

Reviews

narrative and key arguments, it is worth pausing to note that the book includes a useful set of maps, timeline of key events and an excellent essay offering guidance on further reading. Anyone seeking to enhance their understanding and knowledge of British politics at the end of the nineteenth

and beginning of the twentieth centuries need look no further than this outstanding volume.

Dr Iain Sharpe studied history at Leicester and London Universities, completing a doctoral thesis on the Liberal Party in the Edwardian era. He was a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford for 30 years.

and son-in-law, she was not elected as a member of parliament; but she was a constant political figure and also an elected one. She was a councillor and council leader on Cricieth Urban District Council and was also elected to many Liberal bodies and other associations for most of her adult life. She didn't confine herself to the council chambers, however; unlike LG, Margaret actively campaigned in by-elections for the coalition Liberals – some eighteen by-elections during this period. This was against the practice of the day, which was for prime ministers not to campaign in by-elections. This therefore meant that, during the October 1922 Newport by-election, which was central to Lloyd George's future as prime minister, he did not actually do any campaigning and it was lost without a single personal appearance by him – despite it being an underlying factor in the coalition ending.

There have been numerous mentions of Margaret in the many books on Lloyd George but normally as an appendage to her husband. This book, however, sets out her role often very independently from him. The book, for instance, cites a *Time and Tide* (a magazine produced by Viscountess Rhondda) description of Margaret as follows:

It is perfectly true to say that, had she not been

Wife of Lloyd George

Richard Rhys O'Brien, *The Campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George: The wife of the Prime Minister 1916–1922* (Y Lolfa, 2022)

Review by **Russell Deacon**

THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY of the fall of the Lloyd George coalition saw a book published that gave a first-hand account of its inner workings, from no less than the prime ministers' wife, Margaret Lloyd George. The period that is covered in this book (1918–22) was the last point at which the Liberal Party was the driving force in British politics, even if it was only the section of the party headed by David Lloyd George. It was also the last period in Wales in which the Liberals were superior in parliamentary numbers to any other party – and in which one of their own projected a Welsh voice into 10 Downing Street for the first and only time.

There have been dozens of books written about David Lloyd George both during and after his life. *The Campaigns of*

Margaret Lloyd George, written by Richard Rhys O'Brien from his own family archive and some additional sources, is the first book to cover the role of Lloyd George's first wife in detail. O'Brien's grandfather, the Rev. J. T. Rhys (JTR), was private secretary to Margaret, and it is through his papers that O'Brien brings to life much of the record of events and behind-the-scenes political thought of Margaret, David Lloyd George and the wider coalition Liberal Party during the period 1918–22.

The book is not just about the campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George; it also serves as a substantial biography of her. As such, it goes outside of the time frame on the book's cover on occasions. Thus, we are told that, unlike her husband, daughter, son

the wife of David Lloyd George, she would never have been heard of (she is in no sense an ambitious woman), but it is also true to say that as things are she really matters; as the wife of the premier, she is in her quiet way, one of the personalities and powers of today.

The book indicates time and time again what an extensive campaigner and politician she was in her own right. Heading, running and fundraising for many charities and notable causes, by 1920 she had managed to raise some quarter of a million pounds, more than ten million in today's money – something which led to her becoming a Dame in August 1920. We later learn that Margaret Lloyd George in fact took on so much work that it could be the cause of irritation about her inability to attend engagements. One such instance was the Croydon Women's Liberal Association's putting down a motion of censure against Margaret – their president – for never attending their AGMs.

As well as correspondence between Margaret and JTR, O'Brien provides numerous examples throughout the book of Margaret's speeches and how they were amended against the final version. As a result, there are probably a hundred examples of quotable 'Margaret' that are, in many ways, equal to those of her husband. For example:

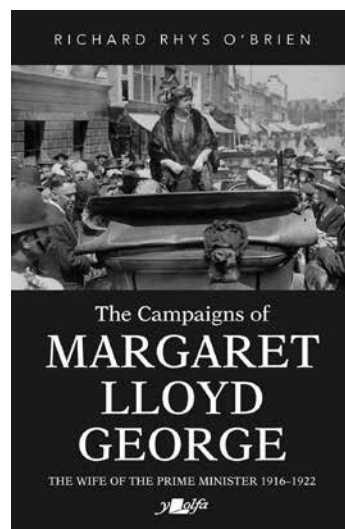
Power is one thing to possess, political wisdom is quite another.

Women have won the right to vote. We must now see that they vote right.

Both quotes are from a speech shortly before the armistice in 1918 to the Welsh Temperance Association in London, and the book is littered with many other notable political quotations from Margaret.

The overall style of the book is that O'Brien sets the historical context and chronological flow that underpins the excerpts from his various sources. We see campaigning in its full flow concerning a number of events that today seem of little relevance but a century ago were at the political forefront: the controversy over temperance in Wales, the events associated with Welsh disestablishment, and the campaigns against tuberculosis.

During the period in which this book is set, Lloyd George was gaining constant criticism for heading a coalition government that was centrally Conservative. Yet from the book we know that, when she addressed the Northern Council of Coalition Liberals in Newcastle in December 1920, Margaret declared, 'I was born a Liberal and I hope to live and die a Liberal.' To her, Liberalism had not been diluted. Yet the book spends some time on



the two different Liberal factions in parliament combating each other. This comes to the forefront in two chapters on the battle between the Lloyd George coalition Liberals and the Asquithian Liberals – and no other opponents – in the 1921 Cardiganshire by-election. Here coalition Liberal Margaret fearlessly campaigned directly against the Asquithian Bonham Carters, and a coalition Liberal victory was gained. Although the Asquithian Liberals retook the seat at the next election.

The gist of the book is that Margaret acts in a public political role as a de facto David Lloyd George, heading the coalition Liberals' political campaigns, including by-elections. For those studying the politics of this period, the book is a gem of first-hand experience. We can learn much more about the role women played within both the Liberal Party and

Reviews

politics as a whole. It illustrates how political spin and 'false news' have been around for well over a century and were part and parcel of most political campaigns. We can see, for example, from first-hand examples the campaigning rhetoric that the Liberals were using against the Labour Party that linked them directly to the chaos evolving in the Russian Revolution.

The book indicates that, as well as being a key campaigning figure, Margaret also played a central role in a 'ceremonial, waving the coalition government flag sense'. As such, she was certainly the most political of the prime ministers' wives in the UK in the twentieth century. So, why didn't she become an MP herself? O'Brien also deals with some of the speculation around this in the penultimate chapter of the book.

As the title of the book indicates, this narrative is centrally about the 'campaigns' of Margaret Lloyd George through the correspondence with her private secretary, the Rev. J. T. Rhys. As a result, although you do get a clearer indication of her own personal political drive and motivations, particularly in the final chapters of the books, this is not a book that provides the reader with Margaret's thoughts about her husband or any other political or royal figures to any great extent. This is not a 'tell-all, revelations and scandal text': it is a detailed and valuable

account of not only how the first interwar coalition government sought to campaign for the Lloyd George side but also how one of the most 'forgotten figures' – Margaret Lloyd George – demonstrated that it was far from being solely a man's world.

When I wrote *The Welsh Liberals* in 2014, there was very little material available on the role of Liberal women in politics in Wales. This book would have been an invaluable source and would have helped balance some of the historical record that often portrays Welsh politics as almost totally excluding females prior to the

1980s. Therefore, those seeking a more balanced view of history will find this a fascinating and detailed read. There is also a pictorial element to the book, with many relevant photographs and some examples of the written material that O'Brien used as the central source for this book.

Professor Russell Deacon is a visiting professor and lecturer at the University of South Wales. He is also chair of the Lloyd George Society and author of The Welsh Liberals: The history of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties in Wales (Welsh Academic Press, 2014).

Churchill in Scotland

Andrew Liddle, *Cheers Mr Churchill: Winston in Scotland* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2022)

Review by **Ian Cawood**

AFTER HIS DEFECTION from the Unionists over Free Trade in 1904, Winston Churchill had been made a junior minister, following the Liberal landslide of 1906. With his gift for self-publicity, he had quickly been spotted by Asquith and was appointed as President of the Board of Trade in April 1908. Under the terms of a long standing convention, in order to enter the Cabinet Churchill had to seek re-election from his constituency in Manchester North-West,

which was by no means a safe seat. Seen as a traitor to the Unionist cause, the Conservatives put up the hard-right William Joynson-Hicks as an opponent and defeated Churchill, risking his political future. Immediately after the sensational result was known, the Dundee Liberal Association telegraphed Churchill and offered him the candidature in the east Scottish city. In this way, Winston Churchill began an association with Dundee that would last until his defeat in the general