

## ORMSBY-GORE, WILLIAM DAVID, 5th Baron Harlech, (1918 - 1985), politician, diplomat, media impresario

**Name:** William David Ormsby-gore  
**Date of birth:** 1918  
**Date of death:** 1985  
**Spouse:** Sylvia Ormsby-Gore (née Lloyd Thomas)  
**Child:** Julian Hugh Ormsby-Gore  
**Child:** Jane Teresa Denyse Rainey (née Ormsby-Gore)  
**Child:** Victoria Mary Lloyd (née Ormsby-Gore)  
**Child:** Alice (née Ormsby-Gore)  
**Child:** Francis David Ormsby-Gore  
**Child:** Pandora Beatrice Kinnear (née Ormsby-Gore)  
**Parent:** Beatrice Edith Mildred Ormsby-Gore (née Gascoyne-Cecil)  
**Parent:** William George Arthur Ormsby-Gore  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** politician, diplomat, media impresario  
**Area of activity:** Politics, Government and Political Movements; Printing and Publishing  
**Author:** Marc Collinson

David Ormsby-Gore was born in London on 20 May 1918, the second son of [William George Arthur Ormsby-Gore](#) (1885-1964), fourth Baron Harlech, landowner and politician, and his wife Lady Beatrice Edith Mildred (née Gascoyne-Cecil, 1891-1980), a daughter of the fourth Marquess of Salisbury. His older brother and the barony of Harlech's heir presumptive, Owen Gerard Cecil Ormsby-Gore (1916-1935) died in a car crash, the first of several lifechanging events involving motor vehicles. Despite a traditional elite education of Eton College, New College, Oxford, and the British Army, Ormsby-Gore's links with Wales were more than just a Welsh title. The Ormsby-Gore family were historic landowners of the Brogyntyn Estate near Oswestry and Glyn Cywarch near Talsarnau, Merionethshire, and had donated their significant country house library, that included rare manuscripts, to the National Library of Wales in the 1930s. They were a family rooted in the Marches and north-west Wales that pursued political careers at Westminster.

Through London connections, in 1938 David Ormsby-Gore had met John Kennedy, the second son of the United States of America's new ambassador to London. Thus began a deep friendship, which Ormsby-Gore later referred to as a 'twenty-five year conversation' on politics and world affairs, the two remaining close friends as their careers developed, and Ormsby-Gore found himself in the USA on Foreign Office business. In 1940, he married his first wife Sylvia (1920-1967), the daughter of the late diplomat Hugh Lloyd Thomas. They had two sons, Julian and Francis, and three daughters, Jane, Victoria, and Alice. After his Second World War military service, which Ormsby-Gore ended as a Major, he managed the family estates. In the 1950 General Election, he successfully stood for the Conservatives in the Oswestry constituency that included Brogyntyn. He represented the area until 1961, serving as a minister under two Prime Ministers. After brief service as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office during the post-Suez months of Anthony Eden's premiership, in 1957 Macmillan appointed him Minister of State under Foreign Secretaries Selwyn Lloyd and the Earl of Home until 1961. Interestingly, he had a family connection to a major political figure, as his sister Katherine was married to Harold Macmillan's son Maurice. The above connections helped in the next move in Ormsby-Gore's career.

After the election of Kennedy as President in November 1960, conversations in Whitehall began about building a close relationship with the new administration that built on Harold Macmillan's relationship with Dwight D. Eisenhower. Both Kennedy and Macmillan favoured the replacement of Harold Caccia with Ormsby-Gore, an unusual move as ambassadors were normally career diplomats not politicians, to ensure close relations. After presenting his credentials in October 1961, the Cold War and fears of mutually-assured destruction shaped his embassy. The now Sir David Ormsby-Gore (appointed KCMG in 1961) was in close discussion with the Kennedy administration throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis, helped secure the Polaris submarine-launched system after the failure of the proposed Skybolt system, and assisted in Macmillan's efforts to implement a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Alongside a close friendship with the President, he developed important strategic relationships with key administration figures. Britain's influence within the White House was probably never closer. Yet Kennedy's tragic assassination in Dallas in November 1963 was not just a personal loss. The elevation of Lyndon Johnson to the White House, and of Harold Wilson to Downing Street in October 1964, transformed Ormsby-Gore's embassy. During his final 18 months, he possessed less direct contact, and therefore influence, with the central foreign policy decisionmakers in Washington and Whitehall. Furthermore, only months after the President's death, in February 1964 his father's death meant he was now elevated to the peerage as fifth Baron Harlech.

A combination of these factors led to his replacement as ambassador by diplomat Patrick Dean in April 1965. After his return, the now Lord Harlech undertook public appointments available to peers of the realm, succeeding Lord Morrison of Lambeth as President of the British Board of Film Censors (1965-1985). He served for a short time (1966-67) as Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords and a member of new party leader Edward Heath's Shadow Cabinet, but resigned after a year. There were suggestions this was linked to disinterest in politics after his ambassadorship, but a number of things likely caused this change. In 1967 his wife was killed in a car crash after a family weekend in Harlech. In addition, private papers sold at auction in 2017 showed that sometime after his wife's death, Lord Harlech proposed marriage to John F. Kennedy's widow, Jacqueline. However, she instead married the Greek shipping magnate, Aristotle Onassis. After this, Harlech's life went in a new direction. In 1969 he married his second wife, Pamela Colin, an editor with the American and British versions of Vogue magazine, with whom he had a daughter, Pandora.

More significant for the history of Wales, in 1968 the new television consortium Lord Harlech chaired, Harlech Television (later HTV), acquired the contract of the Independent Television Authority (which managed the UK's third TV channel, ITV) to produce content for its Wales and West of England region. The new company's board included a number of significant Welsh figures, including [Richard Burton](#) and his wife Elizabeth Taylor, opera singer [Geraint Evans](#), comedian Harry Secombe, and broadcaster [Wynford Vaughan-Thomas](#). HTV delivered coverage of Prince Charles's investiture at Caernarfon in 1969. He was also involved in a number of cross-party organisations, like the charity, Shelter, he chaired the European Movement (1969-75), a National Committee for Electoral Reform, and was deputy chair of the Pearce Commission created to locate a settlement in Rhodesia. He also remained involved in various Anglo-American and Kennedy-associated events and organisations.

Tragedy continued to follow him, however. His son and heir Julian died by suicide in 1974. And in sad reoccurrence of the loss of his first wife and older brother, Harlech himself died as a result of a car accident in Shropshire while driving to north Wales. He died in Shrewsbury hospital the following day, 26 January 1985. He was succeeded by his second son, Francis. If any image encapsulated the fifth Lord Harlech's ability to connect rural Wales with high politics and a global presence, surely it was the image of John Kennedy's widow and siblings at his funeral and burial on 1 February 1985 at the small church at Llanfihangel-y-traethau, Gwynedd, looking towards Glyn Cywarch and Talsarnau.

### Author

Marc Collinson

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## Further reading

ODNB: [Gore, \(William\) David Ormsby, fifth Baron Harlech \(1918–1985\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [David Ormsby-Gore, 5th Baron Harlech](#)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Brogyntyn Estate and Family Records](#)

NLW Archives: [Brogyntyn manuscripts](#)

VIAF: [219398372](#)

Wikidata: [Q2605189](#)

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