on the Liberal benches, facing a Conservative government led by Stanley Baldwin with a majority of no fewer than 223.

The desperately needed Liberal fight-back was spearheaded by Lloyd George, at whose instigation a number of independent investigations were set up to examine the social and economic ills of the nation and to evolve radical, progressive new policies for their remedy. Their conclusions were published in reports such as 'the Green Book' (*The Land and the Nation*), and 'the Brown Book' (*Towns and the Land*) – the former containing far-reaching proposals for rural regeneration, in part by a highly controversial scheme for

the state purchase of agricultural land, and the latter devoted to town planning on regional lines. Jones tended to remain critical. In his May 1929 general election address his endorsement of his party's new policy initiatives was conspicuously muted. Rather, he still came before the Merionethshire electorate as a traditionalist: 'I offer myself as a staunch and convinced Liberal. Liberalism stands opposed on the one hand to Reaction and on the other to Revolution. It stands for sane and ordered progress. It is the only safe path for a nation to tread.'³

Again, Jones won through after a keenly fought three-cornered contest, but, like so many other Liberal MPs, he returned to Westminster in June 1929 with a heavy heart. In spite of a dazzling election campaign, dynamic new policies, and a total of no fewer than 513 candidates, only fifty-nine Liberal MPs were elected, just thirteen more than at the dissolution of parliament in May. Many of Jones's closest associates had either retired or else been defeated at the polls. The health of both Jones and his wife was at best fragile. He tended to hark back nostalgically to the days when he first entered parliament – when his party remained in government and some of the party's giants remained. But, by 1929, 'they have gone & unfortunately we have no such men to fill their place'.⁴ As the 1930s began, Liberal politics in Wales seemed in irreversible, terminal decline. Jones looked askance as the membership of the Parliamentary Liberal Party grew ever more fractious. It never now succeeded in acting in unison and it sometimes displayed bizarre voting records in the Commons lobbies. In June 1931, Ellis W. Davies, a former Welsh Liberal MP, on a return visit to Westminster, found Jones 'pessimistic as usual'.⁵

When the so-called National Government was formed in August of the same year, Jones predictably joined the

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mainstream group of Liberal MPs led by Sir Herbert Samuel. His pessimism was profound and enduring throughout the long 1930s. 'This is a gloomy time in the affairs of our country', he wrote the following Christmas to Sir J. Herbert Lewis, '& as yet there is no sign of the dawn.'⁶ Rumours again circulated as each successive general election loomed that Jones was seriously considering standing down. Doubtless he was, but on each occasion he confounded the political pundits, winning keenly fought three-cornered contests in October 1931 and June 1935. By the latter occasion, Lloyd George had launched his 'New Deal' proposals, unveiled at Bangor in January 1935. Jones remained unimpressed; to his mind, the novel policy initiative was simply 'a re-hash of the policy "I can cure unemployment"' which the electorate had received so coolly back in May 1929.⁷ In March, Ellis Davies, having dined with Jones, found him 'as pessimistic as usual as to everything & everybody'.⁸ Throughout the years from 1931 he disliked intensely the concept of a Tory-dominated National Government and rejoiced at the substantial Labour gains in the London County Council elections in March 1934. To his mind, the National Government 'for some time [had] been doing nothing but trying to get the public to believe it to be the only possible government'.⁹

Haydn Jones was destined to remain at Westminster for a further full decade – until the 1945 election at the end of World War Two. In 1937 he was given a knighthood, a long overdue gesture which was greeted enthusiastically both at Westminster and in Merionethshire. Throughout his long period as Liberal MP for Merionethshire, he continued to manage his well-known ironmongery business in the High Street at Towyn – the biggest ironmongery business in the whole of Merionethshire – and was regularly to be seen in the

'TO HOLD THE OLD FLAG'

General election results in Merionethshire, January 1910–1935			
January 1910			
H. Ha ydn Jones	Liberal	6065	(76.4%)
R. Morris Jones	Conservative	1873	(23.6%)
	Majority	4192	(52.8%)
December 1910			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	unopposed	
1918			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	unopposed	
1922			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9903	(58.3%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7071	(41.7%)
	Majority	2832	(16.6%)
1923			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	11005	(60.5%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7181	(39.5%)
	Majority	3824	(21.0%)
1924			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9228	(47.8%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	6393	(33.1%)
Robert Vaughan	Conservative	3677	(19.1%)
	Majority	2835	(14.7%)
1929			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	11865	(48.2%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7980	(32.5%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	4731	(19.3%)
	Majority	3885	(15.7%)
1931			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9756	(40.8%)
J. H. Howard	Labour	7807	(32.6%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	6372	(26.6%)
	Majority	1949	(8.2%)
1935			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9466	(40.0%)
T. W. Jones	Labour	8317	(35.2%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	5868	(24.8%)
	Majority	1149	(4.8%)

shop until within a few weeks of his death in 1950. He owned and was actively involved in the running of the famous Talylyn miniature-gauge railway, the picturesque narrow-gauge line which was one of very few in the whole of Britain to remain in private ownership. He was also the owner of much of the village of Abergynolwyn, and owned both the Bryneglwys slate quarry and a part-interest in the Aberllefenni slate quarry, which he leased from its owner Mrs. A. Hamilton Pryce of Machynlleth. A number of the farms in the area were also in Sir Haydn's possession. By the end of his life, he had become a very wealthy man with extensive business interests of various kinds, and was a significant local employer. A long-serving elder of the Presbyterian church, he also became a precentor at Bethel C. M. [Calvinistic Methodist] Church, Towyn. He inherited his father's love of music and edited a collection of hymns and hymn tunes entitled *Cân a Moliant*. He also wrote a large number of hymn tunes himself.

One of Haydn Jones's best-known personal characteristics was the carrying of an umbrella which he used as a walking stick, and he was especially pleased to receive a presentation of one, gold-mounted and inscribed, from the quarrymen of Aberllefenni on the occasion of his knighthood in 1937. In some aspects of his personal life he remained proudly and stubbornly old-fashioned. Until the end of his life he doggedly refused to own a typewriter – all his letters are penned in his own distinctive longhand – and he disliked intensely the use of the telephone. When he died in the summer of 1950, he and his two surviving brothers appeared to be survivors of a bygone age. One of his brothers, J. D. Jones, had published an engrossing volume of reminiscences, *Three Score Years and Ten*, in 1940, a volume which chronicles some of the family background.

In 1903, Jones married Gwendolen, the daughter of Lewis D.

Jones of Chicago. She survived him, together with their one daughter, Mrs. Eryl Mathias of London. He was buried at Towyn cemetery at a public service where the Rev. H. Jones-Griffith, pastor of Towyn Welsh Presbyterian Church, officiated. At the graveside a huge gathering of mourners sang the tune 'Capel y Ddol' which had been composed by Sir Haydn's father.

As a politician, Sir Henry Haydn Jones did not distinguish himself at Westminster in any way. He hardly ever delivered speeches in the House of Commons, although he did put down a number of parliamentary questions – generally on agricultural or industrial concerns – and served on several committees. Nor was he an impressive platform performer: 'His voice had a somewhat hoarse quality, and he was keener on marshalling his facts and figures than on pretty turns of phrases.'¹⁰ But he rendered formidable service as a county Member and assiduous constituency MP, responsive to the needs of his constituents for more than thirty-five years. Although an MP, Sir Haydn remained regular in his attendance at the meetings of the Merionethshire County Council and the Local Education Authority. He served as chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party in 1934, and modestly refused repeated suggestions that there should be a public testimonial to him in recognition of his services to the county. He won impressive victories in avidly fought three-cornered parliamentary contests in four successive general elections – in 1924, 1929, 1931 and 1935. Following his re-election in November 1935, an admirer from Bangor wrote to him:

As Celt says no one ever questioned the result in Merioneth, though some parts could have done better, and having regard to all circumstances, I think the victory is a splendid one – a personal and well-deserved compliment. To hold the old flag in spite of every onslaught is no

mean achievement, & I have often wondered if you have ever realised how high you are held in the esteem of crowds outside your constituency. We know something of your 'cymeriad' ['character'] in the old county, but during the fourteen years I have spent in Bangor, you would be surprised the number of people one has met who claim you as their own. You stand for something that is very sacred to them – reliability, consistency, strength of character & outstanding personality – Wales must have its unchanging mountains. May you go back to Westminster gladdened by the fact that your great labours have not been in vain. We are proud of you.¹¹

Haydn Jones remains of interest as one of the last representatives of the traditional rural Welsh Liberal political culture. He undoubtedly accumulated a substantial personal vote which helped to ensure his return to parliament in 1931 and 1935. The local agricultural vote also remained significant: 32.7 per cent of the occupied male population of Merionethshire was engaged in agriculture in 1921, and still 30.4 per cent in 1931. In contrast, the proportion engaged in mining and quarrying, almost sure to vote Labour by this time, had fallen to 17.2 per cent by 1921 and fell still further to 13.5 per cent by 1931, as the local slate-quarrying industry contracted. This socio-economic structure, reinforced by family values, the persistence of the Welsh language and the continued strength of the nonconformist ethos, helped to buttress and perpetuate the deeply entrenched Liberal tradition in the county and thus impede somewhat the advance of the Labour Party. This tradition also played a part in enabling Sir Haydn Jones's successor, Emrys O. Roberts, to retain Merionethshire for the Liberals in 1945 and 1950. Like Anglesey (represented by Lady Megan Lloyd George), it did not fall to Labour until October 1951.

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Note on sources

Nothing of substance has ever been published about Sir Henry Haydn Jones. A useful collection of his papers was donated to the National Library of Wales by his widow in 1955. Other collections in the custody of the National Library which include helpful material are the papers of Ellis W. Davies MP and Sir John Herbert Lewis MP, together with those of Liberal journalist E. Morgan Humphreys. The local newspapers the *Cambrian News*, *Y Rhedegydd* and the *Liverpool Post and Mercury* have also been quarried extensively in the preparation of this article. Obituary notices and tributes were published in the following newspapers: *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950; *The Times*, 3 July 1950, p. 8, col. c; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 July 1950; and the *Merioneth County Times*, 8 July 1950.

- 1 *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950.
- 2 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), E. Morgan Humphreys Papers A1628, Haydn Jones to Humphreys, 22 November 1918 ('Private').
- 3 Election address of Henry Haydn Jones, May 1929, entitled 'The Road to Prosperity'.
- 4 NLW, Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers A1/405, Jones to Lewis, 21 December 1929.
- 5 NLW, Ellis W. Davies Papers 13, diary entry for 15 June 1931. For Haydn Jones's reflections on this occasion, see NLW, Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers A1/547, Jones to Lewis, 1 July 1931.
- 6 *Ibid.*, A1/609, Jones to Lewis, 24 December 1931.
- 7 NLW, Ellis W. Davies Papers 28/21, Jones to Davies, 16 January 1935.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 13, diary entry for 4 March 1935.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 28/1, Jones to Davies, 15 March 1934.
- 10 *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950.
- 11 NLW, Sir Henry Haydn Jones Papers 650, Idris Williams, Upper Bangor, to Jones, 18 November 1935.