

EVANS, DAVID THOMAS GRUFFYDD, Baron Evans of Claughton (1928-1992), solicitor and politician

Name: David Thomas Gruffydd Evans
Date of birth: 1928
Date of death: 1992
Gender: Male
Occupation: solicitor and politician
Area of activity: Law; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Lewis Jones

Born at Birkenhead on 9 February 1928, the son of John Cynlais Evans and Nellie Euronwy Griffiths.

His grandfather, David Evans (who was the donor of the so-called 'black chair' won by **Hedd Wyn** at the Birkenhead national eisteddfod in 1917), left Anglesey in 1884 for Birkenhead where he established a thriving business as a builder; he built a large area of Claughton as well as the Welsh Presbyterian Chapel in Laird Street, Birkenhead, where the family worshipped. His mother's family came from Llangrannog where he spent many holidays. Gruffydd Evans was brought up in a Welsh-speaking family.

He was educated privately at Birkenhead Preparatory School, Birkenhead School and Friars School, Bangor. Although offered a place at Oxford University, he decided to study law at Liverpool University where he graduated LL.B in 1948, and, following National Service as a pilot officer in the RAF, he established a solicitor's practice in Liverpool. In time, he became the solicitor of the Liverpool Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

Both sides of his family supported the Liberal Party and Evans maintained the tradition. To the surprise of the local Tories, he won a seat on Birkenhead County Borough Council in 1957 and held this seat for twelve years. He won a seat on Wirral Borough Council in 1973 and served as Leader of the Liberal Group 1973-77; at the same time, he obtained a seat on Merseyside Council and served as Leader of the Liberal Group 1977-81. He was less successful in national politics and failed to win a seat in the House of Commons. He stood twice, in 1964 and 1966, against Ernest Marples in the Birkenhead constituency and in 1970 for the Wallasey constituency, but achieved only a poor result at the three elections.

Evans was active in the Liberal Party. He was Secretary of the Lancashire, Cheshire and North West Liberal Federation 1956-60 and Chairman of the National League of Young Liberals in 1960-61. He became an influential figure within the party organisation and rose steadily within the party hierarchy: chairman of the party's national executive 1965-68; of the assembly committee 1971-74; of the general election committee 1977-79 and 1983; and, President of the party in 1977-78. In his year as president, Evans had to confront the controversy raging around Jeremy Thorpe, the former leader but still the member for North Devon. Evans asked Thorpe, in vain, to stay away from the party's annual conference at Southport. The controversy made Evans a familiar figure in the national news during the week of the conference. The Liberal Party owed Evans a considerable debt for the great contribution he made in steering the party through a difficult period in the 1960s and 1970s. Aware of their enthusiasm and industry, he tolerated the more extreme members of the party but did not hesitate to eject them from the 1968 annual conference. Not a strong supporter of Thorpe's leadership, Evans helped to develop, in the same year, a more collegiate leadership for the party. Following Thorpe's resignation in May 1976, Evans supported John Pardoe in the leadership contest but he became a strong supporter of David Steel, the new leader, and contributed much to restoring the unity of the party. While his experience of the Labour Party in Liverpool made him a little hesitant about the Liberal-Labour pact of 1977-78, he assisted in defining the details of the arrangement. Despite his reservations over David Steel's abrasive character, he was equally helpful in forming the alliance between the Liberals and the Social Democrats. Evans was the chairman at the meeting of the Liberal Assembly in Llandudno on 16 September 1981, which gave the proposed alliance an overwhelming majority. Evans's political apprenticeship was served local councils on Merseyside and he was an early advocate of the importance of community politics - 'Liberalism on the doorsteps' - which became much more important in the 1980s and 1990s.

Early in 1978, Evans was made a life peer as Baron Evans of Claughton, of Claughton in Merseyside. His maiden speech, during the debate on the Inner Urban Areas Bill, criticised the Labour government for limiting the freedom of action of local authorities. His great experience in local government made him a frontbench spokesman on housing and local government for the Liberals in the Lords and he attacked both Labour and Conservative governments for the restrictions they placed on local government. In his *Who's Who* entry, Evans recorded that he had introduced in 1981 the Leasehold Reform Bill to protect leasehold tenants. According to Evans, he received strong support from Wales, including the *Western Mail*, for the proposals in the bill. Unusually for the House of Lords, the bill failed to obtain a second reading. From the Labour benches, **Lord Cledwyn** supported the bill and commented, characteristically, "I had the pleasure of knowing the noble Lord's grandfather who came from Anglesey." Evans enjoyed being a member of the House of Lords; both the politics and the debates were more emollient than the abrasive exchanges he encountered in local politics. Evans was well known and liked within the Welsh Liberal Party, which elected him vice-president 1979-86 and president 1986-87.

Besides his political and professional work, Evans was active in a number of voluntary positions in Merseyside: a governor of Birkenhead School 1974-78 and from 1988; a member of the court of Liverpool University 1977-83; chairman of the Birkenhead Council of Voluntary Service 1964-73; of the Abbeyfield Society, Birkenhead, 1970-74; and, of the Liverpool Luncheon Society 1980-81. He founded, in 1976, the Friends of Birkenhead Park, designed by Joseph Paxton, and gave them the motto: "That which is good, should be preserved". He would have liked to acquire directorships in leading companies but achieved only positions with Marcher Sound Radio and Granada TV.

Lord Evans of Claughton, known as 'Gruff' to his friends, was a large man who stood out with his distinctive sideburns and his heavy black glasses. He had a strong and deep speaking voice and made his mark on the House of Lords, both in the chamber and in the social life. A hard worker, Evans enjoyed fine food and fine wines, and he was also passionate about sport: cricket, football, golf and rugby. Sport, however, was not allowed to interfere with political principles; he resigned from the presidency of a Welsh rugby club when it accepted an invitation to tour South Africa.

Gruffydd Evans married Moira Elizabeth Rankin on 28 March 1956; they had one son and three daughters. The day before he died, Evans watched, on television, Wales defeat Scotland at the Arms Park in Cardiff. He died at Murrayfield Hospital, Wirral, on 22 March 1992 and the funeral was held at the Welsh Presbyterian Church Laird Street, followed by cremation at Landican, on 26 March. After his death, the Welsh Dragon was flown in front of his home, Sunridge, 69 Bidston Road, Claughton, Birkenhead. A memorial service was held at St. Saviour's, Bidston Road, Oxtou on 23 April. He left an estate of £371,958.

Author

David Lewis Jones

Sources

Who was who? 1991-1995

Dod's Parliamentary Companion, 1990

The Daily Telegraph, 24 March 1992

The Guardian, 26 March 1992

The Independent, 26 March 1992, 1 April 1992

The Times, 20 May 1978, 9, 13 September 1978; 17 September 1981; 27 March 1992, 24 April 1992

private knowledge

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Q5611980](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [_Baron_Evans_of_Claughton](#)

Published date: 2008-09-05

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/>

PDF Print Cite

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).



APA Citation



Jones, D. L., (2008). EVANS, DAVID THOMAS GRUFFYDD, Baron Evans of Claughton (1928-1992), solicitor and politician. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s6-EVAN-GRU-1928>

Copy to Clipboard

Privacy & Cookies
Copyright
The Project
Help
Contact

LGC
NLW

LLYFRGEL
THE NATION



Ynysuon gan
Llywodraeth Cymru
Supported by
Welsh Government