

ROBERTS, Sir IEUAN WYN PRITCHARD, Lord Roberts of Conwy (1930 - 2013), journalist and politician

Name: Ieuan Wyn Pritchard Roberts

Date of birth: 1930

Date of death: 2013

Spouse: Enid Grace Roberts (née Williams)

Child: Geraint Roberts

Child: Rhys Roberts

Child: Huw Roberts

Parent: Evan Prichard Roberts

Parent: Margaret Ann Roberts (née Jones)

Gender: Male

Occupation: journalist and politician

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Politics, Government and Political Movements

Author: Matthew W. Day

Wyn Roberts was born on 10 July 1930 in Llansadwrn, Anglesey, the son of the Reverend Evan Roberts and his wife Margaret (née Jones). His father was a Methodist minister at Capel Penucheldref and writer of a weekly column in *Y Goleuad*. His mother was a teacher at the local school, the schoolhouse also being the Roberts family residence.

He attended Beaumaris County School until he won a scholarship to Harrow School in London, another world compared to his Welsh language upbringing. Upon leaving Harrow, he went on to do his National Service in 1949 with the King's Royal Rifle Corps. Based in Vienna he was involved in an operation to tap the phone lines of the Russian Headquarters, which became part of 'Operation Silver.' After this he went on to read History at University College Oxford.

After university Roberts embarked on his first career as a journalist. In 1952-1954 he did an apprenticeship as a sub-editor for the Daily Post in Liverpool before moving on to be a news assistant for the BBC 1954-1957. From 1957 to 1968 he worked for the newly formed Television Wales and West (TWW). He was involved in several elements of the company, most importantly Welsh-language affairs, working on programmes such as *Camau Cyntaf* and *Croeso Christine*. TWW, however, lost its license to Harlech (HTV) in 1968, and Roberts's distaste for the switch led him to pursue an alternative career in politics.

He married Enid Grace Williams in 1956, and they had three sons, Geraint, Rhys (d. 2004) and Huw.

In 1970 Roberts was elected MP for the seat of Conwy under the Conservative Party, a choice which surprised friends of his at the time. For the Conservative Party itself to have someone who was first-language Welsh was quite a triumph. He served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Wales Peter Thomas 1970-1974, and was Opposition spokesman on Wales 1974-1979. After the Conservative victory in the 1979 election he was appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Welsh Office and became Minister of State at the Welsh Office 1987-1994. Though Roberts never achieved his goal of becoming the Secretary of State for Wales, he was extremely active in his attempts to achieve lasting and meaningful reform for Wales. His early years at TWW prepared him well for the issues surrounding the creation of S4C.

As a minister at the Welsh Office Roberts was responsible for many areas of Welsh policy, such as housing, education, roads and the Welsh Language. He worked hard during foreign visits to bring inward investment to Wales, often actively engaging with Welsh cultural societies abroad. As a politician he was universally popular amongst the Welsh parties, with one of his opponents stating that, 'he built more roads than the Romans.' His campaigns to improve the A55, the main artery through his constituency, often formed part of his election promises.

He is best remembered for the Welsh Language Act of 1993, often described as his greatest achievement. The Act ensured the legal position of Welsh in the public sector and set up the Welsh Language Board to promote its use, although at the time the act drew criticism from some who believed that it did not go far enough to provide protections for the language.

Wyn Roberts was a patriotic Welshman, and in the 1990s his frustrations with the Conservative Party became ever more apparent. He would always put Wales first, as was the case over the Education Reform Act 1988 (Wales) when his argument with Margaret Thatcher cost him his good relations with her for the sake of Wales.

He was knighted for political service in 1990, and after his retirement from the House of Commons in 1997 he was elevated to the House of Lords under the title Lord Roberts of Conwy. He was involved in leading the Conservative Party's consultation amongst the grass roots on devolution policy in 2008, and his proposals were later adopted as part of the Silk Commission under the David Cameron government.

Wyn Roberts died at his home in Rowen, Conwy on 13 December 2013. In 2015 his diaries were donated to the National Library of Wales.

Author

Matthew W. Day

Sources

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Gordon Corera, *The art of betrayal: life and death in the British Secret Service* (London 2011)

Matthew W. Day, Wyn Roberts: The Blue Dragon? Conservatism, Welsh Patriotism and North Wales c.1970s-1990s, PhD Thesis, Bangor University, 2022

John Biffen, 'Lord Roberts of Conwy,' *The Guardian*, 16 December 2013

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Tryst Williams, 'Lord Roberts to sort out party's devolution squabbles' WalesOnline, 3 March 2008

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Further reading

NLW Archives: Win with Wyn Roberts

NLW Archives: Win with Wyn Roberts

NLW Archives: Conway Constituency... Conservative Candidate Wyn Roberts. Meeting and Canvassing Programme

Wikipedia Article: Wyn Roberts, Baron Roberts of Conwy

Images

Geoff Charles, Urdd National Eisteddfod, Abertridwr 1955

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Wyn Roberts Papers

VIAF: 44049232

Wikidata: Q334627

Published date: 2023-11-29

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PDF Print Cite

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APA Citation



Day, M. W., (2023). ROBERTS, Sir IEUAN WYN PRITCHARD, Lord Roberts of Conwy (1930 - 2013), journalist and politician. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s14-ROBE-PRI-1930>

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