

Liberal women mayors

Jaime Reynolds recounts the story of Lady Meriel Howard, the second woman ever to be mayor of an industrial town.

Another Ma

Lady Howard of Llanelli and the str

IN ‘MADAM MAYOR: The First Wave of Liberal Women in Local Government Leadership 1918–39’, published in the *Journal* a few years ago,¹ I described the Liberal pioneers amongst the six women who served as mayor of boroughs before 1918,² and the 147 more who served between 1918 and 1939, or at least those that I succeeded in identifying. Unfortunately, I missed one of the very early and interesting ones, Lady Howard,³ who succeeded her late husband as mayor of Llanelli⁴ in 1916.

The story of Lady Howard – or, to give her full name, Catherine Meriel Cowell-Stepney, known as a child as Alcyone or ‘Alcy’ and later as Meriel – is of interest for several reasons. She was a significant figure in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire and Welsh public life from before the First World War until shortly before her death in 1952. She was born and married into the Liberal aristocracy in its heyday, with close ties to the Gladstone family and wide influence in South Wales and later in Cumberland and Gloucestershire. She was also the only daughter of parents whose long and strange marriage ended in a divorce case which was a cause célèbre in early Edwardian England, an experience which must have deeply affected her emotionally, and may well have shaped her strongest political beliefs.

Meriel’s parents were Sir Emile Algernon Arthur Keppel Cowell-Stepney (known as Sir

Arthur), who was born in Mannheim, Germany, in 1834, and Margaret Leicester Warren. Both were from wealthy, well-connected, politically active, aristocratic families. Meriel’s paternal grandmother came from the Stepneys,⁵ who had built up extensive landholdings in Carmarthenshire which passed to her in 1857 when her two elder brothers died without heir. Meriel’s grandfather John Cowell-Stepney (1791–1877) developed the estate commercially around the family seat, Llanelly House, laying out the streets of the rapidly growing town. He was a personal friend of William Gladstone and served as Liberal MP for Carmarthen Boroughs (1868–74). Sir Arthur came into this inheritance rather unexpectedly in 1872 after his two elder brothers died. Before that he had pursued a career as a clerk in the Foreign Office for many years.

Meriel’s mother, Margaret, was the youngest of four daughters of the second Baron de Tabley (1811–87) and Catherina Barbara de Salis, who came from an Anglo-Swiss (from Grisons) noble family with land in Ireland. Margaret was born in Heidelberg. Baron Tabley was a Liberal politician who served under Lords Aberdeen, Palmerston and Russell as a government whip in the House of Lords in the 1850s and 60s. From 1868 to 1872, he was treasurer of the household in Gladstone’s first government. He was close to Gladstone personally and

Madam Mayor: A strange case of the Cowell-Stepneys

Margaret also entered into the Gladstone circle, becoming a best friend⁶ of Gladstone's favourite daughter Mary (for a time his de facto political secretary). Her friendship with the Gladstones lasted all her life.⁷

Meriel's parents married in August 1875, at first apparently happily, although on his part 'there were some instances of eccentricity during the first few months, to which Lady Stepney did not pay much attention. Sir Arthur absented himself without telling her, and dismissed her maid without reason ... he made certain vague insinuations against her'.⁸ Meriel was born on 12 September 1876. Arthur 'showed the very greatest delight at the birth of his daughter' but on 6 October he abruptly left home and never again cohabited with his wife. 'Certain suggestions were made by Sir Arthur at the time concerning his wife, which were investigated by his friends and by his then solicitor, who found them to be absolutely baseless'.⁹ Years later the divorce court was told that 'they were result of a mental delusion which was subsequently treated under medical advice ... this resulted in Sir Arthur being sent abroad with a doctor'.¹⁰

For the rest of his life Sir Arthur led a nomadic existence with long periods spent abroad, until he finally settled in the United States. This was despite the fact that he continued to manage his Welsh estates (mostly as an absentee landlord), sat as Liberal MP

for Carmarthen Boroughs,¹¹ his father's old seat, and in 1884 served as High Sheriff of Carmarthenshire. He supported his wife and daughter with an ample annual income of £2,000 a year and they carried on living at the family homes in Ascot and London.

At the age of four, 'Miss Alcyone Stepney' was painted by the celebrated Victorian artist, John Millais, who wrote this account:

The child Alcyone was a difficult little bird to catch. She could only be taken on the wing, for when perched on the dais she was so frightened that there was nothing for it but to take her down again, give her some flowers to play with, and let her run about the studio at her own free will. Whatever details were wanted had to be got by catching her up now and then and holding her for a few minutes at a time; and in this way a likeness was secured.¹²

Lady Cowell-Stepney regularly sent messages to Sir Arthur via his friends entreating him to return and, in 1882, a friendly meeting between the two took place and he made several other visits – of a few hours – in the 1880s. But nothing changed: Sir Arthur's 'delusions' continued despite Lady Margaret's 'settled policy... to show to Sir Arthur the greatest possible kindness and the most cordial welcome. No



questions were asked of him, and no explanations were sought, no scenes were ever made.¹³

Throughout, Sir Arthur showed the utmost pride in and affection for his daughter Meriel. In 1889, he invited the tenants of his Welsh estates to an agricultural show at Windsor and Meriel, then 13 years of age, was introduced to them as his heiress, and her health was drunk at the luncheon. Lady Margaret assented to this but wrote to her husband ‘that in taking their daughter to the luncheon she did not doubt that he meant to do what was right and kind, but asked him to think how it must have struck his friends and the girl’s friends when they saw him bring his child but not his wife.’¹⁴

In February 1891, Sir Arthur – ‘under the strange delusion that certain photographs of an improper kind were being made of his daughter’¹⁵ – went to Norwood, where Margaret and Meriel were staying with a friend, and demanded custody of the child. This was the only occasion on which Lady Stepney showed anger. It was decided that Meriel would stay in the custody of a mutual friend while the case was referred to the Court of Chancery. Affidavits by Gladstone¹⁶ and others – selected because they were old and tried friends of her husband – were produced after which Sir Arthur abandoned the case and custody was granted to Lady Stepney.

For the next ten years there were occasional visits between the father and daughter. She later stated that ‘her father was always most courteous and considerate to her, except of course, in saying painful things about her mother’¹⁷. On 1 January 1901, he wrote to Meriel: ‘My dear child, I cannot begin the year and the century without wishing you happiness,’ and adding

Maggie and Alcy
Cowell-Stepney,
c. 1886

Meriel Cowell-
Stepney in 1909

Meriel Cowell-
Stepney (undated)

that he had taken a long farewell to England and was about to become a citizen of the United States.¹⁸ The letter gave Meriel elaborate and very detailed directions for the management of the estates, which he appeared to be abdicating.

In mid-1901 this Trollopian tale moved to its denouement. Letters arrived for Lady Stepney from America in which Sir Arthur declared ‘let bygones be bygones’ and asked: ‘How would the thing act, and how would it suit you to join me in this country and to live here with me? If after our long – more than twenty years separation you could make up your mind to join me, a letter would find me.’¹⁹ She replied: ‘Surely your being a citizen of the United States need not prevent you from coming back to the old homes? And you are such a good traveller! Distance is nothing to you. It would be too sad to think of your never being in England or in Wales, and though I can’t go to you, I must just say how glad I shall always be to see you again.’²⁰

Sir Arthur’s surprising proposal was an attempt to pin the blame for their separation on his wife in order to obtain a divorce. He wrote back: ‘My Dear Margaret, ... I claim the right to choose the spot we make our home and permanent dwelling place. That home I have asked you to share with me as my wife ... If you can be happy anywhere with me, you know on what quarter of the globe to find me. If you will not make my home yours, and live with me in America, then I am constrained to feel that I am bound to effect something very like a full and legal separation.’²¹

At a meeting with Meriel in August 1901, her father admitted – after some fencing – that he planned to divorce her mother and was



particularly concerned to ensure irrevocably Meriel's inheritance as there might be another claimant. Indeed, Sir Arthur had gone to the USA to obtain a divorce and he did so in March 1903 – on the grounds of his wife's desertion – after claiming domicile in Boise, Idaho. He also resumed the management of his estates despite previously handing it over to Meriel.

The US divorce of March 1903 denied Sir Arthur's desertion of his wife and, if unchallenged, Meriel's claim to her entailed estates could easily be imperilled. Lady Margaret, therefore, reluctantly, sued him for judicial separation on the grounds of desertion in the English courts and in May 1903 the High Court granted her petition.

In mid-1909 an elderly passenger was found dead at a station in Yuma, Arizona, and was identified as Sir Arthur, now known simply as Mr A. C. Stepney, American citizen. It seems that he had gone to Arizona in search of beetles for his collection.

Meriel lived with her mother throughout these years and shared Margaret's view that Sir Arthur behaviour stemmed from mental illness. This seems highly likely. He was treated by Dr Henry Maudsley, a pioneer psychiatrist, or 'alienist'. Apart from the 1903 High Court case, many press reports over the years refer to his prolonged bouts of ill health and incessant travelling – his absences often attributed to the need to recover from illness. It is not known exactly what form the illness took, but there seems to be a pattern of wishing to flee from the identity and obligations that fell upon him when he became heir to the baronetcy unexpectedly at the age of 38. This was apparent in his sudden and incomprehensible abandonment of his

Sir Arthur Cowell-Stepney during the divorce case in 1903

Margaret Cowell-Stepney during the divorce case in 1903

Meriel, Lady Howard, in Druidic dress, 1922

wife in 1876, of his political career (in 1878 and again in 1891), of Gladstone, home rule and the Liberal Party in 1891, of his Welsh estate in 1901 and of his country in 1908 when he announced from California that he would never again set foot in Britain. Two or three years before his death he had also renounced his title: 'I am just plain A C Stepney, American citizen, and I want to forget that I ever was Sir Emile Arthur Cowell-Stepney.'²²

Even Sir Arthur's affection for his daughter and desire to ensure her inheritance of his Welsh estates seems to have been negated by his efforts to divorce her mother in 1903. Nevertheless, by the mid-1900s she became increasingly involved with the estate and was fully so after her father's death. From 1909 she mostly resided with her mother in Wales, having moved from Woodend near Ascot where she had spent her childhood. In the 1911 Census she proudly recorded her occupation as 'Landlord in Wales'.

The Cowell-Stepney estate, almost entirely in Carmarthenshire around Llanelli, amounted to 9,847 acres in 1872, valued at £180,000 and generating an income of £7,200 per annum.²³ For today's equivalents you can multiply these amounts by at least 100. The value of the estate increased in the late nineteenth century as it became an important coal-mining area and then as the tinsplate industry concentrated around Llanelli – which came to be known as 'Tinopolis'. The industry expanded greatly between 1870 and 1890 as the demand for tinsplate for such uses as canning and roofing exploded. The industry continued to flourish until 1914, despite setbacks such as the 1890 McKinley tariff, which drastically curtailed US demand.²⁴ New markets such as the

Another Madam Mayor

manufacture of 'Stepney wheels' for the car industry opened up. By the 1900s, it seems that Sir Arthur's annual income had grown to some £30,000 a year.

The population of Llanelli more than doubled between 1851 and 1881 to almost 28,000 and it was to increase to a peak of more than 38,000 in 1931 (with a dip in the 1890s, presumably due to unfavourable economic conditions following the loss of the US markets).

The Liberals were dominant locally, holding the parliamentary seat until 1922, but thereafter it became an absolutely safe Labour seat; even in the 1931 election debacle, Labour had a majority of 16,000 there. However, at the local level, the council was controlled by a Liberal–Conservative alliance ('Independents') throughout the interwar period. Labour held five out of twenty-four seats in 1913 and were not able to expand much beyond this in the 1920s and '30s. The first Labour mayor was not elected until 1929: Morgan Morgan, a steelworks supervisor and trades unionist and secretary of a local Baptist church. Politics in Llanelli were mostly tamer than in the Glamorgan mining valleys, with the notable exception of the August 1911 riots after troops had killed two people when they fired on pickets who had halted a train carrying strike-breakers during the national railway strike. Four other people were killed as the result of an explosion when a man dynamited a freight wagon carrying munitions.²⁵

Just three weeks after the riots Meriel married Sir Stafford Howard in the Church of St Elli, Llanelli. She was 35 and he was 60 and a widower.²⁶ It was described as the 'event of the season' with a guard of honour formed by boy scouts and territorials. Remarkably a film of the wedding has survived and can be watched on the internet.²⁷

Sir Stafford was born into one of the lesser branches of the Howard dynasty and was related to the Duke of Norfolk. The family had lands at Greystoke Castle in Cumberland and Thornbury Castle in Gloucestershire. He was another Gladstonian Liberal, sitting as MP for Cumberland East between 1876 and 1885 and Thornbury from 1885 to 1886, when he was defeated after briefly serving as under-secretary for India. From 1893 to 1912 he was responsible for managing the Crown lands.

Meriel had taken an increasing part in public life in Llanelli and Carmarthen and became a celebrated and popular local figure. Continuing her father's philanthropy, she came to be known as Llanelli's 'Lady Bountiful'.

Sir Stafford threw himself wholeheartedly into the public life of Llanelli alongside

his wife, playing a major part in obtaining the incorporation of the borough in 1913 and serving as its first mayor until his death in 1916. He was also very active on the Harbour Board and sat on Carmarthenshire County Council. In 1912, the Howards bought Bryncaerau Castle and its twenty-four-acre park for £7,750 and gave it to Llanelli to form 'Parc Howard'. They also gave £4,000 to build premises including a rifle-range for the boy scouts. In the First World War, the Howards were heavily engaged in helping families whose menfolk were in the services, especially through the Llanelli & District Relief Fund. Sir Stafford was also chairman of the County Recruiting Committee and largely responsible for forming the Carmarthenshire Battalion of the Welsh Regiment.

The couple also had two children during these years: Margaret Catherine, born in January 1913 and Stafford Vaughan²⁸ born in September 1915.

Sir Stafford died suddenly in April 1916, and Meriel accepted an invitation to serve out his mayoralty, thus becoming only the second woman mayor of an industrial town, the first being Sarah Lees in Oldham. At the end of her term in November, she was co-opted as an alderman so that she could remain a member of the council. She was also co-opted as a Carmarthenshire county councillor in February 1917 and re-elected unopposed for Llanelli No. 1 division in 1919. She resigned her Llanelli Borough seat in November 1919 and thereafter concentrated her work on the county council, and although she lost her seat in 1922, she soon regained a seat as a county councillor and later sat as a county alderman until 1946. She was also an active member of Llanelli Board of Guardians from before 1914 until 1930 and chaired the board in the early 1920s. She received the Freedom of the Borough of Llanelli in 1934.

Meriel was a committed Liberal by inheritance, marriage and conviction. She was a popular figurehead of the local Liberal cause before the First World War. Addressing the cheering crowd after the declaration of the Liberal win in Carmarthen Boroughs at the January 1910 general election,

she said that it had been one of the most glorious days of her life; they had gained a magnificent victory. It was very good of them to think her worthy to take that little part in the triumph ... and not to think she looked something like the grasping landowner they saw on the posters (laughter).

Meriel was a committed Liberal by inheritance, marriage and conviction. She was a popular figurehead of the local Liberal cause before the First World War.

One of the underpinnings of her Liberal belief was her identification with Wales and Welsh language and culture. Llanelli and even more the surrounding districts of Carmarthenshire were Welsh-speaking strongholds.

She hoped not to be like him, but to do her duty in the way of payment of the taxes.

She would have very great pleasure in paying any taxes that Mr Llewellyn Williams (the elected MP) and his party chose to impose upon her (loud cheers).²⁹

In 1912, at the time of the Carmarthenshire East by-election, there was talk of running Stafford Howard as the Liberal candidate either there or in Carmarthen Boroughs (in place of the incumbent, W. Llewellyn Williams). It was reported that 'Lady Howard is so popular at Llanelli that it is thought that she could carry her husband in ...'³⁰

She continued as a leading light of the local Liberal Association after her husband's death and was a strong supporter of Lloyd George and especially of Dame Margaret Lloyd George, who came to Llanelli and lunched with Meriel during her national tour in the 1918 general election. In April 1919, Meriel resigned as president of Llanelli Women's Liberal Association and withdrew from the regional federation in protest at its critical attitude to Lloyd George and decision to drop Lady Lloyd George from the federation executive. She seems to have received wide support from Llanelli Liberals for her stand.³¹

Meriel was in the running to be National (pro-Lloyd George) Liberal candidate for Llanelli in the 1922 general election, succeeding to the seat vacated by the retiring Lloyd Georgeite MP. However, she was unexpectedly passed over by the Association, which selected George Clarke Williams. She supported his campaign and spoke on his behalf, but the seat was lost to Labour.³²

She continued to play a prominent part in Llanelli and South Wales Liberal activity in the 1920s and '30s, for instance appearing on the platform with Lloyd George at the Welsh Liberal Assembly in Swansea in 1925.³³ In 1936, she was again invited to run for selection as candidate (Liberal National) for a parliamentary by-election in Llanelli, but declined. Whether this was for personal or political reasons is unknown.³⁴

One of the underpinnings of her Liberal belief was her identification with Wales and Welsh language and culture. Llanelli and even more the surrounding districts of Carmarthenshire were Welsh-speaking strongholds. Meriel's wedding in 1911 and the funeral service of her mother in 1921 were conducted in Welsh. Her daughter Margaret, born in 1913, was called "Marged Fach" by her parents,³⁵ and subsequently more usually

known as Marged. Meriel was very active in the Union of Welsh Societies (dedicated to promoting bilingualism), the Welsh Bibliographical Society and the Carmarthenshire Society in London. She was said to be a 'great student of Welsh history'. It was reported that Sir Stafford Howard learned to speak fluent Welsh after his marriage – quite a feat for a man in his sixties. Meriel learnt Welsh in order to communicate with her tenants. It was reported that, during an extended visit to the estate in the 1900s, 'after speaking very gracefully in English, the young heiress turned with "effortless ease" to the vernacular showing a familiarity with the "language of Eden" that would have satisfied the most exigent of Welsh scholars'.³⁶ However she played down her capabilities. In 1923 it was proposed that future meetings of the Board of Guardians should be conducted in Welsh. Lady Howard, who was in the chair, 'asked if the members would be allowed time to put in some study. She promised she would be proficient in Welsh in a year's time'. Rev Trevor Jones the proposer of the change replied, 'I think your Ladyship understands the language well enough'. It seems, nevertheless, that she stood down as chair because of this language issue.³⁷

There may well have also been a religious gulf between fierce Nonconformist zealots like the Baptist Reverend Jones³⁸ and Meriel who, like the Gladstones, was tolerant and rather High Church Anglican in her outlook. Her mother was an 'ardent Churchwoman' and her husband became an Ecclesiastical Commissioner of the Church of England. Her religious tolerance and feeling for Welsh identity was well captured in a message she sent to a bazaar held in London in 1912 to raise money for the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Churches:

We Welsh people somehow mix up our patriotism and our religion. When we have lost them we have lost more than words can say and I can well imagine the enormous help and delight it must be in those of our fellow-countrymen who are working here, and who otherwise never hear a word of their mother-tongue, to find that just once a week they can, so to speak, go home a Welshman among the Welsh, and find the church of their childhood in their ... faith, just as it always had been to them ever since they can first remember.³⁹

In 1928 Meriel converted to Roman Catholicism and remained a Catholic for the rest of her life.

Another Madam Mayor

Meriel held very strong views on drink and was a passionate supporter of the temperance movement.⁴⁰ Possibly this stemmed from the part that alcohol may have played in her father's eccentric behaviour. Dr Maudsley, who treated him, adhered to the degeneration theory that mental illness was often triggered by drunkenness and alcoholism and that the effects were inherited. There is at least a suggestion that Sir Arthur had a drinking problem. His death was initially attributed to alcoholism though this was later amended to heat-stroke and a weak heart.⁴¹

Apart from any family history, it was quite natural that Meriel should be drawn to the temperance cause like many other wealthy, Christian, Liberal, philanthropic women of the period. As Margaret Barrow's *Temperate Feminists* has shown, there was a close connection between Liberalism, temperance and the wider women's suffrage movement. One of key motivations of women who campaigned for the vote and became involved in local government through the poor law guardians and later borough and county councils (as Meriel did) was to further temperance measures.⁴²

She married into the heart of the temperance movement. 'Temperance reform was one of the passions of (Sir Stafford Howard's) life', it was said,⁴³ and he became president of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Temperance Association. There was a distant family connection with Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle ('the Red Countess'), who was president and dominant figure of the National British Women's Temperance Association from 1903 to 1921. Sir Stafford's sister-in-law, another Lady Howard, was a temperance activist in Cumberland and a county alderman for many years.⁴⁴

Both Meriel and Sir Stafford tended towards the prohibitionist position. At their insistence, no alcohol was served at their wedding or the accompanying festivities and, when they gifted Parc Howard to Llanelli, one of the conditions was that no intoxicating liquors should be sold in any part of the estate. Leases of pubs on the Stepney estate

were not renewed.⁴⁵ In November 1916, Meriel signed a public appeal to the cabinet, organised by the 'Strength of Britain Movement' and signed by '1000 Representatives of the Brain-power of the country', calling for the suppression of the liquor trade for the duration of the war. Meriel taught her daughter that alcohol was poison. Her children were taught that drink was a curse and a great sin: 'they had never seen and would never see intoxicants at home'.⁴⁶

Sadly, her daughter Marged developed a drink and drug problem. She is remembered as a patron of the poet Dylan Thomas in the early 1950s. Marged died in January 1953, only six months after her mother, aged 40, after an overdose of sleeping pills.⁴⁷

Meriel's temperance and Liberal activism and her early engagement in local government⁴⁸ suggest that she would be sympathetic to women's suffrage, though no direct evidence has been found of her participating actively in the movement before 1918.⁴⁹ In later years, she was firm in her advocacy of women's rights, for example declaring in 1922 that she was 'heartily in agreement with all questions' posed by National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship to candidates in the county council election.⁵⁰ In 1938, as a member of the magistrates bench at a trial for indecent assault of a girl, she demanded to know why there was no woman on the jury, insisting 'that there should be women on the jury in a case where a young woman is involved'. When her comment was overruled, she 'entered a very strong protest'.⁵¹

Lady Howard-Stepney died at her Carmarthenshire home, Cilymaenllwyd, on 8 June 1952.

At the height of the 'Peers versus the People' political crisis of 1910, she declared her deep personal connection with her political faith and her Welsh home that remained with her all her life: 'Fellow Liberals ... I came here today because I wanted you to feel how Liberal I am ... There is hardly anywhere else where one feels so much that we are in a Liberal centre as in Llanelli ... it is delightful to feel that we are on the right side ...'⁵²

Dr Jaime Reynolds was a UK civil servant and EU official working on international environmental policy until his retirement in 2016. He is currently writing a book on the first women mayors in inter-war Britain.

- 1 *Journal of Liberal History* 89 (Winter 2015–16).
- 2 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was the first, in tiny Aldeburgh in 1908, followed in 1910 by Sarah Lees in the large county borough of Oldham, and Miss Gwenllian Morgan in Brecon. Lavinia Malcolm served as provost of the small burgh of Dollar in Clackmannanshire from 1913 to 1919. Mary Alice Partington served as mayor of Glossop in Derbyshire from May 1916 to 1920; and Elizabeth Hannah Kenyon for Dukinfield in Cheshire between May and November 1917, both succeeding their deceased husbands. All were Liberals.
- 3 She changed her name by deed-poll to Howard-Stepney in 1922, but I have referred to her as Lady Howard throughout the article.
- 4 The modern spelling of the borough, Llanelli, was adopted in 1966 in place of the Anglicised spelling, Llanelly, and is used throughout this article except for a few quotations and names of organisations.
- 5 The Stepney family originated in Stepney, east London and began building their fortunes in South Wales from the early sixteenth century. The baronetcy was created in 1621. The seventh baronet, Sir Thomas Stepney (1725–72), accumulated substantial business and shipping interests centred on Llanelly, where the family resided in Llanelly House. The last baronet died childless in 1825, and his sister, the mother of John Cowell-Stepney, became claimant to the inheritance.
- 6 For instance, she was a sponsor at the christening of Mary's daughter, Dorothy, at Hawarden in 1890 with Gladstone and Rosebery present. Dorothy was a bridesmaid at Meriel's wedding in 1911.
- 7 *Western Mail*, 15 Aug. 1921. Mary Gladstone (Drew) was prominent at Lady Margaret's funeral in 1921: *Western Mail*, 18 Aug. 1921. Lady Margaret features often in the diaries and correspondence of Mary Drew (the Drew Manuscripts in the British Library); see Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860–1914* (Oxford, 1986).

- 8 *Western Mail*, 29 May 1903. This and subsequent citations relating to the divorce hearing are taken from this source. The same material from the case was published widely in the national and provincial press and abroad. The material reflects the submissions by Lady Cowell-Stepney, supported by Meriel, which were not contested by Sir Arthur's legal representatives.
- 9 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 10 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 11 He was returned as a Liberal unopposed on 14 Aug. 1876, having been defeated in 1874, and resigned in 1878. He again represented the seat from 1886 to 1892. In September 1891, he wrote to the Liberal Association that he would resign immediately on account of his health – soon correcting this to say that he would resign at the next election. In November, he wrote again from Naples, en route to Western Australia, where, despite being 'slightly better in health', he intended to recuperate until spring 1892. His letter announced that he could no longer support Gladstone's home rule policy and would support the Unionists for the remainder of the parliament. His letter indicated that, since Parnell's disruption of Commons' proceedings in 1890, he had been considering such a move 'but long and troublesome illness' had delayed his decision; see *Cardiff Times*, 12 Dec. 1891. He had not been an active MP; in the 1886–7 session: he voted in 56 of the 485 divisions, the sixth lowest number of the thirty-four Welsh MPs; *South Wales Daily News*, 17 Sep. 1887. He voted in only 16 of the 276 divisions from Feb. to Aug. 1888, the lowest number of Welsh MPs; *South Wales Daily News*, 20 Aug. 1888.
- 12 John Guille Millais, *Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais* (Methuen, 1899), ch. 15.
- 13 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 14 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 15 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 16 Gladstone wrote to Lady Cowell-Stepney: 'Dollis Hill NW Feb 24th 1891, My dear Lady Stepney – No words can tell you how I am grieved at the deplorable intelligence you send me. May God in His mercy minister support to you and Alcy, and to him who does you wrong the light he sadly needs. Of course I shall be ever ready to do all that I find to be legitimately in my power, and I think my first duty is to be on the spot. I propose, therefore, to be at No 18 Park-lane (where we are to live next year), to-morrow at twelve to meet your solicitor, if you will kindly appoint him there at the time, and pray do you come or not as you think best. I will come to you if I find a note or message to that effect. My wife is not here. You know what her feelings and those of our children will be. Ever yours, affectionately W E GLADSTONE'. *Weekly Mail*, 6 Jun. 1903.
- 17 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 18 He applied for naturalisation in Los Angeles on 24 Dec. 1900 but did not receive citizenship until 1908. Ancestry website, and *Evening Express* and *Evening Mail*, 25 Feb. 1900.
- 19 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 20 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 21 *Western Mail* 29 May 1903
- 22 *Belfast Newsletter* 5 July 1909
- 23 K. Cahill, *Who Owns Britain? The hidden facts behind landownership in the UK and Ireland* (Canongate Books Ltd., 2001), pp. 309, 370. Sir Arthur also owned land in Canada, Australia and Ireland, which he left to Meriel.
- 24 From L. W. Evans, 'The Tinsplate, Steel, and Coal Industries', in Sir John E. Lloyd (ed.), *A History of Carmarthenshire*, 2 vols. (London Carmarthenshire Society, 1935, 1939): <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/CMN/Lloyd5>.
- 25 Robert Griffiths, *Killing no murder: South Wales and the Great Railway Strike of 1911* (Manifesto Press, 2009); local politics became more polarised in the 1930s when two Communists were elected to the council.
- 26 His first wife was Lady Rachel Campbell, daughter of the 2nd Earl Cawdor. They married in 1876 and had one son and two daughters. She died in 1906.
- 27 <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-stepney-wedding-1911-online>; see also *Windsor & Eton Express*, 23 Sep. 1911
- 28 Stafford Vaughan Stepney Howard (1915–91); market-gardener and for-ester; Liberal candidate for Gloucestershire South 1950, Penrith & Border 1951; member Cumberland County Council.
- 29 *Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser*, 27 Jan. 1910.
- 30 *Western Mail*, 31 Jul. 1912.
- 31 *Cambria Daily Leader*, 24 Apr. 1919; *Gloucester Chronicle*, 13 Sep. 1919.
- 32 *Western Mail* 30 Oct. 1922, 3 Nov. 1922.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 30 May 1925.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 19 and 21 Feb. 1936.
- 35 In English: "Little Margaret", she was known by this nickname in Llanelli, see *Western Mail* 29 Aug 1927
- 36 *Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser*, 15 Jul. 1909.
- 37 *Western Mail*, 8 Jun. 1923, *Yorkshire Post*, 23 Nov. 1923.
- 38 In 1914, the Rev. Jones described cinemas 'as the latest delusion of the devil' and called for their wholesale condemnation; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 10 Jun. 1914.
- 39 *Western Mail*, 21 Jun. 1912.
- 40 She was president of the British Women's Temperance Association in Llanelli.
- 41 *Oakland Tribune*, 3 Jul. 1909.
- 42 Margaret Barrow, 'Temperate Feminists: The British Women's Temperance Association 1870–1914', PhD thesis (University of Manchester, 1999).
- 43 *Western Mail*, 10 Apr. 1916.
- 44 Lady Mabel Harriet Howard (née McDonnell) of Greystoke Castle (1858–1942), wife of Stafford's elder brother Henry Howard. She was described as 'progressive, influential and fearless'; *Penrith Observer*, 5 Jan. 1943.
- 45 *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 12 Apr. 1916.
- 46 *Llanelly Star*, 12 May 1917.
- 47 See Hannah Ellis (ed.), *Dylan Thomas: A Centenary Celebration* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014).
- 48 She was first nominated for election to Llanelly Board of Guardians in March 1910 but withdrew before the poll. *Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser*, 24 Mar. 1910.
- 49 Christabel Pankhurst visited Llanelli in 1906, and Muriel Matters, propagandist for the Women's Freedom League, spoke in Llanelli and at a stormy meeting in Carmarthen in 1909. A non-militant Women's Association was active in Llanelli in 1913. There are no reports of Meriel being involved.
- 50 *Common Cause*, 3 Mar. 1922.
- 51 *Western Mail*, 2 Jul. 1938.
- 52 *Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser*, 13 Jan. 1910.