

BRUCE, MORYS GEORGE LYNDHURST, 4th Baron Aberdare (1919-2005), politician and sportsman

Name: Morys George Lyndhurst Bruce

Date of birth: 1919

Date of death: 2005

Gender: Male

Occupation: politician and sportsman

Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Sports and Leisure Pursuits

Author: David Lewis Jones

He was born at 67 Victoria Road, Kensington, on 16 June 1919, the elder son of Clarence Napier Bruce, later 3rd Baron Aberdare, and Margaret Bethune Black. From 1932 to 1938, he was a pupil at Winchester College, and then entered New College, Oxford, where he read philosophy, politics and economics. The outbreak of war interrupted Bruce's university studies and he enlisted in the Welsh Guards, rising from a second lieutenant in 1940 to a staff officer and temporary captain in 1944. Bruce left the army in 1946 and worked for the Rank Organisation 1947-1949, before he joined the British Broadcasting Corporation where he worked from 1949 to 1956. With Cyril Orndel, the composer, and Fiona Lonsdale, Bruce established FCM, a recording company producing records of Shakespeare's plays, interviews with eminent sportsmen and Bible stories for children. Bruce's mother died on 8 September 1950 and his father remarried on 12 September 1957, but died in a car accident in Yugoslavia, during his honeymoon, on 4 October; he was buried at Mountain Ash, Glamorganshire, on 8 October.

The new Lord Aberdare took his seat on the Conservative benches in the House of Lords on 5 February 1958; he made his maiden speech on 5 March, during the debate on the recent defence white paper. He spoke regularly in the House of Lords, particularly on youth services, sport and education; in a debate on 1 December 1965, he noted that universities gave more attention to the arts than the sciences: 'There still exists a kind of intellectual snobbery that pays greater respect to the man who misquotes Horace than the man who can repair his own car'. When the Conservatives formed a government in 1970, Lord Aberdare was appointed to a senior post as Minister of State at the Department of Health and Social Security. During the four years that he held this post, Lord Aberdare became an early critic of smoking; when asked for a light, he pulled out a lighter, which produced a sign saying 'I quit'. On 8 January 1974, he was appointed Minister without Portfolio with the difficult task of speaking in the House of Lords for a number of government departments but lost this position after a few weeks when the Conservative government was defeated at the February 1974 election. Besides his government posts, Lord Aberdare was also deputy leader in the House of Lords; after he left government, he became deputy leader of the Opposition in the House from 1974 to 1976.

Political life was not entirely congenial to Lord Aberdare and it was probably with some relief that he accepted the salaried post of Chairman of Committees, being appointed on 11 March 1976 to succeed Lord Listowel when the latter retired in October 1976. Within the administration of the House of Lords, the Chairman of Committees had an important role: he chaired the Offices Committee and other domestic committees; he was responsible for private bill legislation; and, he presided frequently during the sittings of the House. Lord Aberdare was a successful Chairman of Committees: he was popular with the members of the House for his good humour and scrupulous impartiality; he chaired the important domestic committees well; and, he had a good relationship with the agents responsible for piloting private legislation through the House. An efficient administrator, Lord Aberdare was Chairman of Committees from October 1976 until 4 May 1992, when he retired, with some reluctance, after a long and successful tenure of the office. Following the House of Lords Act 1999, he was elected, on the deputy speakers' list, to be one of the ninety-two hereditary members remaining in the House.

His father was a good golfer and a well-known cricketer but his favourite games, at which he excelled, were the two indoor court games: rackets and real tennis; his mother was a good lawn tennis player and one of the first women to play squash. Lord Aberdare inherited his parents' love of tennis, particularly rackets and real tennis; he was captain of the Oxford University Real Tennis first string and captain of the university rackets team. Father and son were partners in the amateur doubles rackets championship in 1939 and reached the final where they were narrowly defeated. During the 1950s and 1960s, Lord Aberdare was four times British singles amateur champion in real tennis and four times amateur doubles champion; he was also an able player of the more popular form of the game, lawn tennis. He played real tennis, with great enthusiasm, into his seventies and became an influential spokesman for the game as President of the Tennis and Rackets Association between 1972 and 2004. His father owned a number of books and artefacts relating to tennis; Lord Aberdare added to this collection and loaned a number of valuable items to the tennis museum established by the All England Lawn Tennis Club at Wimbledon. A keen student of the history of the game, Lord Aberdare wrote *The Story of Tennis* (1959) and *The Willis Faber Book of Tennis and Rackets* (1980), studies that tended towards encyclopaedic rather historical accounts. Lord Aberdare's papers on the history of tennis and rackets, 1682-2000, are deposited at the University of Liverpool Library. The Football Trust, noting his enthusiasm for sport and his administrative abilities, elected him president of the trust in 1979; he held this post for almost sixteen years during a difficult period in the history of English football. Following a number of serious incidents, particularly the Hillsborough disaster when ninety-six Liverpool Football Club supporters lost their lives on 15 April 1989, the trust, led by Lord Aberdare, was heavily involved in a programme to convert many football grounds to seats only stadiums.

On occasion, during debates in the House of Lords, Lord Aberdare would refer to another member as a 'fellow-Welshman'; he was proud to call himself a Welshman and he made a number of varied contributions to Welsh public life. He was an active member of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in Wales, holding, like his father, the office of Prior for Wales from 1958 to 1988. Youth work was also a family tradition and Lord Aberdare was president of the Welsh YMCA. Together with a small number of leading Welshmen, he was a trustee of the St. David's Theatre Trust, which campaigned unsuccessfully during the nineteen-sixties to establish a national theatre in Wales. Other Welsh organisations that benefited from his support and expertise included the Kidney Research Unit for Wales Foundation and the London Welsh Association. He was awarded a knighthood for his public services in Wales and received an honorary LLD from the University of Wales. His last service to a Welsh cause was the role of chairman of the trust established by Lord Cledwyn to raise a statue of David Lloyd George in Parliament Square, London; he organised the competition to select the artist but died before the statue was completed.

The family owned the Duffryn Estate, some three thousand acres near Mountain Ash, including a number of disused coal tips, which were, particularly after the Aberfan Disaster, a source of great concern. Lord Aberdare confessed, with some feeling, during the second reading of the Mines and Quarries (Tips) Bill of 1969, that he was in the 'unfortunate position of owning some of these disused tips'. With relief, he sold the Duffryn Estate in 1979 and purchased Ochr y Fforest, a house with some land at Cilycwm, not far from Llandoverly, where he maintained, for a time, a small flock of sheep and created, with his wife, a fine and colourful wilderness garden. He looked forward with pleasure to the weeks he spent in Carmarthenshire.

A man with a high sense of public service, but with a light touch, Lord Aberdare remained a tall, elegant and slender figure into his old age. On 1 June 1946, he married (Maud Helen) Sarah Dashwood, daughter of Sir John Dashwood, 10th Bt. of West Wycombe Park; they had four sons. The last years of Lord Aberdare's life were overshadowed by his considerable losses as a member of an insurance syndicate at Lloyd's and, to a much greater extent, by the grave illness suffered by his wife. Lord Aberdare died at his home, near Sloane Square, London, on 23 January 2005. The funeral service was held at St. Michael's Church, Cilycwm, on 31 January, followed by burial in the churchyard. At the memorial service held at St. Margaret's, Westminster, on 4 May 2005, Alastair Bruce, 5th Baron Aberdare, read an extract from 'In Praise of the Chairman of Committees', verses written by Lord Cledwyn, while his brother, Adam Bruce, read 'Carmarthenshire' by Dudley Garnet Davies. Lord Aberdare left an estate of £651,978 net.

Author

David Lewis Jones

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private knowledge

personal information

Further Reading

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