

GOWER, HERBERT RAYMOND (1916-1989), Conservative politician

Name: Herbert Raymond Gower
Date of birth: 1916
Date of death: 1989
Gender: Male
Occupation: Conservative politician
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: John Graham Jones

He was born at Briton Ferry on 15 August 1916, the son of Lawford R. Gower, FRIBA, an architect employed by the Glamorganshire County Council who lived at Penylan. He was educated at Neath Grammar School, Cardiff High School, the University College of South Wales Cardiff and the Cardiff School of Law. At the beginning of World War II, after failing a military medical examination, Gower became an army cadet officer with the Royal Observer Corps, the Army Cadet Corps, and later in Military Defence. He qualified as a solicitor in 1944 and set up in his own practice in 1948, continuing to practise until 1963. In 1964 he became a partner in S. R. Freed & Co. solicitors of Harewood Place, London W1. He also became a journalist and broadcaster. From his youth he had been deeply interested in politics, and in 1946 Gower was elected honorary secretary of the Cardiff East Conservative and Unionist Association. He stood unsuccessfully as the Conservative candidate in the Ogmore division in the 1950 general election, winning the highest Conservative poll in all the Welsh coalmining constituencies, and he was then elected to parliament as the Conservative MP for Barry in the general election of October 1951. From the time of his adoption until the 1951 election he personally visited more than 8,000 houses and addressed more than 200 political meetings in the constituency. He also wrote countless letters to the local press. His reward was an increase of almost 5,000 votes in the Conservative poll and an unexpected majority of 1,649. He was re-elected in each successive general election, including in 1983 and 1987 for the redistributed Vale of Glamorgan constituency. It was widely felt that the 1983 re-distribution of parliamentary constituencies had given Gower a safer Conservative seat. He had lost Penarth but he had gained the solidly Tory coastal villages and rural terrain around Cowbridge. He had seriously considered retiring from parliament in 1987, but was persuaded to stand again because of fears that he enjoyed a substantial personal vote in the constituency and that a new candidate might not be able to retain a still fairly marginal seat for the Conservatives. (In the event in the hotly contested by-election which ensued in May 1989 after Gower's death the seat fell to John Smith and the Labour Party.) He remained MP for the Vale of Glamorgan at the time of his death when he was the longest continuously serving Welsh MP. He was widely regarded as an assiduous and effective backbencher and a dedicated constituency MP.

Raymond Gower wrote regular columns for the *Western Mail*, 1951-64, and he was chairman of the Penray Press and the *Barry Herald*, 1955-64. He was also a director of a large number of commercial companies. He served as a parliamentary private secretary, 1952-60, to several ministers including R. Maudling, J. Profumo, J. G. Braithwaite and H. Molson. He was a member of the court of the National Library of Wales, the National Museum of Wales, University College, Cardiff, and University College, Aberystwyth. He was hon. secretary to the Friends of Wales Society. A wide array of other commitments included membership of the Welsh Executive and Council of the United Nations Association. He also served as chairman of the Welsh Conservative MPs group, and he became treasurer of the Welsh Parliamentary Group in 1966. He became a member of the Select Committee on Expenditures in 1970 and served on the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform, 1967-69 and 1971-73. He became a Fellow of the Institute of Directors in 1958. He was never given high office at Westminster. After the general election of June 1970, Gower was tipped as a possible first Conservative Secretary of State for Wales, but Edward Heath chose instead Peter Thomas, the MP for Hendon South. As a consolation prize, Gower was knighted in 1974, and he was also made a Freeman of the Borough of Vale of Glamorgan in 1978.

Raymond Gower lived at Sully near Cardiff. He married in 1973, Cynthia, the daughter of James Hobbs. There were no children. He died on 23 February 1989 after spending the day canvassing in the Pontypridd by-election.

Author

Dr John Graham Jones

Sources

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The Times, 24 February 1989

Western Mail, 24 and 27 February 1989

Further Reading

NLW Archives: Sir Raymond Gower Conservative

NLW Archives: Welsh Devolution Referendum, 1979

Wikipedia Article: Raymond Gower

Additional Links

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Jones, J. G., (2008). GOWER, HERBERT RAYMOND (1916-1989), Conservative politician. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s6-GOWE-RAY-1916>

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