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THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES, 1906-1924.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of
Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Thomas Wyn Williams.

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THOMAS WYN WILLIAMS-THESIS ABSTRACT.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES, 1906-1924.

Between 1906 and 1924 the Conservative party only won three parliamentary elections in North-east Wales – the Denbigh Boroughs division twice in 1910 and the county seat in Flintshire in 1924. Conversely the Liberal party won all the other elections throughout the period, with the exception of Wrexham which fell to Labour in 1922 and 1923. This, however, says more about the vagaries of the British ‘first past the post’ electoral system than it does about the true strength of the political parties in the region. Indeed, between 1906 and 1924 the Conservative party never averaged below 39 per cent of the electorate in the constituencies it contested. Given this impressive but unrecognised electoral position, what this study set out to do was to analyse the strength of Conservatism in a region where failure was the norm. The period was chosen because it saw the last Liberal administration in this country, and marked the start of the Conservative dominance of government for much of the twentieth century. It also saw one of the biggest cultural and social upheavals in British history with the advent of the First World War, and witnessed the enfranchisement of women for the first time.

The general election of 1906 returned no Conservatives for Wales. In North Wales a conference was called to examine the situation and evaluate future prospects. This led to a review of party organisation in the region, the intention being not only to attract more working class people and women, but also to lessen the autocratic domination by the landed classes. In 1910 the Conservatives won the Denbigh Boroughs constituency with a large swing against the Liberals, and came very close to winning the Flint Boroughs by-election of 1913. The period of War, 1914-1918, saw all political parties moth-balled until the end of hostilities, but during the period of Coalition Government from 1918 to 1922 in which Liberal representation went almost unchallenged in North-east Wales, the Conservatives reorganised their Constituency Associations. By 1924 the landed domination of the party had diminished significantly, and in Flintshire the Conservatives won their first seat in an industrial working class area.

Underpinning this success was a long-standing popular support, which after 1906 was better organised and mobilised for the Conservative cause through a variety of loosely attached organisations, societies and clubs. The Primrose League, an organisation that had been founded in 1883 to rally Conservative support, had a very high membership in the region compared to the rest of Wales. For example, the Denbigh Primrose League had over 800 members in 1912. A network of Conservative clubs existed in the region and as early as 1905 a thriving Workingmen’s Association had been founded in Wrexham. The Conservative party was also well represented in local government; in Flintshire between 1907 and 1913 it had more county councillors than the Liberal party. In addition, the upheaval of War and the attraction of socialism to the newly enfranchised masses meant that the Conservative party had to widen its appeal to those people who had acquired the vote in 1918. By recruiting women and working class members the Conservative party was able to lay the foundations for a number of parliamentary successes in North-east Wales that lasted until the 1990s. It is therefore the contention of this thesis that the Conservative party not only survived a very difficult period, but that it emerged a strengthened and invigorated force.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the Conservative party in North-east Wales between 1906 and 1924. In particular it represents an attempt to analyse and evaluate how the party organised itself, and how it operated and survived during a period of turmoil and transition in national politics. It will examine how the party performed in three distinct demographic regions: the largely rural county of Denbighshire, the more diverse county of Flintshire and the industrial town of and the areas surrounding Wrexham. It will explore how the party reacted to electoral failure in the region - between 1906 and 1924 it gained only three victories, Denbigh Boroughs twice in 1910 and Flintshire in 1924, from a possible thirty contests at seven general elections - and will analyse the negative impact of radical Liberal legislation on the party in the years leading up to the First World War. For example, it will discuss the effects of Lloyd George's 1909 People's Budget, its proposed land taxes and the Peers versus People's Debate on the party. It will show how after the First World War its position was further undermined by the boundary changes contained within the Representation of the People Act and how even during the 1920's when the Liberal party went into decline nationally it remained the dominant political force in North-east Wales while the Conservative position was further weakened by the emergence of Labour.

However, the election results belie a basic Tory strength in North-east Wales. The party performed well at county council elections, winning Flintshire in 1910, and its share of the vote never fell below thirty per cent at any parliamentary election it contested during the period. Furthermore, the party leadership was at the forefront of moves designed to make the party more popular, often embracing and nurturing change to widen the party's appeal. These were largely successful, as by 1924 organisation had been overhauled as constituency associations, the key component in the local Conservative party machine, became more democratic and professionally run institutions. In addition the party substantially expanded its membership, mainly owing to the increased numbers of women and working class members. Even though it ultimately failed in its chief ambition to get Conservative candidates elected on a consistent basis the thesis will attempt to demonstrate that the party emerged from the period a modern and vibrant organisation.

CONSERVATIVE PARTY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Studies of the Conservative party and its ideas, policies and associations, down until the late 1980s trailed significantly behind those of the Labour and Liberal parties and tended to focus upon high politics—biographies, memoirs and diaries, general histories of the party, crisis and upheaval in the political party, even policies were analysed in a high political context. Biographies such as H. Nicholson's, *Curzon: The Last Phase* (London: Macmillan, 1937) and K.Middlemas and J.Barnes' *Baldwin* (London: Macmillan, 1969) were two among many works that related to the high political emphasis on renowned politicians who were key to change and developments in the Conservative party. The general histories included such seminal works as R.Blake's *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Fontana, 1985) and the six volume Longman series on the history of the party, including J.Ramsden's, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (London: Longman, 1978), which proved invaluable to this thesis when considering organisational change. In addition such works as A. Sykes' *Tariff Reform in British Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and D. Dutton's 'The Unionist Party and Social Policy' considered Conservative policy in the period leading up to the Great War.¹ Both these studies were again invaluable to this thesis because they demonstrated that the Conservative party was not merely a passive bystander as the Liberal government passed a raft of radical legislation, but was considering and modifying policies of its own—policies discussed at a local level in North-east Wales.

From the late 1980s research into the party began to take new directions as it moved away from a high political focus and began to broaden its analysis and it is in this re-direction that this thesis locates itself. Within this move away from high politics we can observe four overlapping themes which together provide the context and basis for this study. Firstly, a number of studies started to look below high politics at popular Tory leagues and societies, movements, opinion forming, mobilising agencies and Conservative

¹ D, Dutton, 'The Unionist Party and Social Policy', *Historical Journal*, volume 24, No 4, (1981)

Associations. In particular, these studies looked at the constituency groups that provided the foot soldiers of the party, the unsung heroes of Conservatism. For example, M. Pugh's influential work *The Tories and the People 1883-1906* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), a study of the Primrose League, 'reveals how social relations and political ideas were mobilised among millions of citizens by the first popular political organisation in Britain'.² *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) edited by A. Seldon and S. Ball is a thematic collection which includes studies of the Conservative party's electoral support and social class as well as its appeal to women.³ Furthermore, Neil McCrillis' *The British Conservative Party in The Age of Universal Suffrage Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1998) considers the Conservative response to the ever-widening franchise in post-World War Britain. To do this he also takes a thematic approach analysing the roles of the Women's Unionist Organisation, the Junior Imperial League, Conservative labour committees as well as the effect of party propaganda and education on Conservative party fortunes. This thesis considers such support in North-east Wales and demonstrates that despite the hostile conditions such agencies, especially the Primrose League, flourished and as, with elsewhere, formed the essential bedrock upon which Toryism stabilised and survived in the region.

Secondly, a number of works took the Conservative story into constituency parties and organisations. Eminent amongst these are D.Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J.Lawrence's article 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914' and S.Ball's 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation' in *Conservative Century*.⁴ Such histories looked at local organisation, local themes and parties and demonstrated that party organisations were not monolithic structures but were

² N. McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism, 1918-1929* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998) p.5.

³ R. Waller, 'Conservative Electoral Support and Social Class' in *Conservative Century, The Conservative Party Since 1900*, eds, A. Seldon and S. Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) and J. Lovenduski, P. Norris and C. Burness 'The Party and Women' in *Conservative Century, The Conservative Party Since 1900*, eds, A. Seldon and S. Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴ J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914,' *English Historical Review* (July 1993)

composites of different aims, ideas, groups, pressures, demands and concerns. Similarly, this study of North-east Wales Conservative Associations also reflects such organisational diversity. Affiliated to the North Wales Provincial Division of the National Union of Conservatives (NWDNU), the individual Conservative Constituency Associations in North-east Wales were only loosely connected—and often contested or simply ignored NWDNU resolutions. This thesis considers why such independence was maintained and what affect it had on Conservative politics in the region.

Thirdly, a number of histories looked at the Conservative party in specific regions. In particular, J. Bates ‘The Conservative Party in the Constituencies, 1918-1939’ (Merton College Oxford, DPHIL thesis, 1994); T.A. Jenkins’ ‘Political Life in Late Victorian Britain: The Conservatives in Thornbury’ and N. Mansfield’s ‘Farmers and Local Conservatism in South West Shropshire’ are typical of these.⁵ As such they look at the concerns and the different priorities and aims within the regions, and build on the research undertaken by J. Lawrence in *Speaking for the People, Party Language and Popular Politics, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) who assess the nature of politics in an urban setting prior to the First World War. Lawrence’s methodology is important to this study which recounts the nature of Conservative politics in Wrexham, not too dissimilar to Wolverhampton, upon which Lawrence bases his research. As he explains:

The intention is to examine the shifting fortunes of party within a framework which is sensitive both to local social, economic and cultural context, and to the impact of development at the national level. Local politics are seen not as the antithesis of Westminster politics, but as a specific, and electorally very important facet of the ‘party game’.⁶

This study is located within this framework, its study of low politics in North-east Wales far removed from the battlefield of Westminster, studying

⁵ T.A Jenkins, ‘Political Life in Late Victorian Britain: The Conservatives in Thornbury’, *Parliamentary History*, 2004; N.Mansfield, ‘Farmworkers and Local Workers in South-west Shropshire’ in *Mass Conservatism, the Conservatives and the Public Since the 1880’s*, eds, S.Ball and I.Holliday (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

⁶ J. Lawrence, *Speaking for the People, Language and Popular Politics, 1867-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.6.

the Conservative party in the social, economic and cultural context of the region, while analysing the effects of national developments. For example, the thesis looks at how the party interpreted Tariff Reform, a major Conservative fiscal policy initiative after 1903, in a diverse regional setting and how it attempted to persuade rural Welsh communities as well as industrial areas near the English border of its benefits. This helps feed our knowledge of how the party employed Tariff Reform policies in the constituencies far away from the national inter and intra-party debate on the policy at Westminster.⁷ Given Lawrence's conclusion that local politics is very much an integral part of understanding how support is gained nationally, it is surprising that historians have not tested his methodology further and that regional and local studies of the Conservative party remain few in number.

Even rarer are studies of the Conservative party in Wales, but F. Aubel's 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaption' (University of Wales, Lampeter, PhD thesis, 1995); S. Jones' 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales with special reference to the Liberal party' (University of Wales, Bangor, PhD thesis, 2002) and M. Cragoe's *An Anglican Aristocracy, The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832-1895* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) all consider aspects of the party's history in the Principality. Consequently, all reflect on certain facets of the party in a different ethnic, linguistic, historical and cultural context to that faced elsewhere. Jones' study is not one that concentrates on the Conservative party, but it is important to this thesis as it analyses the Liberal response to the threat the Conservative party posted to its hegemony in North-east Wales after the First World War concluding that:

In terms of management and organisation, they were the most successful party in North-east Wales between 1918 and 1939. Although this was not reflected in

⁷ Tariff Reform was a policy initiative championed by Joseph Chamberlain that offered protection to British industry by imposing duties on foreign imports while giving preferential trading agreements to the Empire. It was anticipated that 'Protection' would reduce unemployment and that revenue from import duties would provide money for social reform. It was thus seen as a radical positive policy initiative to many Conservatives but also alienated many Free Trade Tories.

electoral terms, when the obstacles the Tories had to overcome are considered, their achievements were substantial.⁸

As Jones' main point of reference is the Liberal party she does not give any substantive explanations as to why this situation was so and thus her observations need validating; this thesis addresses the reasons for this and why the Conservative party was relatively strong in a region where the Liberal party was dominant.

Cragoe's work is also significant because it analyses the role of Tory landowners in a rural Welsh setting and challenges the commonly held view of them 'as a class wholly alienated from the lives of their fellow countrymen'.⁹ Cragoe observes that far from routinely coercing and evicting tenants for not voting for the landowners choice at election times, as has often been suggested, there was frequently a shared inter-dependence between landlord and tenant, including the acceptance of voting for the landlord's choice at elections – a fact borne out by the evidence included in this thesis. But it is Aubel's study that remains the only in-depth study of the Conservative party in Wales. His thesis is a study of electoral failure, but it concludes that Welsh Conservatism remained resilient and that the party continued to be a vigorous force throughout the period. This is demonstrated by his close analysis of five Welsh constituencies.¹⁰ The constituencies he considers are diverse and are broadly typical of other divisions in the Principality, but as Aubel accepts his study is largely restricted to the party's fortunes in Mid and South Wales, because of his extensive knowledge of these regions, the access to source material as well as a desire to ensure that the thesis was kept within a manageable reading length.¹¹ He thus suggests that there is room for further historical analysis of the Conservative party in Wales. This is finally where this study is positioned. It sits alongside the only other examination of the party in Wales and fills a gap in the historiography of the party. It considers

⁸ S.Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North East Wales with Special Reference to the Liberal Party, 1918-1935, University of Wales, Bangor, PhD Thesis, 2002. p.91.

⁹ M. Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy, The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1823-1895* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 103.

¹⁰ F. Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaptation', (University of Wales, Lampeter, PhD thesis, 1995), p.436.

¹¹ F. Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaptation', p.436.

the party's fortunes in a narrower time scale than Aubels' study and during a period when it faced a number of challenges both in North-east Wales and nationally. The reasons for such a study are varied and thus need explaining in more detail.

A RATIONALE OF THE STUDY.

For this regional study of the Conservative party the two counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire, adjacent to the English border, were chosen because of the availability of primary sources, the diverse nature of the two counties, and the Conservative party's ability to adapt to and survive in the ever changing adverse political conditions it faced in the region. By comparison the more western North Wales counties of Anglesey, Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire (now Gwynedd) retained very little Conservative presence during the period of 1906 to 1924, because of the overwhelming strength of Liberalism, and visits to local record offices here revealed very few Conservative party papers or sources. These counties were and remain largely rural areas where even today in certain parts English has failed to penetrate as a first language. It is not coincidental for a party largely consisting of English speaking Tory landowners subsequently regarded as an English institution in Wales, that the Conservative party fared better in the more anglicised areas of North Wales, in particular the counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire. This was especially true of those areas close to the English border where industrialisation and inward migration from neighbouring English counties brought with it an ever-expanding anglicisation process. At the same time the more westerly parts of these counties retained large areas of farming land where Welsh speaking people remained in the ascendancy, but yet contained a high concentration of landowners. It is not surprising therefore that many Conservative party papers and private archives of Tory landowners existed and survived from the period, providing a rich seam of sources for this thesis. This said, North-east Wales remained a difficult region for the Conservatives between 1906 and 1924—industrialisation and anglicisation bringing with it its own set of unique problems and challenges to set alongside the existing problems faced in the more westerly Welsh speaking rural areas.

From the heavily industrialised areas in Flintshire and Denbighshire north and south of North Wales' largest town, Wrexham, to the rural farming lands in west Denbighshire where tenant farmers eked out a living, every area presented a challenge to the Conservatives. In the industrial areas the Liberals dominated prior to the Great War and Labour started to gain a foothold during the post War period. In the rural Welsh speaking areas in the west of the region where English speaking Tory landlords earned themselves fierce reputations as overpowering tyrants, Liberalism remained unchallenged even after the First World War. It is these challenges that made the research a fascinating study, and as such this work represents an attempt to explain how the Conservatives reacted to the almost impossible circumstances they faced. It is ultimately a study of electoral failure, similar to that of Aabel's, but helps us complete our picture of the party in the Principality, and considers the measures the party took to adapt and survive in a hostile environment dominated by long-term Liberal success. That it survived and remained vibrant is not necessarily the most significant factor that emerges from this thesis. Indeed, its consistent failures at general elections and how it reacted to them helps furnish our understanding of the party and how it operated.

Unlike Aabel's study this thesis considers Conservative party fortunes in a fairly narrow time frame. Aabel's study of Welsh constituencies considers the party against a national backdrop of fifty momentous years including the effects of the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884 and 1885, the end of the Conservative dominance of the late Victorian period, the First World War, the Coalition Government between 1918 and 1922 and Conservative, Labour and National governments up to 1935 – in terms of politics a broad canvass. The short period of 1906-1924 was chosen deliberately here because it represented a unique period in the history of the Conservative party - it marked an isolated period of uncertainty for the party that has been the most successful political organisation in British history. Between 1886 and 1997 it won 16 out of the 28 general elections with its share of the vote seldom falling below 40 per cent. According to E.H.H. Green 'no other European party of the right operating

within a mass electorate has equalled this achievement'.¹² Yet continued success looked unlikely after the 1906 general election defeat which saw the party reduced to a mere rump of 157 MP's. Such was the despair that the party felt after its defeat that many feared they faced a very long time in opposition with little hope of re-election – few could see they would be in government by 1915, or that by 1924 the party would win a landslide general election victory with over 400 victorious MPs. The party's fears appeared to be borne out as two further general elections losses occurred in 1910 and even after a number of by-election victories which saw the Conservative party overtake the Liberal party, in numbers of seats, its position seemed uncertain on the eve of the First World War.¹³

The First World War was a pivotal period for the party – not just because many from the patrician classes, inevitably the leaders and future leaders of the Conservative party, lost their lives, but also because the conflict saw their return to government. At first this was as a minor partner to Asquith's administration from May 1915, but from December 1916 it was as a fully-fledged partner of Lloyd George's Coalition Government. Conservatives dominated the Cabinet and took leading positions, including Bonar Law, the party leader, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. The War thus marked an important turning point in Tory fortunes. Yet, franchise reform and the rise of the Labour party after the War rendered this a potentially dangerous period for the party. Few believed that the Conservatives would be able to compete in the era of the mass franchise. In particular, it was perceived that women's suffrage, the huge potential of a working class electorate, and the growing power of the trade unions, in theory helping the Labour party, would seriously hamper the Conservative party's electoral prospects. These fears were exacerbated by the period spent in Coalition Government between 1918 and 1922. Against a background of

¹² E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism, The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.1

¹³ See for example, Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.268-269; D.Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, The Unionist Party in Opposition, 1905-1915* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1992) pp.297-300; M.Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) pp.152-153. J.Ramsden does take an opposite view and believes the party was poised for success see J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (London: Longman, 1978) pp.85-86.

mounting industrial conflict, the emergence of Labour as a political force and the cost of social welfare programmes reflected in high taxation levels, Conservative discontent started to fester and grow. This was solved in the short term when in October 1922 Conservative MP's rebelled against its leadership and brought the Lloyd George Coalition down, and in the ensuing election won a landslide victory. But even with an overall majority of 87 over all other parties Conservative uncertainty resurfaced. Economic and unemployment problems undermined the government and at a subsequent general election in November 1923 the Conservative party lost its overall majority. As a result with Liberal help the Labour party took power for the first time. Nevertheless, less than a year later the party was returned to government winning over 400 seats and gaining a majority over all other parties of more than 200 - a victory that witnessed the start of the Conservative dominance of politics in the twentieth century.

So the period 1906 –1924, marks one of the most turbulent and critical periods in the party's history, which makes it an important one for study. Given the amount of high political literature that exists on the party, especially on its period of 'crisis' before the First World War, this thesis takes this story into North-east Wales to explore how the party adapted to and managed during this very difficult period in a small region. It examines how the party acclimatised itself to the new political environment after 1906, the compromises it was forced to make, how it survived a very difficult period both during and immediately after the First World War and the dangers and obstacles it had to surmount in this region. As a result the thesis presents a totally different picture to other studies of the Conservative party during the same period and it is this perhaps more than anything else that made it worthy of study.

A NOTE ON THE SOURCES.

For this study it was imperative to look at both national and local documents concerning the Conservative party during the period under review. One of the first places that was visited was the Bodleian Library at Oxford which houses the Conservative party archive and the Primrose League manuscripts. A search of Conservative Agents Journals and Campaign Guides between 1906 and

1924 revealed little of note for this specific narrow study of the party in North-east Wales. Of more use were the Executive Committee Minutes of the National Union of Conservative Associations, 1897–1956 and the Central Council Minutes of this body for 1899–1956. The papers of the National Union, the body that co-ordinated Conservative support in the constituencies, proved a rich source for matters concerning party organisation prior to the Great War and the response from constituencies to, for example, Irish Home Rule and franchise reform, but again they revealed little of specific reference to North-east Wales. However, a search of the Primrose League manuscripts proved far more productive. The Primrose League ‘Roll of Habitations’ for 1886, 1904 and 1912 demonstrated that there were thriving League Habitations in North-east Wales in the period leading up to the First World War. For example, Denbighshire and Flintshire had 36 Habitations with over 4,000 members in 1886. Nonetheless, the records were patchy, no membership numbers are recorded for 1904 and only partial accounts exist for 1912, with hand-written entries for this date making legibility difficult; much of the detail had to be filled-in from local sources.

A search of private papers belonging to leading politicians of the period under review proved more fruitful. At the British Library in London the papers belonging to A.J Balfour, Conservative Prime Minister between 1902 and 1905, are housed. His papers provide detailed evidence of the political problems that the Conservative party encountered during his leadership, which lasted until 1911. Of value here was the correspondence of Ernest Iwan Muller, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, who informed Balfour of Conservative party discontent and the reasons for electoral failure in 1906. Kept at the House of Lords Record Office are the Lloyd George and Bonar Law papers. As Prime Minister between December 1916 and October 1922 and senior Welsh politician for nearly the first half of the twentieth century, Lloyd George, who was also MP for Caernarfon Boroughs in North-west Wales, is integral to this study. His papers contain a number of documents that are contextually important to this thesis including many on Welsh Church Disestablishment, the Liberal land campaigns, his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer, which saw the passage of the 1909 Budget and provoked the Peers versus People debate, and his period as Prime Minister during and after the

First World War. Also contained within Lloyd George's papers are the draft agreements, which mapped out the electoral pact between the Conservative and Liberal parties at the 1918 general election. This impacted greatly on North-east Wales where it was agreed that all three constituencies would be represented by Coalition Liberals with all prospective Conservatives standing down.

As leader of the Conservative party between 1911 and 1921 and Prime Minister between October 1922 and May 1923 Bonar Law is of obvious importance to this thesis. His papers include many relevant documents including Conservative party reaction to Irish Home Rule. Also of importance are the 1918 general election reports from party agents indicating the subjects in which the electors were most interested and the forecast of results in each region. Unfortunately in both cases no returns were forthcoming from North Wales, but the documents remain useful tools providing contextual information and acting as a comparison to the evidence available in local sources.

With regard to local sources the Denbighshire Record Office at Ruthin and the Flintshire Record Office at Hawarden hold Conservative Constituency Association records. At Hawarden, the Flintshire Constitutional Association and the Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Minute Books between 1910 and 1964 are deposited. These records are supplemented by the Bryn-y-Pys Estate papers of Major Hugh Peel, a leading local Conservative, which contain a limited number of documents, mostly accounts concerning the Denbigh Boroughs Conservative and Unionist Association between 1911 and 1918 and the records of the Flintshire Maelor Conservative Associations between 1922 and 1934. In Ruthin, the official papers of the Denbigh Division of Conservative Associations between 1923 and 1939 are archived while the Plas Nantglyn manuscripts of the Wynne family, Conservative landowners, contain the records of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association between 1895 and 1924. Finally at Aberystwyth the National Library of Wales house the Minute Book of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association 1918-1926 and the Minute Book of the Wrexham Division Women's Constitutional Association 1923-1924.

All these sources contained vital information for this research but also presented a number of problems. Firstly, a number of gaps exist in the years between 1906 and 1924. Apart from those of the West Denbighshire Conservative Association none of the other Constituency Associations papers have survived the period before 1910. All associations have detailed records after 1910, but there is a paucity of information concerning the Conservative party during the First World War. Secondly, the documents often only offer tantalising glimpses of contentious issues and divisions that occurred within the party. For example, in January 1924 the Wrexham Conservative Association underwent an organisational change that saw Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, the largest landowner in the region and President of the party since 1886, lose his place on the Executive Committee and thus his overall control of the local party. Was this a rebellion of the rank and file which saw Sir Watkin ousted perhaps because of his attempts to forge an unpopular alliance with the local Liberal party? Or was it an amicable agreement which saw Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn withdraw from the strains of local politics? The documents tell us little except who won selection to the new Executive Committee and that new Association rules and regulations were passed. On the other hand, some of the papers are very frank in their detail. The Flintshire Constitutional Association report into the 1910 general election defeat in Flint Boroughs condemns the lack of canvassing, the poor organisation and the failure to campaign properly on behalf of party activists.

Many of the party's financial accounts also remain intact and are produced in detail—evidence showing that in West Denbighshire, where many wealthy Tory landowners resided, subscriptions remained buoyant and even helped fund a working class candidate in 1910. At the same time in Flintshire, a more demographically diverse county with few large landed estates, subscriptions remained low, the party was unable to fund much party activity and consequently it nearly went bankrupt in 1914. The financial accounts therefore produce a snapshot of the state of the party in North-east Wales – where it remained vibrant and where it struggled to survive. In addition the papers provide an in-depth account of how the party gradually responded and adapted to the Liberal hegemony in the region. In particular they show how the party transformed itself in each constituency after the First World War from

narrowly based male dominated organisations into modern democratic mass movements. In many cases they also demonstrate how this occurred at the behest of and not in spite of the landed leadership.

Other local political parties papers were also scrutinised, the most useful of these being the Flintshire Liberal Association Minutes for the period 1918 – 1939, archived at the Flintshire Record Office. These papers confirmed Conservative party attempts to forge an electoral pact with the Liberals to cover county council as well as parliamentary elections in Flintshire during the period of Coalition Government between 1918 and 1922. While an electoral pact remained in force for parliamentary elections Conservative advances for a similar agreement for council elections were firmly rejected. The documents reveal that the Liberal Association was more sympathetic to the aims of the Labour party, thus creating tensions between themselves and the local Conservative Association. These tensions led to the local Conservative party forging their own organisation and survival plans and so the Liberal Minutes are important to this thesis.

Unfortunately apart from these papers little official evidence remains for the Liberal party in North-east Wales. In amongst the Ruthin Borough Council manuscripts held at the Denbighshire Record Office, a few papers exist concerning the Ruthin Liberals in 1913 but nothing of any relevance to this study. Nevertheless, the Glyndwr Manuscripts recently deposited at the Denbighshire Record Office contain the papers of Edward Hughes, Chairman of the Wrexham Liberal Association during the post First World War period. In contrast to the Flintshire Liberal Association minutes these papers show the close relationship that existed between Hughes and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, leader of the Wrexham Constitutional Association, after 1918. This enabled them to enter into negotiations and to consider fielding a mutually acceptable candidate in opposition to Labour, even after the Coalition Government had fallen in October 1922.

The Wrexham Trade and Divisional Labour party papers, 1915-1922 also deposited at the Denbighshire Record Office outline the problems Labour were having gaining a foothold in the region. Even in the coal mining and steel working areas surrounding Wrexham, Labour had problems gaining support prior to 1922. With the Labour forces split between the Independent Labour

party (ILP) and the Divisional Labour party there was a total lack of cohesion between Labour forces in the area. The papers describe how after 1921 a joint executive was formed and how finally the Labour party became a credible alternative to the Liberal and Conservative parties in the Wrexham constituency.

Two further manuscript sources proved invaluable to the completion of this thesis. The privately owned papers and diaries of the Fourth Baron Tyrell Kenyon show how this leading Conservative was central to all that happened in Conservative politics in North-east Wales between 1906 and 1924 as his role as Chairman of the Denbigh Boroughs Constitutional Association, Vice-president of the East Denbighshire Unionist Association and Chairman of the NWDNU suggest.¹⁴ His papers reveal his diverse responsibilities between 1908 and 1914 – meetings and involvement with the Conservatives in the small enclave of Flintshire Maelor, in Anglesey, in the Denbigh Boroughs constituency (one of the very few Conservative seats in Wales after 1910), with the North Wales Unionists and with prominent party leaders, including F.E. Smith, Arthur Steel Maitland and Bonar Law. Not only this but his personal scrapbooks also demonstrate his interest in the defence of the Church in Wales, which was constantly threatened with Disestablishment before 1914, the ‘Peers versus People’ debate and the protection of landed interests.

The Brogyntyn manuscripts held at the National Library of Wales contain the papers and letters of the Fourth Baron Harlech, William Ormsby-Gore, Conservative MP for Denbigh Boroughs in 1910. These give an insight into election campaigning in a small marginal constituency in North-east Wales and also provided an invaluable insight into the Conservative parliamentary candidate selection process. The manuscripts also offer a fascinating glimpse of the expectations and fears of a leading peer’s son as he takes the accepted family path of a career in politics. It soon becomes clear that politically little animated Ormsby-Gore apart from the Welsh Church and, as a ‘diehard’ Tory, rejection and resistance to Liberal plans to end the House of Lords veto. He argues that he ‘could never feel ‘partizan’ and general elections were near torture to me...I rarely attended party meetings or conferences. For me

¹⁴ The Fourth Baron Tyrell Kenyon’s papers are owned by the Sixth Baron Tyrell Kenyon.

political life was a family tradition and an opportunity to work—a medium rather than an end or career in itself¹⁵. As revealing as they are both of these sources, are limited in their application – Ormsby-Gore’s papers often consider the much wider political stage with little on Denbigh Boroughs and both give a highly individual and biased account of events and consequently left gaps that needed filling to complete the story of the party in North-east Wales. To this end local newspapers provided an invaluable source of information. The two most important papers were the *Denbighshire Free Press*, still in existence today, and the *Flintshire Observer*. Both were heavily biased towards the Conservative party, the *Flintshire Observer* was actually owned by the party until it was sold in 1914. A number of papers also favoured the Conservative party and were important to this study – The *North Wales Guardian*, a Wrexham publication, and the *North Wales Pioneer*, a Colwyn Bay newspaper. All stories had to be sifted carefully because of political bias—those that could be cross-referenced with official party papers proved the most informative. The newspapers were also the only sources that covered the many Primrose League functions that took place before the Great War—fleshing-out the limited information on membership numbers that the manuscripts held at the Bodelian gave. A number of North Wales newspapers provided a counter balance to the Conservative point of view: the *County Herald*, a Flintshire newspaper; the *North Wales Times*, a Denbighshire publication, and the *Wrexham Leader* all represented the Liberal perspective. In particular these newspapers provided useful information on the period of Coalition Government between 1918 and 1922. In addition, the *Wrexham Leader* proved invaluable as a source for the period leading up to the 1924 election. It was the only newspaper that gave a detailed account of the negotiations which went on between the Wrexham Conservative and Liberal Associations in selecting a joint anti-socialist candidate, the Conservative party and newspapers that favoured it proving very secretive on the subject.

In conclusion, this thesis uses a wide range of sources of differing types and value to give an insight into a short period of Conservative party history in two fairly small Welsh counties. All the source materials demonstrate that the

¹⁵ National Library of Wales (NLW), Aberystwyth, Brogyntyn MSS, William Ormsby-Gore, Fourth Baron Harlech, Autobiographical Notes.n.d.

Conservative party remained a vibrant and dynamic organisation which adapted well to a hostile environment, during an uncertain period in Conservative party politics. The leadership, in general, attempted to widen the party's appeal and were not the group of self-interested political amateurs that one, perhaps, might expect from a group of wealthy landowners who had been at the forefront of North Wales society for so long. As the sources show by 1924 the party had overhauled its outmoded organisation, addressed its financial shortcomings, played an important part in undermining Labour's progress in the region, and was challenging the Liberal party for political ascendancy in North-east Wales.

My thesis will thus demonstrate how the Conservative party operated in a regional setting where electoral failure was the norm. It will show how the party addressed questions of organisation and finance, in particular how and where it gained its sources of revenue. It will also examine how the party survived in a region where the Liberal party reigned supreme, and will explore how national issues and developments were interpreted and acted upon, and how sometimes national aims did not correspond with the parties interests in North-east Wales. For example, when the Conservative party's resistance to the Irish Home Rule Bill was the focus nationally, the major issue in North-east Wales became defence of the Established Church. This thesis also looks at the Conservative party's support in the region and how it attempted to broaden its appeal. In particular it explores how the party embraced working class support and how it attempted to undermine the spread of trade unionism by adopting its own labour committees. It will further examine the party's endeavours to increase its female membership—women were seen as invaluable party workers as fundraisers and canvassers, and of course, after 1918 as vital to the party's electoral prospects. Finally, the thesis investigates the ideas and policies that mobilised the party during the period - in particular those that provoked intra-party conflict such as Tariff Reform and those that were a unifying force, for example the resistance to Labour after the First World War.

To do this it was decided to break the thesis down into an initial chapter that considered the region in a socio-economic as well as a political context followed by five chapters which examined the Conservative party during five distinct periods within the timeframe of 1906 to 1924. Each of these, with the

exception of the period encompassing the Great War, start with an overview of the Conservative party's national fortunes, analyses its performance in North-east Wales during a general election campaign and then finally considers its response in the region afterwards - including how the party organised itself, the political initiatives it undertook in a bid to improve its electoral performance and how these compared to those undertaken by the party nationally. Thus the Conservative party's performance and fortunes in Denbighshire and Flintshire are examined in the following timeframes: 1906-1910; 1910-1914; 1914-1918; 1918-1922 and 1922-1924. This is unlike many other regional political studies, which consider a different approach. For example, in the introduction to his thesis 'Politics in Devon and Cornwall, 1900-1931' (London School of Economics, PhD Thesis, 1991) A.M. Dawson explains that:

All of the chapters apart from those on the Liberal Land campaign cover the whole of the period 1900-1931. Rather than deal with Edwardian and inter-War politics this approach reflects the fact that continuity not change marked the region's politics before and after the First World War. There were no changes substantial enough to write a section on the impact of the War.¹⁶

Similarly, in his study of Welsh Conservatism Aubel considers the Conservative party across the whole timeframe 1885-1935, dedicating a chapter to each of his chosen constituencies.

Such approaches were considered here. However, it quickly became apparent that the changes contained in the Representation of the People Act 1918, which reduced the number of constituencies from five to three in the region, altering all the electoral boundaries, prevented such a seamless comparison of constituencies in North-east Wales before and after the Great War. Furthermore, it also became apparent that a separate chapter was needed to explain the Conservative party's response to the War. In particular participation in the War effort and its relations with the local Liberal party during the conflict needed explaining while its reaction to the Representation of

¹⁶A.M.Dawson, Politics in Devon and Cornwall, 1900-1931(London School of Economics, PhD Thesis, 1991) p20.

the People Act as well as the measures it undertook to ensure its survival as a separate political identity in the region during the War warranted examination.

A chronological approach also allowed comparisons to be made between the constituency Conservative parties and their responses to national political events within the region. For example, the period of Coalition Government between 1918 and 1922 saw relations sour between the Conservative and Liberal parties in Flintshire, while they remained cordial between the two parties in Wrexham. These local differences, which needed analysing against the national political backdrop and the flexibility that a chronological approach gave the thesis, proved the deciding factor in deciding the layout of the text. It is believed that by adopting this approach the party has been covered more comprehensively in this regional setting.

CHAPTER 1: NORTH-EAST WALES GEOGRAPHIC, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

A number of geographic, demographic and social factors affected the Conservative party's electoral performance in North-east Wales between 1906 and 1924. For example the geographic position of the two counties in the region, Denbighshire and Flintshire, bordering as they both were in 1906 on to England at their eastern ends suggests a more anglicised population – especially in those areas closest to the English border.¹ This in theory meant better prospects for the Conservative party which by the end of the nineteenth century was increasingly coming under pressure from the Welsh electorate which viewed it as an alien party in Wales, mainly because its membership consisted of English speaking landowners, who were far removed from the everyday concerns of the population, and worshipped in the Anglican Church. By contrast the vast majority of people in Wales still spoke Welsh and worshipped in Nonconformist chapels.

At the same time as the franchise widened during the second half of the nineteenth century the Liberal party came to dominate parliamentary representation in Wales as it became closely associated with, and promised to address the grievances of the Nonconformist population, especially inequality in education and religious worship, while they pledged to correct the plight of the underprivileged, including Welsh speaking tenants on landed estates. As a result those MPs who came from the landed classes, had dominated parliamentary representation and the Tory cause in Wales since Tudor times were removed from office and were replaced by radical Liberals. In particular after the 1884 and 1885 Reform and Redistribution Acts a solid phalanx of Liberals who represented radical politics came to represent Welsh constituencies at the expense of Conservative candidates whose party never again won the majority of

¹ North-east Wales throughout this thesis refers to the areas covered by the traditional counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire. See W.T.R. Pryce, 'Language Areas in North-East Wales' in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed, G.H. Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998) p.21 for a definition

seats in the Principality.² This chapter will therefore discuss the demographic and social factors that affected the Conservative party in North-east Wales by looking at such matters as population figures (including inward migration), Welsh language statistics, employment levels and religious worship. It will also examine the influence of landed authority in the region and will review the party's electoral performance during the latter half of the nineteenth century to provide the essential contextual information for this study.

POPULATION.

By the turn of the twentieth century there were over 2,000,000 people living in Wales.³ In North-east Wales the population more than doubled between 1801 and 1911 to reach 247,500, a reflection of the region's industrialisation and inward migration, but unlike the south eastern counties the rates slowed after 1821. This was largely due to a steady decline in the lead mining and metallurgical industries at this time. A large downturn in population levels was offset, however, by the steady expansion in the collieries and ironworks, especially in the area surrounding Wrexham. Thereafter, the coal mining areas increased their share of the regional population from 48 percent in 1801 to approximately 54 per cent by 1851 but the agricultural population dropped from 24 to 17 percent in the same period.⁴

An analysis of migration figures for Denbighshire and Flintshire indicate that by 1901 nearly 30 per cent of the population were immigrants. Until 1871 nearly half of all people who migrated to Denbighshire and Flintshire came from neighbouring English and Welsh counties. After 1871, more people migrated to the region from further away, and by 1911 over 53 per cent of the migrants into North-east Wales came from more distant areas in England. In addition by 1891 those migrating from the adjacent English border counties of Cheshire and Shropshire overtook those migrating from the neighbouring Welsh counties of Caernarfonshire, Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire. The development of the slate industry in Carnarfonshire and Merionethshire as well as the lure of the

²For a summary of political issues and the importance of the Liberal party to Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century see D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989) pp 271-296 and pp301-306.

³ P.Morgan and D. Thomas, *Wales, the Shaping of a Nation*, (Newton Abbot: David and Charles) p.48. See also, J.Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1994) p.319.

larger South Wales coalfields meant that from the 1850's onwards North-east Wales was no longer such an attractive destination for the rural Welsh. Thus a trend that added significantly to the continued and quickening pace of the Anglicisation of North-east Wales was established.⁵

Table 1.1:
Population Changes in Industrialised Counties of Wales 1851-1921

	1851- 1861	1861- 1871	1871- 1881	1881- 1891	1891- 1901	1901- 1911	1911- 1921
N.E. Wales	6.1	6.4	6.0	1.5	9.2	11.5	10.1
Denbs.	8.9	4.3	6.3	5.5	11.6	10.0	7.0
Flints	2.3	9.4	5.6	-4.1	5.5	13.8	15.0
Glamorgan	37.1	25.2	28.6	34.4	25.0	30.4	11.7
Monmouth	10.9	11.9	8.1	22.2	15.5	32.8	13.9
Wales	10.1	10.3	11.3	12.8	13.6	20.3	9.7

The table shows percentage changes in population between census reports, 1801-1921.

Original source for above table: W.T.R Pryce, 'Language Areas in North- East Wales c.1800-1911 in *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century*, ed, Geraint H.Jenkins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

Table 1.2: Inward Migration Into North-east Wales 1861-1911.

	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>
Population (thousands)	159.3	169.0	181.3	183.0	199.0	224.8
Migrants (thousands)	22.2	33.5	41.1	42.6	51.5	65.8
Migrants % of Population	17.7	19.8	22.7	23.3	25.9	29.3
Regional Origins %						
Neighbouring Counties:						
Cheshire and Shropshire	25.1	25.4	20.8	25.5	25.5	18.0
Caernarfonshire, Merioneth&Montgomeryshire.	29.7	24.1	24.4	21.2	19.3	16.3
Wales (excluding above counties)	5.3	5.2	7.0	6.9	6.7	6.2
England (excluding above)	29.6	34.2	40.9	38.2	41.5	53.5
Ireland	7.3	6.9	5.8	4.1	3.3	2.4
Scotland	2.0	2.5	2.3	2.0	1.8	1.7
Foreign	0.9	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.9

Original source: W.T.R. Pryce 'Language Areas in North-east Wales', p.30.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE

From the 1536 Acts of Union onwards Welsh was encouraged as a medium only in the new Protestant Church. By the eighteenth century, its usage further declined as the upper classes, landed gentry and merchants started to use English as the language of trade and economics. As a result there

⁴ Pryce, 'Language Areas in North-East Wales c1800-1911', p. 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.31.

emerged an anglicised group of people detached from those workers and peasants of Wales who continued to use the Welsh language. Moreover, as the Welsh economy grew so did the use of the English language and its integration into Welsh speaking communities. Bilingualism has been seen as one of the major steps in the Anglicisation of the Principality, and by the mid nineteenth century it encroached everywhere.⁶ The 1870 Education Act also accelerated this process as it enforced English as the language of instruction in schools, hastening the decline of the Welsh language. As English became the language of economic and social prestige, Welsh was accorded the label as the language of inferior social status.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century bilingualism was spreading westwards across North-east Wales engulfing the Vale of Clwyd and many western areas of Denbighshire. By 1870 most people in West Denbighshire understood English, and at the same time it was reported that very few people did not understand the language in Flintshire. Everywhere people accepted that children should acquire English as it was considered 'indispensable for their advancement'.⁷ Once a community absorbed the English language it was only a matter of time before it became fully English speaking with an anglicised outlook. All the anglicised areas sustained strong population growths, and the most rapid expansions were recorded in communities, which went from a bilingual to that of a full English status. These communities were largely situated in the coalfields of East Denbighshire, where the highest inward migration of people took place, and where English gradually replaced Welsh, not only in the workplace but also as the medium of family life.

Welsh, however, remained the principle language in rural parts of Denbighshire: Llanrwst, Ruthin and Corwen still had over 50 percent of their populations as monoglot Welsh speakers. In the industrialised areas of Flintshire many people still spoke Welsh, and even in Wrexham, the centre of the North-east Wales coal industry, with its many English migrants, 47 per cent of the people still spoke the language. Nevertheless, the influx of English speakers into the region coupled with the spread of bilingualism westward,

⁶ Morgan and Thomas, *Wales the Shaping of a Nation*, pp. 46-47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.50.

was to leave North-east Wales as part of the territory, described by E.G. Bowen, as ‘Outer Wales’.⁸

By 1921 English was the dominant language in North-east Wales. In Denbighshire only 8.5 per cent of the population were monoglot Welsh speakers and fewer than 50 per cent still spoke the language. In 1931 the numbers of people in the county who could speak Welsh saw a slight rise, but now only just over five per cent of the population were Welsh only speaking. In Flintshire, the most industrialised county in North Wales the figures were even worse. In 1921 just over two percent of the population were monoglot Welsh speakers and just under 33 per cent still spoke the language. By 1931 less than one per cent of the Flintshire population were Welsh only speakers. The two North-east counties of Wales had become completely anglicised.⁹

Table 1.3: Language statistics in North Wales.

Welsh speakers as a percentage of total population over 3 years of age.

	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1931</u>
<u>North-west Counties</u>					
Anglesey	93.5	91.7	88.7	84.9	87.4
Caernarfonshire	89.3	89.6	85.6	75.0	79.2
Merionethshire	92.3	93.7	90.3	82.1	86.1
<u>North-east Counties</u>					
Denbighshire	64.7	62.2	56.7	48.4	48.5
Flintshire	67.8	49.1	42.2	32.7	31.7

Original source: J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies* (Pontypool: The Welsh Office, 1985) p.86.

EMPLOYMENT.

South Wales’ industrial history will be forever associated with coal mining but there was also a thriving coal industry in North-east Wales. The North Wales coalfield, compacted into a small area of North-east Wales, extended from the English border near Oswestry to Point of Ayr, a few miles east of Prestatyn, on the coast. Coal mining played a major part in the development of such towns in North Wales as Holywell and Wrexham, and by 1848 the Flintshire collieries employed approximately 8,000 people, and the

⁸ E.G. Bowen’s description of North-East Wales as ‘Outer Wales’ is also taken from this article. See p.21.

Mostyn pits were producing 70,000 tons of coal a year. Further developments saw 10,176 miners working in the Denbighshire and Flintshire coalfields in 1881. By 1901 this number increased to 13,337 and by 1914 to 16,257. At the start of the twentieth century coalmining was the largest non- agricultural employer in North Wales and it became such an extensive and successful enterprise that over 3.3 million tons of coal were being produced by 1914.

Iron manufacturing in North-east Wales stagnated after 1830, but by the end of the century a new steel industry was born and developed. A modern steelworks was built in East Denbighshire at Brymbo in 1885, and John Summers, Liberal M.P for Flint Boroughs in 1910, founded his steelworks at Shotton in East Flintshire in 1896.¹⁰ By 1911 the steel industry employed over 3, 300 people in North-east Wales. This figure contributed to the 6,800 people who worked in the metal working trades in Denbighshire and Flintshire, which by 1921 reached over 8,000. Further industrial development took place at Holywell as the Holywell Textile Mills, incorporated in 1874, produced Royal Welsh Flannel, a highly desirable product throughout Great Britain. After 1931 these textile mills became the largest in Wales, employing over 3,700 workers.¹¹ Chemical making was also established at Flint in 1917, a development, which led to the manufacture of synthetics and the founding of the Courtaulds Rayon Works.

In spite of these industrial advances the early part of the twentieth century still saw vast tracts of land in Denbighshire and Flintshire under agricultural cultivation. In 1901 agriculture employed over 10,000 people in Denbighshire, a figure that hardly changed by 1921 when still over 10,500 people worked on the land. In Flintshire, agriculture was still the largest employer of labour between 1851 and 1921, and at no time did the numbers employed in the new industries exceed those working in agriculture. In 1901 there were over 5,000 employed on the land and between 1911 and 1921 this figure increased to 6,000.¹²

⁹J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies* (Pontypool: Mid-Wales Litho Ltd, 1985) pp.78-86.

¹⁰ Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.487.

¹¹ *Flintshire for Industry and Pleasure, Official Handbook*, (Cheltenham: J. Burrow, 1938).

¹² J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies*, pp.101-116.

Table 1.4: Largest Employers in Denbighshire and Flintshire, 1851-1921.

	Numbers Employed			
	<u>1851</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>	<u>1921</u>
Denbighshire				
Agriculture	17,114	10490	11719	10781
Mines and Quarries	4752	10656	11983	13451
Metal Working	1756	2116	2366	2948
Flintshire				
Agriculture	3891	5165	5980	5726
Mines and Quarries	3549	4780	5062	4546
Metal Working	1149	2436	4441	5195

Original Source: J. Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies*, pp.111-112.

RELIGION AND SOCIETY: 1851-1905.

The spread of Nonconformity in Wales during the nineteenth century can be attributed to the number of immigrants who flooded into the industrial areas and established new centres of worship. It was also helped by the weakness and intransigence of the Established Church. The Church, which had served rural areas for centuries, could not adapt to the needs of the new industrial society and provide the desired places of worship, as it was unable to subdivide its existing parishes that were designated by an Act of parliament. By contrast Nonconformity unhindered by legal precedent could build chapels wherever communities gathered.

In 1851 the first religious census took place in Great Britain. The results indicated that Wales was a far more religious country than England and that on the day of the census 34 per cent of Welsh people attended a religious establishment compared to 24 per cent for both England and Wales.¹³ The most revealing figures were those for the denominational breakdown of religious attendance. In the Principality Anglican Church attendance figures were extremely low: only nine per cent of total worshippers went to Church yet 87 per cent went to Nonconformist chapels. By 1905 the people who attended Nonconformist religious establishments in Wales increased to over half a million, and the total number of people who attended places of worship

¹³ D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989) pp.215-220.

reached 744,760 or 37 per cent of the population, three per cent more than in 1851.¹⁴

Yet, the figures in Table 1.5 demonstrate that Anglican Church attendance in North Wales was at its highest in those more anglicised regions nearest the English border. Church attendance was much higher in the North-eastern counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire and was way above the total figure for Wales in percentage terms. Conversely, Nonconformist chapel attendance was very high in the North-western counties, away from the English border, and was higher here than the percentage total for Wales. Flintshire had the highest percentage of Anglican Church communicants in Wales, and in all other Welsh counties only Radnorshire with 44.4 per cent had a higher percentage of Church Communicants than Denbighshire. Nonetheless, Nonconformity was still in the ascendant in Denbighshire and even in the more anglicised Flintshire nearly 55 per cent of worshippers were Nonconformists.

Table 1.5: 1905- Religious Communicants – Comparative Study, Northwest Wales, Northeast Wales.

<u>Northwest Wales Counties</u>	<u>Church Communicants</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N/conformist communicants</u>	<u>%</u>
Anglesey	4807	18.4	21251	81.6
Caernarfonshire	13361	19.9	53938	80.1
Merionethshire	4213	14.5	24733	85.5
<u>Northeast Wales Counties</u>				
Denbighshire	16922	32.4	35339	67.6
<u>Flintshire</u>	<u>11621</u>	<u>45.3</u>	<u>14016</u>	<u>54.7</u>
Wales	193081	26.0	551670	74.0

Figures taken from: K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970).

It is not hard, therefore, to see why tensions grew in the late nineteenth century as Welsh speaking chapel-goers agitated for the Disestablishment of what was seen as an alien English speaking Church sponsored by a state that did not represent them. Tensions were also heightened as the Anglican Church was seen as the body that represented the English speaking landed gentry, largely Tory by nature, who dominated land ownership and made vast profits

¹⁴ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970) p.315.

from the tenants who worked their land. The Anglican Church and the landed gentry came to symbolise all that was wrong in modern Welsh society to the rural and increasingly radicalised worker.

LAND.

In the nineteenth century the amount of owner-occupied land was very small in Wales, and those who owned land often let it out to other farmers and then became tenants on neighbouring estates. It was the combined strength of the aristocratic nobility and the landed gentry who owned vast tracts of lands in Wales, and derived most of their wealth and income from their tenanted estates, that ensured the ownership of land remained in the hands of the very few. Estates of over 1,000 acres accounted for over 60 per cent of the total area of Wales, which in 1871 stood at approximately five million acres.¹⁵

Table 1.6: Wales- Landowners 1873.

<u>Category of Landowner</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Acreage held</u>	<u>% of Wales</u>
Peers	31	557000	13.5
Great Landlords	148	1263100	30.6
Squires	392	672000	16.3
Greater Yeoman	1224	612000	14.8
Lesser Yeoman	2952	498000	12.1
Small Proprietors	17289	431000	10.5
Cottagers	35592	7300	0.2
Public Bodies	723	79700	1.9

Information taken from: J.Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971).

The most powerful section of landowners were the 179 peers and great landowners who each had at least 3,000 acres of land with a gross annual income exceeding £3,000 a year. Between them they received approximately a third of the total farming rental of Wales.¹⁶ Table 1.7 indicates what percentage of the total land in each county those estates over 3,000 acres in size represented.

¹⁵ Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906*, p.199.

¹⁶ P. Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales* (London: Longman, 1996) p.279.

Table 1.7: Wales- Percentage of land held in estates over 3,000 acres

Caernarfon	67%	<i>Denbighshire</i>	43%	Pembrokeshire	38%
Anglesey	61%	Monmouthshire	43%	Radnorshire	37%
Glamorgan	55%	Brecknock	42%	Cardiganshire	36%
Merioenth	48%	Mongomery	40%	Carmarthenshire	34%
<i>Flintshire</i>	45%				

J.Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971).

At the end of the nineteenth century the highest concentration of estates in excess of 3,000 acres was, with the exception of Glamorgan, in the counties of North Wales. While the three North-west Wales counties had higher concentrations the two North-east Wales counties still had a high proportion of their land given over to estates in excess of 3,000 acres. In Flintshire, which was the smallest county in Wales, there was not a single estate of over 10,000 acres, and yet it had the fifth largest amount of land given over to estates in excess of 3,000 acres (see table1.7). One of the largest landowners was Captain Rowley-Conway of Bodrhyddan Hall, near Rhyl, whose 5526 acres of land brought in nearly £7,000 in annual rents. Other influential landowners included Lord Hanmer at Bettisfield whose estate of 7,318 acres netted nearly £11,000 in rents, Lord Kenyon whose Gredington estate received £5,575 in rents from 4,000 acres of land and the Peel family whose estate at Overton raised £5,574 from just under 3,000 acres of land.¹⁷

Denbighshire, with fourteen, had the highest number of major landowners in North Wales although at the end of the nineteenth century when the *Returns of the Owners of Land* survey was taken there were no peers in the county. The Watkin Williams-Wynn family not only owned a 34,000-acre estate near Wrexham yielding over £25,000 in rents, but also owned large tracts of land in Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire that earned a further £17,000. Other important landowners in Denbighshire included the Biddulphs of Chirk Castle whose 5513 acres netted them £8,580 in rents, the Cornwallis West family of Ruthin Castle whose 5,457 acres brought in £9,562, and John

¹⁷FRO, *The Returns of the Owners Land -1873 volume II -Wales*. See returns for Flintshire.

L. Wynne's estate near Abergele that yielded over £9,000 from just over 10,000 acres.¹⁸

LANDED INFLUENCE AND AUTHORITY: THE ARISTOCRATIC LEADERS OF CONSERVATISM IN NORTH-EAST WALES.

Land ownership also brought with it political influence.¹⁹ This political power was based on an authority that the landed classes built up and exercised over their tenants who lived and worked on their estates in a pre industrial society. In Wales large estates were founded in the last decades of the seventeenth century as families unified their land and vast fortunes through marriage.²⁰ This unification process saw the end of the squire's dominance of politics, and witnessed the takeover of parliamentary representation by the landed classes who largely favoured the Tory Party.²¹ At the end of the seventeenth century approximately two thirds of the members for Wales had Tory sympathies although there were a small number of families, in particular the Myddletons in North-east Wales, who had Whig affiliations.²² This trend continued until the latter half of the nineteenth century when with the passing of Reform Acts the franchise was widened and the landed stranglehold on politics slowly diminished.

The huge amount of land, over 145,000 acres at the end of the nineteenth century, owned by the Watkin-Williams Wynn family from Wynnstay, Ruabon, earned the family immense deferential and political power, not just in North-east Wales but in the Principality as a whole. Such was the influence that the Watkin Williams-Wynn family wielded during the period that the Sixth Baronet was dubbed the 'Prince in Wales' (see Appendices, p324)²³. The Sixth Baronet also represented Denbighshire for the Conservative cause in parliament until his death in 1885.

The Seventh Baronet, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, who inherited the Wynnstay estates and the Denbighshire parliamentary seat on the death of his

¹⁸ FRO, *The Returns of the Owners Land-1873 volume II -Wales* See returns for Denbighshire.

¹⁹ K.O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p 14.

²⁰ Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp.285-286.

²¹ A squire was a landowner who had an estate of between 1,000 and 3,000 acres and was distinct from a great landowner who owned over 3,000 acres. See J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, p. 501.

²² Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.286.

uncle in 1885, was defeated in the general election of the same year and thus served in parliament for just six months. After unsuccessful attempts to win the East Denbighshire constituency back in 1886 and 1892 he concentrated on local politics and became President and Treasurer of the East Denbighshire Constitutional Association, which was formed in 1886, and then the Wrexham Constitutional Association which was founded in 1918. He also served as a Vice-President of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association that was formed at the same time, and was elected as a Conservative county councillor for Ruabon in 1888, a position he held until his death in 1944. As a wealthy local Conservative leader his contributions to the party could be seen in the provision of land, money and premises for Conservative constituency associations, clubs and workingmen's organisations, especially in Ruabon close to the family estate at Wynnstay. After his election defeat Sir Watkin restricted himself to local affairs and did not seek any higher office in the Conservative Party, but his patriarchal benevolence and patronage ensured that he remained at the centre of local Conservative party affairs until his death. He was instrumental in holding the alliance between Conservatives and Liberals together in East Denbighshire between 1918 and 1922, and was central to the discussion that led to an anti-socialist candidate being elected in the Wrexham constituency in 1924.

The Fourth Baron Tyrell Kenyon of Greddington Hall, Flintshire Maelor, was born in 1864 and went on to become one of the most important Conservatives in the region. Unlike Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and his uncle George T. Kenyon, who became MP for the Denbigh Boroughs in 1885, Lord Kenyon never sought elected office and chose instead to wield political power and influence through the Conservative Party organisation. In 1911 Lord Kenyon scaled the heights of the Conservative Party by becoming Chairman of the National Union, a major achievement for one of the lesser-known members of the landed elite.²⁴ In comparison to some of the other landed families in North-east Wales, in particular the Mostyn family, the Kenyon family were relative newcomers to the region only arriving in 1696. By 1873 the Kenyon's

²³ D.Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Papermac, 1996) p143.

owned over 7,000 acres, which by Flintshire standards made them very large landowners. Despite his reluctance to seek elected political office, the Fourth Baron was a pivotal hub in the Conservative landed network that grew up in North-east Wales in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Married to the daughter of Colonel Howard, of Wigfair Hall St. Asaph, the parliamentary candidate for both the Flint Boroughs and the Flint County constituencies at the two 1910 general elections, Lord Kenyon was also tied to the Ormsby-Gore (Barons Harlech) family through his mother, the only daughter of the First Baron Harlech. More importantly for the Conservative Party Lord Kenyon was also chairman of the Denbigh Boroughs Constitutional Association, Vice-President to the East Denbighshire Constitutional Association, a Vice-President of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association from 1913 and served on the Financial Committee, the most powerful group in the Flintshire Constitutional Association.

He was, therefore, centrally involved in every Conservative Association in North-east Wales. In addition he represented the East Denbighshire Constitutional Association on the Central Council of the National Union and was a Vice-President of the NWDNU in 1906 and became its chairman in 1922. Kenyon was thus a highly influential figure within Conservative Party circles - it was to him that the Flintshire Conservatives deferred in the matter of the de-selection of their parliamentary candidate for Flint County in 1909, and it was Kenyon who ran two associations in 1918, the Denbigh Boroughs and the East Denbighshire Unionist Associations, when Sir Watkin Williams Wynn refused to be involved in politics for the duration of the First World War. If this was not enough Lord Kenyon was also Ruling Councillor of the Hundred of Maelor Primrose League Habitation.

The Third Baron Mostyn, Llewelyn Neville Vaughan Lloyd Mostyn, was born in 1865 and came from one of the oldest landed families in North Wales - the Mostyn family settled at Mostyn Flintshire in the early fifteenth century and Richard Mostyn took 1600 miners to support Henry Tudor at Bosworth Field in 1485. The family acquired lands in Cheshire,

²⁴ In the 2004 edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) the Fourth Baron Kenyon does not receive a mention, although the First and Fifth Barons do have entries.

Merionethshire and Caernarfonshire and developed Llandudno as a resort town in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1873 the family held 5,460 acres in Flintshire making it the third largest landowner in the county. When the family's other lands were added the Mostyn's owned 8,390 acres earning £15,312 in rent, one of the largest returns on land in North Wales.²⁵ The Mostyn family also dominated parliamentary representation in Flintshire, a Mostyn first winning a parliamentary seat in 1544.²⁶ When the Flintshire seat fell to the Liberal landowner Lord Grosvenor in 1861, the Mostyn's never represented the constituency again.

The Third Baron Mostyn slipped into local politics, as Sir Watkin Williams Wynn had in Denbighshire, and held the Mostyn seat on the Flintshire County Council until 1922. He was President of the Flintshire Constitutional Association, the organisation that looked after Conservative affairs in the Flint Boroughs and Flint County constituencies, for over forty years until his death in 1929.²⁷ Lord Mostyn held an almost omnipotent control over the Association, often refusing to adopt directives from the NWDNU whilst ironically being the Association's delegate to the same body. Yet it would be wrong to describe Mostyn as an intransigent diehard peer of the type that afflicted the Conservative party during the Parliament Act and House of Lords veto crises. Lord Mostyn was a pragmatist who believed in House of Lords Reform, but abstained from the vote on the Parliament Bill in 1911. He was ambivalent towards Tariff Reform - he was initially committed to Balfourite retaliatory policies, but then became a Protectionist. He was conciliatory over education, one of the biggest causes of dispute between Liberals and Conservatives in Wales, and even held his political opponents in Flintshire in high esteem.²⁸ It was also during Lord Mostyn's tenure as President that the Flintshire Constitutional Association adopted an organisational strategy, which received complimentary notices from Central Office for its thoroughness.²⁹ Lord Mostyn was therefore, a landed aristocratic

²⁵ 'Archive Network Wales: Mostyn MSS' [Online]. Available: www.archivesnetworkwales.info

²⁶ W.R. Williams, *Parliamentary History of Wales* (Brecknock: Davies and Bell, 1895) See entry for Flintshire.

²⁷ *North Wales Weekly News*, 18 April 1929.

²⁸ *Flintshire Observer*, 28 December 1905.

²⁹ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association, Minute Book 2, D/DM307/2. Meeting of the executive held on 7 July 1923.

politician who was determined to hold on to his power base, but was also aware of the need to adapt and move the Conservative party forward at a time it was under intense pressure from the radical forces in the region. His dedication to the Conservative cause finally paid off when Goodman Roberts was elected for the Flintshire constituency at the 1924 general election. With a Conservative taking the seat for the first time in over eighty years he is supposed to have said 'Now I can die in peace'.³⁰

Finally, the landed domination of the Conservative party organisation in North-east Wales was completed by Colonel Mesham of Bodfari near Denbigh who became a leading figure in the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association. William Mesham inherited the Pontrufydd estate in Bodfari from his aunty Margaret Mesham in 1873. A career soldier who was related to the Mostyn family, Mesham played a central role in late nineteenth century North-east Wales society, becoming a magistrate and deputy Lord Lieutenant of Denbighshire as well as High Sheriff of Flintshire. On the death of John Wynne Edwards in March 1886 he became Chairman of the Denbigh Conservative Association and thereafter became Chairman of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association as the county Conservatives divided their resources to match the redrawing of the constituency boundaries under the 1885 Redistribution Act.³¹ Mesham was a personal friend of George T. Kenyon, Conservative MP for the Denbigh Boroughs, an ardent Churchman and played a prominent role within the Primrose League in North-east Wales. Not only was he Chairman of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, he was also Ruling Councillor of the Denbigh Primrose League for 32 years until his death in 1918. When he died it became clear that the Conservative Party had lost one of their best administrators in North Wales. Mesham was responsible for organising Primrose League conferences in the region, for developing the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association as an effective democratic organisation, and in an enlightened move appointing Sam Thompson as a working-class Conservative parliamentary candidate for the West Denbighshire constituency in 1908. After his death the West

³⁰ *North Wales Weekly News*, 18 April 1929.

³¹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 16 March 1886.

Denbighshire Constitutional Association went into decline, not reviving again until 1923.

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the landed elite dominated the leading positions in the Conservative Party in North-east Wales. This network consisted largely of wealthy landowners many of whom were ex-MPs finding an outlet in party organisation and local party politics and were Anglican Churchmen determined to defend their religion from the encroachment of Welsh Nonconformity. Most were appalled by the prospect of Irish Home Rule and the perceived threat to Empire, and were not deterred by their rejection at the polls, but saw the loss of their privileged status at the hands of radical Liberals as an indignity to be avoided at all costs. United and consolidated by marriage, these landed families had played a dominant role in Welsh society for centuries. The ranks of the landed rich in North-east Wales were packed with magistrates, Lords Lieutenants, High Sheriffs, county councillors and high-ranking soldiers.³² Liberal reforms, which attacked the status of such people were seen by North-east Wales landowners as a series of unjust acts by an over-zealous crusading Nonconformist government.

THE EROSION OF CONSERVATIVE POWER AND THE RISE OF THE LIBERALS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY WALES.

Much was made of landlord influence over tenants in mid-nineteenth century Wales. Landlords, mostly Conservative by inclination, often expected the support of their tenants in the election bid that they or their nominees made and such expectations occasionally led to the coercion of tenants for not voting for their choice – as happened in 1859 and 1868 when tenants were evicted in many parts of Wales for not voting the way of the landlord.³³ Consequently the Welsh language radical press created a storm by highlighting the plight of impoverished tenants, such as those who had been evicted from their homes by unscrupulous Tory landlords.³⁴ Furthermore, accusations were made that

³² The Seventh baronet Sir Watkin Williams Wynn was Lord lieutenant of Montgomeryshire in 1891, High Sheriff of Denbighshire in 1890 and a J.P in the same county; the Fourth Baron Tyrell Kenyon was a Lord Lieutenant of Denbighshire; the Third Baron Mostyn was a Vice – Admiral of North Wales and was royal standard Bearer of Wales at the coronation of George V.

³³ See, for example, Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp20-21 and pp24-25.

³⁴ D.Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) pp. 86-88.

landlords cruelly enforced agreements on their tenants, charged excessive rents without abatements in times of depression and allowed the tenants to feel insecure for not adopting a decent tenurial system. Allegations were also made that landowners preferred Churchmen and Conservatives as tenants to radicals and Nonconformists. Thomas Gee, editor of the *Baner* newspaper, described landowners as 'in general, cruel, unreasonable, unfeeling and un pitying men'.³⁵

Relations between landlord and tenant were irrevocably soured by this radical press onslaught, especially the 'ceaseless tirade against Welsh landlordism' contained in Gee's *Baner* newspaper from 1886.³⁶ Yet it has been argued that the claims of the radical press on the land question were greatly exaggerated. According to D.G Evans there is evidence to show that during agricultural difficulties large landowners suffered as much as their tenants and that 'during the 1880's and the early 1890's the landowner was often made a scapegoat for the tenants' problems.³⁷ Furthermore Mathew Cragoe concludes that tenants generally accepted the leadership of their landlord in political matters and that 'a vote for the estate was a vote for the things with which an individual had been brought up, and for a system that, religious considerations notwithstanding, guaranteed the tenant satisfaction of his fundamental social imperative, the transmission of his family's farm to the next generation'.³⁸ These arguments appear reasonable, and there is evidence in North-east Wales, for example, amongst the Wynnstay Estate papers to prove their point.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Welsh language press gave radical Nonconformity a political voice, which was enhanced by the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884 and 1885. These Acts allowed many newly enfranchised working-class men, stirred by the emotive language of the radical press to eject Conservative landowning MP's from parliament at election times.

At the same time the transfer of land from the gentry to their tenants eroded the landowners position in the Principality. At the start of the twentieth

³⁵ Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales*, pp.86-87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁷ D.G. Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906*, p.209.

³⁸ Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*, p171.

³⁹ Denbighshire Record Office, (DRO), Wynnstay MSS, DD/WY/9060, letter from William Owen to Sir Watkin Williams- Wynn, 18 February 1886.

century landowners with interests in England started to sell off their Welsh estates, seen as mere supplements to other holdings and as a means of raising money. The sell-off intensified when with political power transferring to the Liberals in 1906 a new collectivist environment was created in which individualism and landlordism were seen as enemies of social improvement; Lloyd George's land taxes and land campaigns threatening the existence of the landed elite. As John Davies has noted:

The vehemence with which Lloyd George and his colleagues attacked the land-owning class,... certainly created apprehension, and some of the sales of 1911 and 1912 were motivated by a desire to take advantage of a buoyant market before Lloyd George dreamt up new offensives.⁴⁰

Between 1910 and 1914 nearly every major landowner in the Principality sold land. A more democratic climate precipitated an explosion of sales as tenants bought the land they farmed. Sales continued throughout the First World War and after the War the torrent of sales became a flood as tenants eagerly bought up land from their former landlords. At the height of the boom estates exchanged hands for vast sums of money. In North Wales £100,000 was received for Tremadog estate land, in excess of £120,000 was taken for land sold by the Glynllifon estate, both were in Caernarfonshire, and £200,000 was made on the sale of the Barons Hill land in Anglesey.⁴¹ The sales boom ended in 1922 and even though a mini-boom occurred in 1924 and 1925, which saw sales of Penrhyn land in Caernarfonshire and Nash and Bute land in Glamorgan, a depression set in, and during the 1930's the number of successful auctions dropped significantly. Nonetheless, by the start of the Second World War Wales had seen a transformation in land ownership, as owner-occupiers who enthusiastically bought up land now owned over thirty over cent of the Principality's acreage.

In North-east Wales the situation mirrored that of the rest of Wales as land transferred from estate to tenant ownership. Between 1910 and 1914 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn sold off Wynnstay estate land in Denbighshire and

⁴⁰ J. Davies, 'The End of the Great Estates and the Rise of Freehold Farming in Wales', *Welsh History Review*, No7, 1974-75 p.198.

Montgomeryshire, and in Flintshire the Duke of Westminster made £20,000 on his land sales. During the First World War the Bodelwyddan estate was sold off and large areas of the Gladstone estate was put on the market as a result, somewhat ironically, of the Liberal tax measures.⁴² After the War, Major George Cornwallis West sold Ruthin Castle and 11,000 acres of land in Denbighshire for £76,000, and the outlying areas of the Gladstone's family estate at Hawarden in Flintshire were sold for £112,000

This transfer of land in Wales was accompanied by a transfer of political and social power as the Principality witnessed something 'little short of an agrarian revolution'.⁴³ Kenneth O. Morgan has commented:

The gentry subsided as if they had never been. Great houses eventually turned into public or private institutions....The political influence of the gentry was now in total eclipse.... Notable landlords still appeared as lords lieutenant, high sheriffs or justices of the peace.... But their regime in real terms was dead. Landlordism, no less than the thousands of young servicemen who sacrificed their lives between 1914 and 1918 was a casualty of total war. The passing of the old social order, notably in the rural areas, led to the passing of an old political order. After the declaration of the polls in December 1918, the general ascendancy of Liberalism....appeared to be confirmed.⁴⁴

In addition a number of Nonconformist issues and grievances also helped undermine the Conservative position in Wales. The issue of Church Disestablishment had long given radical Liberals a cause with which to assail the Tory landowning interest. Landlords were seen by the Welsh radical press as the political arm of the state Church, and as Nonconformity spread throughout Wales during the nineteenth century the clamour for Church Disestablishment grew; in 1895 every single Welsh Liberal candidate featured it in their election addresses. Such was the movement against the Anglican Church that in 1886 disturbances took place in many areas of Wales as farmers refused to pay their compulsory annual tithes to the local Church. Supported in their agitation by the scourge of the Anglican Conservative landowners,

⁴¹ Davies, *The End of the Great Estates and the Rise of Freehold Farming in Wales*, p 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Canadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p106.

Thomas Gee, conflict continued in parts of Wales for many years.⁴⁵ With the passing of the Tithe Bill in 1891 that made the landowner responsible for the collection of the tithe many disturbances ceased, but by the last decade of the nineteenth century the Liberal party was committed to the Disestablishment of the Church.⁴⁶ Attempts to place Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill on the Statute book failed, but with the arrival of a Liberal government in 1906 its passage through parliament appeared inevitable.⁴⁷

The issue of education also proved detrimental for Conservative support in Wales. The Forster Education Act of 1870 placed schools, including the Nonconformist British Society Schools, under the control of local School Boards and maintained them on subsidies from the rates.⁴⁸ At the same time it left the Church of England National Schools outside the Act. With over 1,000 Church of England National Schools teaching the Anglican catechism serving over 300 locations in Wales, and with no Board schools being set up in areas which were adequately supplied by National Schools, the potential for a Nonconformist backlash was created.⁴⁹ The Education question finally came to a head at the start of the new century, with the introduction of Balfour's 1902 Education Act. The Act was designed to rationalise education by bringing both voluntary and school boards under the supervision of county councils, but a massive groundswell of Nonconformist antipathy to the Bill and the provision it now made for Church schools to be maintained on the rates culminated in Welsh county councils refusing to operate the Act. By December 1903 with Lloyd George advising resistance to the Act, only Radnorshire and Brecknockshire had not refused grant aid to voluntary schools.⁵⁰ In the 1904 County Council elections every single Welsh council fell to the Liberals whose leaders actively campaigned on the issue of Nonconformist education. Not a single council applied the contingencies of the Act, an impasse only broken by the fall from power of the Conservatives in 1905.

⁴⁴ Morgan, *Wales Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* p.187.

⁴⁵ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868-1922*, pp.84-90. See also T.Jones, *Rioting in North-east Wales*, (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 1997).

⁴⁶ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.89.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.216.

⁴⁸ Davies, *A History of Wales*, pp.435-436.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.436.

Not even the more anglicised region of North-east Wales was saved from the onslaught of the Welsh education issue. In Denbighshire an already overwhelming Liberal county council had its Liberal ranks swelled to a total of 35 in 1904, the highest number, prior to the First World War. In Flintshire, Herbert Lewis, the Liberal MP for Flint Boroughs, claimed that Balfour's controversial Education Act enabled the Liberals to take control of the council in a county where Anglican schoolmasters predominated.⁵¹

Radical Nonconformity and Welsh Liberalism were also invigorated by the temperance movement. Over indulgence in alcohol became a concern during the nineteenth century as drunkenness undermined the success of industry by affecting both the health and output of the working-class.⁵² A sub-culture grew up in which Nonconformists took the teetotal pledge and pushed for legislation that would curb the liquor trade as temperance moved from being a moral crusade to one that formed part of the radical Liberal programme.⁵³ In 1872 the Liberal government was persuaded to restrict the licensing trade and in 1881 the Welsh Sunday Closing Act was passed, which to the supporters of abstinence was a step towards a total ban.⁵⁴ Temperance increasingly became part of the Nonconformist Liberal campaign fostered by a new band of Welsh Liberal MPs who emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

However, the Conservative Party in North-east Wales was less affected by the main thrusts of radical Liberalism. For example, issues such as temperance were less important here than they were elsewhere in North Wales. Wrexham was the centre of the brewing trade in the region, employing many people, and the ranks of the Conservative Party contained some well-known

⁵⁰ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.191.

⁵¹In 1909 Flintshire still had 63 Church of England Schools, over 62 per cent of its total number of schools. At the same time 56 per cent of schools in Denbighshire were Church of England schools.

Sources: *Royal Commission on the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (1910), Vol.1 Cd.5432; *List of Public Elementary Schools in Wales on 31 July 1909*.

⁵² Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.374.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation Wales, 1880-1980*, pp.36-37.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

brewers.⁵⁶ Charles Murless, a Wrexham brewer was on the Finance Committee of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association and J.A Chadwick a local brewer, held the South ward in Wrexham for the Conservatives at the 1904 and 1907 county council elections. This suggests there was local support for the brewing interest or at least little concern about temperance and certainly at this time brewing and the consumption of alcohol played a strategic part in the defence of Conservative principles and the attack on Nonconformist Liberalism. According to Jon Lawrence ‘Liberalism was portrayed as a stern coercive creed that had no understanding of or sympathy for the social customs of the free born Englishman’.⁵⁷

The Conservatives thus defended the right of the working class man to enjoy a beer as a basic freedom. In North-east Wales the Conservatives began to cultivate the support of the workingman as early as 1871 when a Conservative Working-men’s Association was founded for the industrial villages of Ruabon, Rhos, Penycae and Cefn. Subsequently, a thriving network of Conservative clubs grew up in the region. Every major town had a licensed Conservative club, although concerns were expressed about the over-use of billiards tables and the lack of commitment to the Conservative cause at election time. In Wrexham, the largest and most industrial town in North Wales, both the Conservative Club and the Workingmen’s Association were very well supported, indicating that there was solid support for the Conservative stance on the freedom of the individual to consume and enjoy alcohol.⁵⁸ Membership of workingmen’s clubs and associations did not obviously automatically translate into votes, but a large working-class Conservative vote certainly existed in Wrexham enabling the party to hold the Denbigh Boroughs seat between 1885 and 1906.

The Conservative Party also managed to fight a sustained rearguard action on the issue of Church Disestablishment in the region. Faced with demands for Disestablishment by Nonconformists the Conservative party responded by claiming that Disestablishment represented religious intolerance

⁵⁶ The brewing trade and associated industries employed over 3, 000 people in Denbighshire in 1911, See J.Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies*, p.112.

⁵⁷ J.Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914’, *English Historical Review*, July 1993, p. 636.

⁵⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 15 May 1908.

and that the removal of long held endowments was merely asset stripping by vengeful dissenters.⁵⁹ This vigorous defence culminated in mass demonstrations organised by Church leaders and Conservative party members as a new Disestablishment Bill was introduced in 1912. Welsh Church Disestablishment was a radical issue that had Conservatives on the defensive, but it also conversely gave them a principle to fight for and helped galvanise them at a time when they were swamped by Nonconformist Liberalism. Conservatives, particularly in North-east Wales, were able to whip up support for the defence of the church, which even had local Liberals questioning the wisdom of removing church endowments (in this case a large proportion of its land and rents). For a small number of Liberal churchmen the issue marked the end of their attachment to the Liberal party as they swapped allegiances to join the Conservative party, which they believed would better protect their spiritual inheritance.⁶⁰

There was also only minimal agitation against landlords in North-east Wales. This was especially so in those areas closest to the English border where 'Welsh was rapidly giving place to English and where the vernacular press was thus limited in its influence'.⁶¹ Agitation against the payment of tithes started in Denbighshire, but in some areas tenants managed to persuade the parish priest to award discounts and disputes over rents were often countered by landlords offering concessions, as happened in the Vale of Clwyd in 1885.⁶² There were also many tenants who were unconcerned by the politics of their landlord or the agitation that ensued over Church tithe payments and were willing to negotiate directly with the landlord. A letter from one of the Wynnstay tenant's in February 1886 betrays a disdain for any form of tithe agitation or conflict that would disrupt landlord- tenant relations:

The agitation which they are trying to raise in some parts of the Principality will not I am sure have any attention from Sir Watkin tenants. We have always been proud of the good feeling, which has so long existed between landlord and tenant, and I sincerely hope it may always continue. Should I hear anything

⁵⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 January 1910 and 15 January 1910.

⁶⁰ See, for example, cessations from Liberal party on the eve of the January 1910 general election the *Denbighshire Free Press*, 15 January 1910.

⁶¹ Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth Century Wales* p.87

⁶² Jones, *Rioting In North-east Wales*, p.57.

unpleasant talked about I will for my own sake and that of my family do all in my power to stop it...⁶³

This demonstrates that there was still strong support for the Williams-Wynn family and landowners in North-east Wales, perhaps suggesting there was, if not substantial local sympathy for the Conservative party and its leadership, at least a tolerance of their aims. This in part helps explain why the party retained the Denbigh Boroughs seat until 1906 and why its vote held up better in this region between 1885 and 1900 than it did in the corresponding period for the rest of the Principality (see table 2.3) The evidence also shows that in spite of all the impediments and the prevailing conditions in the rest of the Principality, especially in the rural more westerly areas where the Welsh language and Nonconformity dominated, the Conservatives recovered well in North-east Wales after 1906. They were aided by the advances made in party organisation and by the successful development of Conservative support groups.

THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE.

Conservative support in North-east Wales was bolstered by the existence of a successful Primrose League network. The Tory Primrose League, as it was initially known, was founded in 1883 by Lord Randolph Churchill, John Gorst, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff and Sir Alfred Slade, all members of the National Union's Council – the body concerned with organising Conservative support. Their aim was to harness the affection and respect the memory of Disraeli, who had died in 1881, still evoked during a period of internal party bickering and low morale caused by election defeat in 1883.⁶⁴ The intention was to rectify 'the failure of Conservative and Constitutional Associations to suit the popular taste or to succeed in joining all classes together for political objects.'⁶⁵ Membership was open to all except atheists and enemies of the British Empire, the pledge being:

⁶³ Denbighshire Record Office, (DRO), Wynnstay MSS, DD/WY/9060, Letter from William Owen to Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 18 February 1886.

⁶⁴ M.Pugh, *The Tories and the People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) pp 11-13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.13.

I declare on my honour and faith that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and of the unity of the British Empire under our Sovereign.⁶⁶

While membership of the Primrose League was open to all classes, allowing working class members to rub shoulders with those from the landed elite, a hierarchical structure existed ‘that mirrored the gradations of society’ as the most senior Habitation officers in the Primrose League, the Ruling Councillors and Dame Presidents, came exclusively from the ranks of the landed elite.⁶⁷ However, since its founding in 1883 the Primrose League had introduced women to the world of politics as part of its all-embracing ethos.⁶⁸ Even though those females involved also tended to come from the upper strata of society they were successful in the roles they eagerly adopted for the Conservative party. According to Martin Pugh ‘middle and upper-class ladies threw themselves enthusiastically into arranging League functions, canvassing, contacting the outvoters, conveying electors to the polls in private carriages, raising funds and generally keeping the grass roots of Conservatism vigorous’.⁶⁹

The League also proved to be an enormous benefit to the Conservative Party in organising and educating supporters while providing an outlet for social gatherings, which were especially well attended in rural areas. The League made ‘good use’ of sympathetic landed families in North and Mid-Wales - Lord Mostyn in Flintshire, the Earl of Powis in Montgomeryshire, the Marquess of Anglesey, and Sir Watkin and Lady Williams-Wynn in Denbighshire – their names often being given to the local Habitations with social events frequently being held on their land. Measurement is somewhat difficult but Pugh’s survey of the Primrose League indicates that there were 68 associations, or Habitations, as they were known, in North Wales at the end of the nineteenth century. Memberships varied, but somewhat surprising were the membership figures in the rural west of the region, where the Liberal party dominated. In 1886 the membership at Bangor was over 1,000, in Caernarfon

⁶⁶ M.Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, p.13.

⁶⁷ M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.43-44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p52.

over 600, and in Beaumaris nearly 600.⁷⁰ There were also large memberships in North-east Wales. For example, the Denbigh Primrose League Habitation had a membership in excess of 800 in 1886 and by the end of the nineteenth century there were 16 Habitations in Flintshire and 20 in Denbighshire, all holding regular social gatherings, political functions and fetes up until 1918 (see Appendices, p319).⁷¹

The Primrose League did not survive the First World War in North-east Wales with any significant numbers. As local Conservative Associations adapted and revised their organisations to incorporate women and restructured their leadership, the League became obsolete as all social, financial and political functions were brought under the auspices of the local constituency associations. Nevertheless, in the period prior to the Great War the Primrose League was a powerful tool, which the Conservative Party deployed to its full extent as both a purveyor of its political message and as a successful lobbying agent. Utilising its members to canvass and sponsor political meetings on its behalf during election campaigns the Conservative Party had at its disposal a ready-made support machine even at times when its own organisation was weak. The Primrose League's popularity is hardly proof that people were willing to vote Conservative in North-east Wales, but it does demonstrate that this body was acting as an important outlet for the Conservative message as well as providing a valuable social function.

VOTERS AND THE CONSTITUENCIES.

With the passage of Disraeli's Reform Act in 1867 large numbers of urban householders were enfranchised for the first time throughout Wales, and the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 enabled people to vote unhindered without the threat of coercion from their landlords. The Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884 and 1885 extended the franchise further and altered the composition of constituencies. As a result of these Acts in Wales thousands of industrial working class men were enfranchised, and in rural areas, the county electorate rose from 74,936 to 200,373.⁷² The Acts worked to the benefit of the

⁷⁰ M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1939*, p.134

⁷¹ Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, pp.249-251.

⁷² Morgan, *Wales In British Politics*, p.64.

workingman as a number of working class industrial constituencies were founded, and many traditional boroughs were disenfranchised. In addition large urban constituencies, such as Cardiff with 85,000 inhabitants, were given the same parliamentary representation with one member as constituencies like Montgomery Boroughs, which had a population of fewer than 20,000. The impact of these measures on party politics in Wales was enormous, as increasing numbers of rural workers were able to vote uninhibited and elect Liberal Nonconformist candidates in areas where previously only the landed interest, with a small electorate and little opposition, had stood for parliament. As a result the Tory interest that dominated Wales for so long was pushed into the anglicised border areas, where they received a more sympathetic hearing.⁷³

Under the terms of the Reform and Redistribution Acts of 1884-85 Wales was divided into 34 parliamentary constituencies, the North of the country being split into twelve parliamentary seats.⁷⁴ North-east Wales was given one more constituency by breaking up Denbighshire into three parliamentary divisions, retaining the Denbigh Boroughs division, but splitting the county into two seats - West Denbighshire and East Denbighshire. The new East Denbighshire division contained all the coalmining districts and industrial centres in and around Wrexham and the English border. The West Denbighshire constituency included all the farming and rural areas west of the narrow band that made up East Denbighshire. The only major town in this division was the resort town of Colwyn Bay, which by the turn of the century had nearly 9,000 inhabitants. The West Denbighshire constituency stretched from the Conwy valley near Llandudno, southerly as far as Llanrwst and easterly as far as Chirk adjacent to the English border.⁷⁵ Two totally different constituencies were thus created - the rural West division and the industrial urban sprawl of the East division. The Denbigh Boroughs constituency remained unaltered. The division consisted of the two market towns of Denbigh and Ruthin, in the centre of Denbighshire, together with Wrexham, the largest town in North Wales, and the tiny borough of Holt both situated at the eastern end of the county. Under the terms of the Reform Act the

⁷³Morgan, *Wales In British Politics*, p.64.

⁷⁴B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (Aberystwyth: Y Lolfa, 1997) pp.9-11.

⁷⁵*Denbighshire Free Press*, 7 March 1885.

electorate in the Boroughs division was increased from 3,071 to 3,414. The electorate in the old Denbighshire division was 7,323, in the new West constituency the electorate was 8,899 and in the East constituency it was 8,297.⁷⁶

Flintshire remained unaltered by the terms of the Redistribution Act. The Flint County seat contained all the major industrial centres situated at the eastern end of the county including the Shotton steel works and the collieries dotted along the North Wales coast at Point of Ayr, Mostyn and Bagillt. Large areas of the constituency were still agricultural, especially in Flintshire Maelor where farming dominated and much of the land was under the control of the estate owner. The largest town in the Flint County constituency was Rhyl, the resort town, which by 1901 had a population of 8,500 people.⁷⁷ The Flint Boroughs constituency consisted of the small boroughs of Caergwrle near Wrexham, Caerwys near Denbigh, Overton in Flintshire Maelor, Rhuddlan just south of Rhyl and the cathedral town of St. Asaph. The only sizeable boroughs in the constituency were the colliery and industrial towns of Holywell, Flint and Mold. In 1901 both Flint and Mold had populations of approximately 4,500. The Reform Act increased the electorate in the County constituency from 4,794 to 10,081, but the electorate in the Boroughs division remained approximately the same.⁷⁸

ELECTIONS AND PARTY POLITICS 1880-1906.

At the 1880 general election the Liberals secured a majority of 137 over the Conservatives and other parties while Nonconformist anger over the restrictive Burial Acts of 1874 and criticisms of coercive Welsh landlords ensured a disastrous set of general election results for the Conservative Party in Wales. Noticeable landed defeats included Douglas Pennant of the Penrhyn family at Caernarfon, and a scion of the mighty Wynn family of Wynnstay was defeated in Montgomeryshire by Stuart Rendel, an English industrialist and Anglican who avowed Welsh Church Disestablishment.⁷⁹ The trend that

⁷⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 12 December 1885.

⁷⁷ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Studies*, See population of towns, pp.66-67

⁷⁸ Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*, pp.9-11.

⁷⁹ Davies, *A History of Wales*, p. 445

started at the 1880 general election, was completed at the 1885 general election, when over 200 years of Conservative ascendancy was brought to an end in Wales, the party subsiding to a mere 38 per cent share of the electorate.⁸⁰ Of the 34 M.P's returned for Wales only nine now represented the landed interest, of which five were Conservatives. The general election also marked a slump for the party nationally as it crashed to defeat gaining only 249 seats compared to the Liberals 335.

The forces of Conservatism recovered nationally and swept to power a year later gaining 316 of the Westminster seats at an election defined by the secession of a number of Liberals who were concerned about the party's apparent commitment to Irish Home Rule. Liberal Unionists, as they became known, gained some support in Wales as Gladstone's dalliance with Irish Home Rule upset such leading Welsh Nonconformists as Thomas Gee. More famously Lloyd George came close to joining the Liberal Unionists, but at the 1886 general election Wales remained solidly Liberal even though six Conservatives were returned and Cornwallis-West was successful as a Liberal Unionist in West Denbighshire.

In 1892 a mere three Conservatives in Wales were elected at an election dominated by Nonconformist issues. Every Liberal candidate mentioned Welsh Church Disestablishment in their election addresses; six placed this issue at the top of their agenda, and eleven mentioned Welsh issues only.⁸¹ The 1892 general election also saw the start of an isolated period of Liberal government, during an era dominated by the Conservative party. The Liberals obtained a 40-seat majority based on their success in the new county seats, which became increasingly vulnerable for the Conservatives as a result of the enfranchisement of many more rural voters.⁸²

At the 1895 general election the Conservatives again swept to power gaining 411 seats against the Liberals 177. Even in Wales the Conservatives did relatively well winning eight of the 34 seats. Where Liberals featured Church Disestablishment in their programmes the Conservatives mounted a fierce opposition aided by the formation of the Church Defence Committee,

⁸⁰ Davies, *A History of Wales*, p.286.

⁸¹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.118.

⁸² Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939*, p.68.

which under the auspices of the Duke of Westminster, Lord Penrhyn and Lord Emlyn, campaigned vigorously in Welsh constituencies. Many places saw Liberal majorities slashed. Lloyd George did well to gain re-election in Caernarfon Boroughs, and in Flintshire where the Committee was particularly active Samuel Smith's majority was reduced by a thousand votes.⁸³

The Liberals still retained an overwhelming number of MPs in Wales, and between 1895 and 1899 they clawed back much of their support nationally. Their success at by-elections, however, was short lived as the advent of the Boer War initiated a Conservative government recovery. The Conservative Party's overwhelming victory at the polls in 1900 where it gained 334 seats and an overall majority of 134 came as a direct result of their support for the conflict.⁸⁴ Patriotic support for the War was somewhat muted in the Principality where many Liberals opposed the conflict. In Wales 28 Liberals were returned, a net gain of two seats over the Conservatives, and out of ten Liberal candidates hostile to the Boer War nine were returned. The 'Khaki Election' is probably best remembered in Wales for the return of Keir Hardie at Merthyr Tydfil, the very first Independent Labour Party member in Wales.

NORTH-EAST WALES ELECTIONS 1880-1906.

From 1880 a trend was started in Wales, which witnessed the regular return of Liberals in parliamentary elections at the cost of Conservative members of the landed gentry. Nowhere was this trend in Wales more emphatically announced than in the North-east Wales constituency of East Denbighshire where the Wynnstay interest in the form of the Seventh Baronet, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, was finally overthrown at the 1885 general election. Nearly 200 years of parliamentary representation in the constituency by the Williams-Wynn family came to a close when the Seventh Baronet was beaten by his radical Liberal opponent, Osborne Morgan by 393 votes. Surprisingly, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn came within a whisker of retaking the seat in 1886 by reducing the Liberal majority to 26, and it was not until 1892 when Osborne Morgan extended his majority to 756 that the constituency

⁸³ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp.158-160.

⁸⁴ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p.69.

became safe for the Liberals. After this Sir Watkin finally withdrew from parliamentary challenges and the Liberals comfortably held the division in 1895. They increased their majority at a by-election on Morgan's death in 1897 and the seat went uncontested in 1900 and 1906.

The 1885 election in the West Denbighshire constituency was a battle of landed interests. Colonel Cornwallis-West, Liberal, took the seat from C.S. Mainwaring, the Conservative candidate, with 60 per cent of the vote. Having defected to the Liberal Unionists Cornwallis-West took the seat unopposed in 1886, but at the 1892 election he was ousted by the Liberal, John Herbert Roberts, finally ending the landed interest in the constituency. By 1895 it became a safe Liberal seat, which went uncontested in 1900 and 1906.

At the 1885 election in the Flint Boroughs the Liberals held on against the landed interest of the Conservative candidate, P.P. Pennant, by a mere 122 votes. The Flint Boroughs constituency was a marginal seat and even though the Radical Herbert Lewis, held it at the 1886 and 1892 elections it never became completely safe for the Liberals. In July 1895 Pennant kept the Liberal majority down to 165, and in 1900 it only rose to 350. In Flint County another landed battle ensued in 1885 when Lord Grosvenor, nominally a Liberal, defeated the Mostyn family member H.R.H. Lloyd-Mostyn, representing the Conservatives, by over 1600 votes. At a by-election in March 1886 the constituency fell to the radical Liberal Samuel Smith, a Liverpool merchant, who was unopposed at the general election held the same year. But, Sir Robert Cunliffe a landowner, representing the Liberal Unionists, put up a stout fight against him in 1892 gaining over 40 per cent of the vote. Colonel H.R. L Howard, another Conservative landowner from St. Asaph, polled well against Smith at the 1895 election coming within 450 votes of unseating him on an electorate of 10,500, proving that the landed interests in the region were still capable of attracting a large vote.⁸⁵ This was borne out by the fact that George T. Kenyon a member of the landed Kenyon family took the Denbigh Boroughs for the Conservative party in 1885 with a majority of 306, the constituency being represented by him, with one exception in 1895, until 1906. However,

⁸⁵ J.J. Arnold and T.E. John, *Wales at Westminster* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1981)
All election statistics for the section 'North-east Wales, 1880-1906' have been taken from this publication. Samuel Smith extended his majority to 600 in 1900.

the facts cannot be avoided by 1906 the region of North-east Wales, with this one notable exception, was overwhelmingly Liberal in its affiliations.

Table 1.8: General election Results in Wales, 1885-1900.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Party.</u>	<u>No. Elected.</u>	<u>Total votes.</u>	<u>% of Vote.</u>
1885	Conservative	4	79,960	38.9
	Liberal	29	119,328	58.3
	Ind Lib/Lab	1	3,859	1.9
	Ind Lib	0	1,907	0.9
1886	Conservative	6	60,048	40.0
	Liberal	32	119,328	46.9
	Lib Uni	1	19,609	13.1
	Lib/Lab	1		
1892	Conservative	3	56,692	25.8
	Liberal	30	141,465	64.5
	Lib Uni	1	21,346	9.7
	Lib/Lab	1		
1895	Conservative	8	98,256	39.2
	Liberal	24	144,216	57.5
	Lib Uni	1	5,546	2.2
	Lib/Lab	1		
1900	Conservative	6	61,885	34.5
	Liberal	26	95,702	53.4
	Lib/Lab	1	10,135	5.7
	Lab	1	9,598	5.3

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 1.9: Election winners in North-east Wales 1885-1900

<u>1885</u>					
<u>Constituency.</u>	<u>Electorate.</u>	<u>T/O%.</u>	<u>Candidate.</u>	<u>Maj.</u>	<u>% Vote.</u>
Denbigh Boro's	3,414	94.2	G.T. Kenyon-C	306	54.8
Flint Boro's	3,773	94.0	John Roberts-L	122	51.7
E. Denbs	8,297	87.6	G.O. Morgan-L	393	52.7
W. Denbs	8,899	85.2	W.C. West-L	1594	60.5
Flint County	10,081	78.3	Lord Grosvenor-L	1626	60.3
<u>1886</u>					
Denbigh Boro's	3,414	90.9	G.T. Kenyon-C	211	53.4
Flint Boro's	3,773	85.6	John Roberts-L	424	56.6
E. Denbs	8,297	84.9	G.O. Morgan-L	26	50.2
W. Denbs	8,899	-----	W.C. West-LU	-----	-----
Flint County	10,081	-----	S. Smith-L	-----	-----

Table 1.9 cont

1892

Denbigh Boro's	3,414	90.9	G.T. Kenyon-C	98	51.5
Flint Boro's	3,710	85.6	J.H. Lewis-L	359	55.3
E. Denbs	9,941	84.9	G.O. Morgan-L	756	55.0
W. Denbs	9,915	-----	J.H. Roberts-L	2,333	66.9
Flint County	10,075	-----	S. Smith-L	1,452	59.4

1895

Denbigh Boro's	4,137	91.6	W.T. Howell-C	209	53.3
Flint Boro's	3,581	90.6	J.H. Lewis-L	347	55.5
E. Denbs	10,242	83.5	G.O.Morgan-L	1784	61.1
W. Denbs	9,290	82.3	J.H. Roberts-L	1603	60.9
Flint County	10,774	78.4	S. Smith-L	606	53.6

1900

Denbigh Boro's	4,137	87.4	G.T. Kenyon-C	110	51.5
Flint Boro's	3,581	88.6	J.H. Lewis-L	347	55.5
E. Denbs	10,242	-----	S. Moss-L	----	-----
W. Denbs	9,290	-----	J.H. Roberts-L	----	-----
Flint County	10,774	78.4	S. Smith-L	606	53.6

Information taken from: Arnold J. James and John E. Thomas, *Wales at Westminster, A History of the Parliamentary Representation of Wales, 1800-1979* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1981).

Table 1.10: Percentage of the Conservative Party Vote.

<u>Region</u>	<u>1885</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1892</u>	<u>1895</u>	<u>1900</u>
United Kingdom	43.5	51.4	47.0	49.1	50.3
Wales	38.9	40.0	35.6	41.4	34.5
North Wales	41.7	38.9*	39.4	42.9	47.9
North-east Wales	44.2	38.6	41.7	43.8	47.2
North-west Wales	40.2	40.8*	34.4	39.0	-----

North-west Wales constituencies were: Caernarfon Arfon, Caernarfon Eifion, Caernarfon Boroughs, Merionethshire and Anglesey.

*1886. North Wales including North-West Wales figures are inflated by Lib Unionist participation- in the West Denbighshire constituency Cornwallis west lib unionist was unopposed.

In 1900 only the Caernarfon Boroughs constituency was contested

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

CONCLUSION.

What the demographic, social and economic developments tell us is that by the early years of the twentieth century Wales was a far more anglicised country than it had been 100 years earlier. Even though the rural more westerly regions of the Principality were still essentially Welsh in their outlook, the anglicisation process that took hold in the east of the country was spreading ever westwards. In theory this was good news for the Conservative party, especially in those regions, including North-east Wales, which were

closest to the English border. As North-east Wales contained a high concentration of estate lands with English speaking landlords and large numbers of Anglican Church communicants, there potentially existed a more receptive audience for the Conservative message. Although this did not convert into political parity with the Liberal party, after all Denbighshire and Flintshire were still in essence Nonconformist and Liberal in their political allegiances, the fact that the Conservatives did better in the more easterly areas of North Wales is not coincidental. Moreover, in North-east Wales, the traditional Liberal orthodoxy of Free Trade came under severe pressure in those areas where large-scale industrialisation took place, especially in districts dominated by the steel trade where foreign imports affected profitability and employment levels. Consequently, the Conservative policy of economic tariffs had it was believed potential if advocated properly. Thus, even though, the Liberals dominated the political scene at the end of the nineteenth century there was still plenty for the Conservatives to draw strength from support and develop.

Between 1885 and 1900 the Denbigh Boroughs division remained in Conservative hands, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn came very close to unseating Osborn Morgan in East Denbighshire and regaining the constituency in 1886 and West Denbighshire only came into the radical Liberal fold from 1892. At the same time the two Flintshire constituencies were nearly lost for the Liberals in 1895, with two Conservative landowners, Colonel Howard in Flint County and Philip Pennant in Flint Boroughs, making huge inroads into the Liberal majorities, and neither of these seats were retained convincingly in 1900. Even as the Principality became a bastion for the Liberal party, the Conservative remained a vibrant force in North-east Wales.

What the election results prove was that between 1880 and 1906 the Conservative Party in North-east Wales was not nearly as marginalized as it was elsewhere in Wales. Its average share of the vote in the region held up reasonably well, polling in most cases at above or near forty per cent and even achieving 47.2 per cent at the 1900 general election. Their cause was helped by the significant presence of the Primrose League which maintained high membership figures, even in the west of the region where Liberalism was at its strongest. This suggests that there was strong support for the party throughout

North-east Wales aided by certain geographic and demographic circumstances. Here the Conservative vote was stronger and more resilient than it was in the rest of North Wales and in the Principality as a whole. Despite winning only one constituency regularly, the Denbigh Boroughs, its performance in comparison to the more westerly, more rural constituencies of North Wales where Welsh nonconformity and a deteriorating landlord-tenant relationship went had in hand is striking. (see Table 1.10).

CHAPTER 2: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES, 1906-1910.

INTRODUCTION: THE DECLINE AND FALL OF CONSERVATIVE HEGEMONY.

Between 1885 and 1906 the Conservative party dominated government, holding power, apart from two short periods of Liberal government, for nearly twenty years.¹ A landslide election victory in 1900 suggested that this dominance was set to continue but by 1904 with public opinion turning against Arthur Balfour and the Conservative government it became increasingly clear that the Liberals were on course to win the next general election. One reason for the collapse of government support appeared to be Balfour's 1902 Education Act, which was met with approval by most Conservatives and even some Liberals, but caused dissent amongst Nonconformists. Another was the launch of the Tariff Reform campaign by Joseph Chamberlain in May 1903, following a series of by-election defeats. Intended as a means to reverse by-election losses, Tariff Reform was borne out of a conviction that Britain's industrial supremacy and her links with the Empire needed safeguarding. Chamberlain argued for a revision of Free Trade orthodoxy through the introduction of protective tariffs that guaranteed preferential treatment to imperial imports. This appeared to steady the Conservative party as many MPs rallied to his cause and by-election results improved in the latter half of 1903.²

Chamberlain's support was substantial receiving backing from those who supported agricultural protection as well as those who maintained industrial interests, his faction numbering over 170 Conservative MP's.³ Opposed to his views were a group of powerful Free Trade and Unionists, including Lord Devonshire and Lords Robert and Hugh Cecil who believed they represented a large and growing strand of Free Trade Conservatives in the country. Between the two factions stood the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, who advocated a compromise approach of retaliation against those countries

¹ The Liberal party was in power for a short period during 1886 and between 1892 and 1895.

² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³ Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p.4.

which imposed excessive duties on British exports. According to E.H.H Green, Balfour's more cautious approach was borne out of an 'overriding desire to preserve the unity of the party', his concept of retaliation 'an idea that Britain should introduce duties on imported goods as a way of forcing protectionist nations to negotiate their tariffs downwards'.⁴ This it was hoped would satisfy those demanding Chamberlainite protectionist policies, but placate Free Traders by falling well short of a full tariff programme. Unfortunately for Balfour the argument degenerated into open warfare with both sides attacking each other rather than the Liberals. From the autumn of 1904 the swing against the government increased with by-election losses, most notably at Norwich and St Albans, as the arguments over Tariff Reform deepened, and by November 1905 Balfour's position as leader became vulnerable. With the pro-tariff National Union, the body that represented the Conservative Associations and grass root support, in revolt against his moderate approach and Free Traders hectoring for the defence of fiscal orthodoxy, Balfour was increasingly unable to command the support of the party.⁵ On 4 December 1905 he finally relinquished the seals of office, anticipating that a Liberal administration would struggle to govern effectively given the divisions that existed between its leaders over Home Rule and thus, he hoped perform badly at the imminent general election.⁶

This proved a forlorn hope and at the general election of 1906, the magnitude of the Conservative defeat matched their worst expectations as the party was reduced to a rump of 157 MP's with the Liberal party winning 400 seats and achieving a majority of 130 over all other parties. To add to the misery Balfour and all but four of his cabinet were amongst those defeated. Green argues that the size of the loss was exacerbated by the Liberal-Labour electoral pact agreed in 1903, which produced a united anti-Tory front.⁷ The effectiveness of this can be seen with Labour candidates contesting just 52 seats, two-thirds of them in Conservative regions or in double member

⁴ E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) pp.19-20.

⁵ N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People, The British General Elections of 1910* (London: Macmillan, 1972) pp.35-36.

⁶ A.K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide, the General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973) pp. 32-34.

⁷ E.H. H.Green, 'Radical Conservatism, the Electoral Genesis of Tariff Reform', *The Historical Journal*, volume 28, 1985, pp.681-683.

constituencies, with only thirteen three-cornered contests, leaving the Liberal party 'fairly free from disruptive attacks'.⁸ The pact and the enormity of their defeat fuelled Conservative fears that they faced an extended period in opposition as well as raising concerns that the Labour party now wielded undue influence over the government signalling the 'transformation of the Liberal party into a quasi-socialist party'.⁹

These developments prompted some Conservatives, after 1906, to try to cut the ground from underneath Labour by pursuing constructive populist policies that might attract working class votes and re-establish the party as an electoral force in the new political environment. At the heart of these ambitions stood Tariff Reform, as the means to make the party more electable by offering job security to the working-class from expanding imperial markets and the protection of British domestic industry from foreign competition, the revenue from which could be used to pay for social reforms. It was hardly surprising, then, that after the election defeat Joseph Chamberlain renewed his attack on the party machine to bring the organisation under his control, his aim being to sideline party traditionalists and neutralise opposition to Tariff Reform.¹⁰ By the end of 1908 the Chamberlainite National Union had brought much of the local party machinery under its control, with the vast majority of constituency associations committed to the full Tariff Reform programme.¹¹ As a result, the party started to do well in by-elections, commencing with a surprise victory in Mid-Devon on 17 January in 1908. A further six seats were won during the next eleven months with the swing against the Liberal government exceeding ten per cent.¹² To add to the Liberal woes the House of Lords rejected much of its legislative programme including such important Nonconformist measures as the Education and Licensing Bills. The Government also managed to alienate influential groups and supporters. Its education policy for example, antagonised Anglicans as well as Catholics, and with the 1902 Act remaining unaltered Nonconformists grew increasingly disaffected. Government land policies also alienated Liberal landowners and

⁸ D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* pp21-23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.685. See also D. Dutton, 'The Unionist Party and Social Policy, 1906-1914', *The Historical Journal*, 1981, p.871.

¹⁰ D. Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, pp.127-128.

¹¹ Blewett, *The Parties, the Peers and the People*, p.64.

the 1908 Licensing Bill generated opposition from the pro-Conservative Brewing industry, which lobbied the House of Lords to reject the legislation. Thus, even though many historians, amongst them David Dutton and E.H.H. Green, have seen the Edwardian period as one of crisis for the Conservatives, the four years between 1906 and 1910 can actually be interpreted more positively.¹³ The party after all succeeded in stopping much of the Liberal party's radical legislation and revived its election fortunes, despite the inhibiting nature of the Liberal/Labour election pact, culminating in an improved performance at the two 1910 general elections.

This chapter will examine the progress of the party in North-east Wales after the electoral disaster of 1906. It will demonstrate how this failure prompted a reorganisation of the party in the region, itself part of the Tariff Reformers bid to seize control of local party organisation, and how this impacted on the different Conservative party constituency associations. It will also show how the Conservative party successfully exploited the Liberal party's inability to amend Balfour's Education Act, resulting in successful local election campaigns and how each constituency association selected parliamentary candidates during the period – the first time this had been achieved since 1895. It will finally conclude that in spite of continuing Liberal party popularity in the region largely caused by its support for Nonconformist issues and the introduction of Lloyd George's Budget in 1909 the period marked an important step forward in the Conservative party's long-term revival in the region.

THE 1906 GENERAL ELECTION IN NORTH-EAST WALES.

As the general election approached the problem the Conservative party faced in North-east Wales was how to attract suitable parliamentary candidates given the steady but inexorable decline it had faced in its fortunes since 1885. At a general meeting of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association held on 24 February 1905 a resolution was passed to contest the constituency, but in

¹² Blewett, *The Parties, the Peers and the People*, p.47.

¹³ See for example Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, pp.1-5 and Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p. 1.

the face of Liberal dominance there were few interested candidates.¹⁴ Colonel H.R Hughes, of the Kinmel Park estate, struck a more realistic tone when he declared that a Liberal victory was a foregone conclusion and the ‘result could not fail to be a heavy Conservative defeat, probably the worst the Party has ever sustained and therefore a most unsatisfactory outlay of money’.¹⁵ Consequently the decision of the Association was overturned, with the Liberal Sir John Herbert Roberts returned unopposed. It was a similar story in East Denbighshire where since 1897 the seat had been held uncontested by the Liberal Samuel Moss. The *North Wales Guardian* noted, rather understandably, that in the political climate which prevailed ‘the Unionist candidate had one been brought forward – would have stood but a poor chance of being returned for East Denbighshire’.¹⁶ The only contest in Denbighshire took place in Denbigh Boroughs where the sitting MP, a Conservative, George T. Kenyon, uncle of the Fourth Baron Tyrell Kenyon, was standing again. In Flintshire, however, both constituencies were contested. In Flint Boroughs Sir John Eldon Bankes, a successful judge and local landowner was chosen to fight the constituency. In the County division, Harold Edwards, the son of the Bishop of St. Asaph was selected shortly after Balfour had chosen to resign. With the election prospects looking bleak for the Conservatives in the region – even in Denbigh Boroughs which they had held since 1885 they must have been apprehensive given the prevailing political climate – the attention now turned to the campaigns and the issues to see if the candidates could make up ground.

The issue of Tariff Reform dominated the general election campaign. Given the difficulties he had had uniting the party on the issue Balfour’s election address remained vague on the subject merely stating that he believed in ‘adapting our policy, in fiscal matters as in all matters to the changing conditions of a changing World’.¹⁷ At the same time most Conservatives believed that some sort of fiscal reform was needed to reduce unemployment

¹⁴ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, Minutes and Committee Minutes 1903-1914,DD/PN/204, General Meeting of the Association, 24 February 1905.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, H.R.Hughes Kinmel Park Estate to Annual General Meeting, 28 October 1904.

¹⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 20 July 1906.

¹⁷ I. Dale, ed, *Conservative party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* London: Routledge, 2000). See ‘Conservative Party General Election Manifesto 1906.

and thus Balfour added to his address that should the electorate 'return the Unionist party to power, it is to the reform of our fiscal system that its attention ought first to be directed'.¹⁸ Consequently, 98 per cent of Conservative candidates mentioned Tariff Reform during their campaigns.¹⁹ However an analysis of Conservative election addresses undertaken by A.K. Russell shows that the Conservative party was split as to what form the fiscal system should take as 55 per cent of Conservative candidates shared Balfour's position on retaliatory taxes while 40 per cent supported Chamberlain's Tariff programme in one form or another.²⁰

Such divisions of opinion were also evident in North-east Wales where Tariff Reform was also the leading question in the campaign, but the Nonconformist issues of Welsh Church Disestablishment and education also strongly featured.²¹ In Denbigh Boroughs G.T.Kenyon campaigned vigorously on the issue of Tariff Reform. In a speech at Denbigh he argued that by placing tax on freely imported goods the Conservatives 'would stimulate decaying British industries, provide work for the unemployed and ensure relief from starvation for millions of people in Britain'.²² Tariff Reform proved, as elsewhere, a difficult policy to sell in North-east Wales and was not helped by the schism between the Free Trade and Tariff Reform factions. Indeed, rather foolishly, Kenyon's election address drew attention to these divisions:

As regards the fiscal question there had been a divergence of opinion amongst our party between what the other side chose to call Balfourites and Chamberlainites, but from subsequent speeches from these two gentlemen it was quite clear that both aimed at the same thing - an improvement in the trade of the country.²³

Kenyon's opponent was Clement Edwards, chief architect of the Trades Disputes Act of 1906, and former personal secretary to Lloyd George (see

¹⁸ I. Dale, ed, *Conservative party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁹ Russell, *Liberal Landslide, the General Election of 1906*, p65

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*. pp.214-218.

²² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 6 January 1906.

²³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 6 January 1906.

Appendices, p322). He quickly latched on to the fact that the Conservative party was split on Tariff Reform while pointing out that initially Kenyon was unsure about a full Tariff Reform programme – first supporting Balfour’s position, against the apparent wishes of his local party, then to comply with it joining the ranks of the Tariff Reformers in time for the election campaign.²⁴ Such divisions and differences of opinion on Tariff Reform between members in local parties was not unusual at the 1906 election, and obviously caused difficulties for the Conservatives in presenting a coherent argument on the policy. In his study ‘Middle Class Realignment and Party Politics In Norwich, 1900 -1932’ B.M. Doyle points out that in the double member constituency of Norwich there was not only conflict between an existing Conservative member but also between a prospective candidate and his father who was leader of the local Conservative Constituency Association:

Problems for the Conservatives stemmed from divisions within their own party and personalities. The Conservative candidate in...1906 was Ernest Wild a local man ... who was proud of his Tariff reform credentials, whilst his father, the leader of the local party, was a weak Balfourite. The division between candidate and party leader was exacerbated by the stance of the other Conservative member, Samuel Hoare who was an out and out Free Fooder.²⁵

Similar divisions were also evident in Flintshire where the Liberals were also able to exploit divisions over Tariff Reform in the Conservative party. In Flint Boroughs, Sir John Eldon Bankes, unlike G.T Kenyon, supported Balfour’s retaliationist position on Tariff Reform. In his election address Bankes confirmed that:

Upon the fiscal question I am a supporter of the policy associated with Mr.Balfour, I believe in as little restriction upon the absolute freedom of trade as possible, but I think that the time has come to endeavour to obtain free access for our manufactures to the markets of such foreign countries as are now largely closed to us by hostile tariffs. These tariffs do greatly hamper the export trade of

²⁴ *North Wales Times*, 30 December 1905.

²⁵ B.M. Doyle, ‘Middle Class Realignment and Party Politics in Norwich, 1900-1932’, University of East Anglia, PhD, 1990,p.54.

the country, and thereby reduce the amount of work available for our workingmen.²⁶

A few days later Bankes argued that Tariff Reform was a policy ‘that should change from time to time, not only on account of things at home, but because of things abroad’.²⁷ While campaigning on behalf of the Liberal cause in the constituency Lloyd George seized on his comments as evidence of vacillation and division in the Conservative party. At Holywell, during the second week of campaigning, he ridiculed Bankes by saying that he ‘had read since he came into the constituency...the address of the Conservative–Unionist-Fiscal Reform-Balfourite Retaliation candidate; he really did not know, but he did not think from his address he really knew himself what he was’.²⁸

In Flint County Harold Edwards, also supported Balfour’s fiscal policy.²⁹ This was evident at Prestatyn where he argued that he approached the question of Tariff Reform as ‘a firm believer in Free Trade. But to be successful Free Trade must be universal. As things stood, though our hands were tied behind our back while the foreigner hit us in the face.’³⁰ His campaign, though, was undermined by a sustained attack on him in the local Liberal press as the newspapers sought to expose differences between him and his father over fiscal policy. As the *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, commented:

The Bishop of St. Asaph has been heard to declare that if a candidate Liberal or Conservative were to come out as an opponent of Free Trade he would be inclined to appear on the platform to oppose him. Well known as the Bishop’s views are to many people on the fiscal question, we should like to be informed whether they are shared by his son?³¹

Perhaps more damaging was the newspaper’s assessment of Edwards’ first campaign speech, which it claimed was ‘more Liberal than Conservative’.³² This accusation was also levelled at Lord Mostyn who took

²⁶ *The County Herald*, 12 January 1906.

²⁷ *Flintshire Observer*, 18 January 1906.

²⁸ *The County Herald*, 19 January 1906.

²⁹ *Flintshire Observer*, 4 January 1906.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 January 1906.

³¹ *Rhyl Record and Advertiser*, 6 January 1906.

³² *The County Herald*, 13 January 1906.

Balfour's line that retaliatory taxes against countries which imposed duties on British exports was the way forward, rather than a full blown Tariff Reform programme. In a speech at Rhyl he announced that 'on the fiscal question he was himself rather inclined to be a Free Trader. He had been brought up a Free Trader and had always been one'.³³ If Lord Mostyn was (or so it appeared) a little confused on Tariff Reform, then he was of no more certainty over his party's prospects at the forthcoming election, when he declared 'with regard to the Conservative Party they may say they had a long innings, and perhaps it was now the time of the other side to go in'.³⁴ He further asserted that the Liberal candidate, Herbert Lewis, 'was a gentleman born in their parish, [who had] lived in Mostyn for many years and was the friend of many of them. He was a model member of parliament and he only wished Mr. Lewis was on their side and that they had not to fight him'.³⁵ Lord Mostyn could hardly have given his political opponents a more ringing endorsement.

It would appear, then, that the problem for the Conservative candidates in North-east Wales was their failure to speak with any clarity or unity on Tariff Reform. G.T. Kenyon's late conversion to the policy and his attempts to demonstrate party unity only helped highlight the differences between party leaders on the initiative. Eldon Bankes appeared unclear as to what the Tariff programme actually was and Lord Mostyn admitted he was both a Free Trader and a Balfourite. These divisions reflected the discord and confusion over the issue in the party nationally. According to A.K. Russell 55-60 per cent of Conservative candidates across the United Kingdom took refuge in advocating 'vague evasive' Balfourite formulas during the election campaign.³⁶ On the other hand 'very few candidates, even among the Tariff Reformers, came out with a clear definition for Chamberlain's general Tariff...and rather more...went out of their way to make it clear that, although supporters of fiscal reform they were hostile to anything approaching protection'.³⁷ Given this uncertainty it is hardly surprising that the policy failed to make any positive

³³ *Flintshire Observer*, 28 December 1905.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p.87.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

impact during the campaign in North-east Wales or the United Kingdom as a whole.

Forced onto the defensive over Tariff Reform, the Conservative party was also under pressure over the education question. Balfour's 1902 Education Act was still the law of the land, but Liberals were pledged to administering it differently pending its alteration.³⁸ A sense of injustice was strongly felt by Nonconformists throughout Wales, who demanded that voluntary Anglican and Catholic schools be brought under public control.³⁹ In Denbigh Boroughs G.T Kenyon tried to counteract these arguments by suggesting such control would mean the end of Bible teaching in schools, commenting 'he believed himself that not one parent in a hundred desired that their children should not be taught the Bible'.⁴⁰ In Flint County Harold Edwards went a step further by saying 'if they handed over the voluntary schools to the local authorities that particular religious education which they desired would become illegal'.⁴¹ Such arguments had little impact and education remained a vote winner for the Liberals. Indeed, it was a topic that the Conservatives would have been better advised to avoid altogether during the election campaign.

Unable to convince the electorate on Tariff Reform policies and ignored on education, Conservative candidates in North-east Wales faced an uphill battle. Unsurprisingly the election results were disastrous for the party. In Denbigh Boroughs G.T Kenyon, the one sitting Conservative MP, fell to Clement Edwards with a majority of 503 the largest majority ever recorded in the division. Kenyon later claimed he lost the constituency because working-class Labour voters were not canvassed in Wrexham until already committed to his radical opponent, a conclusion confirmed by the *Denbighshire Free Press*:

The victory is really due to the increased Labour vote. Since 1900 the character of the Wrexham electorate has been changed by the increase of votes to the extent of 800, practically all colliers and miners who have come into the

³⁸ *North Wales Times*, 9 December 1905

³⁹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp.184-187.

⁴⁰ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 13 January 1906.

⁴¹ *Flintshire Observer*, 4 January 1906.

borough from East Denbighshire principally, and who supported the radical candidate.⁴²

In Flint Boroughs and Flint County the Liberal candidates, Howell Idris and Herbert Lewis, were returned with large majorities. The swing to Lewis in Flint County was over ten per cent compared to the general election of 1900 as Harold Edwards' share of the vote crumbled to just above 36 per cent. In the Boroughs Bankes' vote remained at the same level as 1900, which given the general collapse of the party and the swing to the Liberal party everywhere at the 1906 general election, was something of an achievement. (see tables 2.2 and 2.3). Here then amongst the despair of 1906 were the seeds of optimism, evidence that the Conservative vote could survive in reasonable order the Liberal onslaught.

The election in North-east Wales largely corresponded to the same trends and fortunes faced by the Conservative party nationally. The Liberal party galvanised by their support for Free Trade were able to exploit divisions in the Conservative party over Tariff Reform and label the policy as the harbinger of food taxes. As Russell comments:

Tariff Reform....never commanded the brains and hearts of the people, it was certainly tried and found wanting by all those commercial and consumer groups interested first and foremost in cheap food and raw materials.⁴³

Consequently, across the country voters rejected Tariff Reform and opted for the 'fiscal status quo'.⁴⁴ Overall, the Liberal party won 400 seats (see table 2.1) and its gains were remarkable, winning 223 seats from the Conservatives and losing only four as it succeeded in totalling 400 seats. In London they gained 31 seats and made significant other gains across the country. Even in the rural areas where they had not done well since 1885 the Liberals made substantial gains. In Lancashire the Liberal party won 33 seats, gaining 22 from the Conservatives; in the South-east they won 32 seats gaining 27 seats from the

⁴² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 27 January 1906.

⁴³ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 177.

⁴⁴ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p. 177

Conservatives and across all the Scottish regions the Liberals gained 22 seats.⁴⁵

In North-east Wales, the Conservative party's average share of the vote fell by just over 7.5 per cent compared to 1900 in the three constituencies it contested. (see table 2.3). This was a little more than the party suffered nationally as its share of the vote fell by nearly seven per cent. This is probably explained by the fact that the party only contested three seats in the region and that the ten percent drop in Harold Edwards' vote in Flint County, where Lord Mostyn gave the popular sitting Liberal MP, Herbert Lewis, a ringing endorsement skewed the results. By comparison, in the whole of Wales the Conservative vote fell by only 4.7 per cent compared to 1900, but now its share of the vote fell below thirty per cent for the first time and it lost all six MPs who had won in 1900. One ray of sunshine, however, was that the share of the vote for the party in North-east Wales averaged nearly 40 per cent, which compared favourably to the share of the vote as a whole in the Principality. (see table 2.3). What the results indicated, bad as they were, was that there was still a substantial vote in the region to be harnessed and galvanised.

Table 2.1
The 1906 General Election.

<u>Party</u>	<u>U.K. seats</u>	<u>% of the vote</u>	<u>Wales seats</u>	<u>% of the vote</u>
Liberal	400	49.5	32* ²	60.8 ²
Conservative	157	43.4	0	29.8
Labour	30	5.9	2	7.9 * ³
Irish Nationalist	83	0.6		

*2 Includes 4 Lib- Lab candidates gaining 8.3% of the vote.

*3 Includes Independent Labour candidate gaining 2.3% of the vote.

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997* (Aberystwyth: Y Lolfa, 1998).

Table 2.2
General Election in Northeast Wales, Results 1906

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Majority</u>
Denbigh East	Unopposed				
Denbigh West	Unopposed				
DenbighBoro's	2533	56.4	1960	43.6	Lib + 573
Flint County	6294	63.8	3572	36.2	Lib + 2722
Flint Boro's	1899	55.5	1523	44.5	Lib + 376

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

⁴⁵ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p62.

Table 2.3.
Percentage Vote of the Conservative Party.

<u>Region</u>	<u>General Elections</u>					
	1885	1886	1892	1895	1900	1906
United Kingdom	43.5	51.4	47.0	49.1	50.3	43.4
Wales	38.9	40.0	35.6	41.4	34.5	29.8
North-east Wales	44.2	38.6	41.7	43.8	47.2	39.7

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Election, 1885-1997*.

REORGANISATION AND RECOVERY, 1906-1910.

The 1906 election defeat demonstrated that the Conservative Party organisation was ill equipped for new types of challenges (Labour). The Liberal Party had reorganised their associations and party machinery, as early as 1902, whereas the Unionists had been ‘struggling with the combined effects of apathy, inexperience and division’.⁴⁶ A.K. Russell has noted that as late as 2 January 1906, a mere five days before polling, the Conservatives were still appealing for volunteer workers to help canvass voters while the system of party agents representing area offices and established to bring Central Office into closer contact with local party organisation, had almost completely broken down.⁴⁷ In the aftermath of the general election defeat the party organisation appeared in urgent need of repair. Under pressure from Chamberlain who was keen to capture the party structure for his Tariff Reform campaign, Balfour agreed to a party meeting at which he announced the setting up of a small committee to examine party organisation.⁴⁸ So it was in May 1906, a standing advisory committee was formed, its aim to liase between the Balfourite Central Office and the Chamberlainite National Union. As a direct challenge to these initiatives and to Balfour’s authority as leader, a separate committee was established by the National Union to look at party organisation. This greatly alarmed Unionist Free Traders as it looked like a plan to seize control of Central Office.⁴⁹ However, the Conservative leadership successfully repulsed Chamberlain’s attack by delaying any immediate actions or decisions and Chamberlain’s stroke in early July 1906 largely ended hopes of a successful

⁴⁶ Russell, *Liberal Landslide, The General Election of 1906*, p.51.

⁴⁷ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, pp.51-52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁴⁹ Russell, *Liberal Landslide* p. 128.

Chamberlainite challenge.⁵⁰ Instead the Chamberlainite National Union now turned to ensuring control of its own affairs and removing any influence Central Office had over its business. An organisational committee took over from Central Office to supervise agents and local parties with the result that by July 1906 the National Union structure had been reorganised with most provincial divisions abolished as each county was made responsible for its own organisation.⁵¹

In Wales this de-centralisation scheme saw Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire made into separate divisions while the eight South Wales constituencies outside these counties continued as a separate division. In North Wales, the NWDNU was left as it was prior to the 1906 general election with all twelve constituencies comprising the division. A new Executive Council and Finance Committee was established in May 1906 with Lord Penrhyn elected President; the Earl of Powis, Vice-President; Lord Kenyon, Chairman; L.A. Brodrick, Treasurer and R.A. Mainwaring, Secretary (see Appendices, Structure of Wales/North-east Wales Conservatives 1885-1918 pp320-321).⁵² Each member of the Executive Committee came from the landed gentry and each was a committed Tariff Reformer, confirming the takeover by the Chamberlainite faction.

On 30 March 1906 Conservative representatives from all over the region met at Eaton Hall, the seat of the Duke of Westminster, to discuss the party organisation. Lord Kenyon opened the proceedings by reading a letter from Lord Penrhyn, who was unable to attend, but emphasised that there was:

.... A paramount need and imperative necessity for a thorough revision, and where necessary complete construction of the electoral machinery in all the constituencies; and I hope that in dealing with this part of the question the policy of the new broom and the clean sweep, wherever it is wanted may be adopted..... I should like to go a step further and say that as the last election taught us the lesson that Labour have come to stay, it seems to me that we ought accordingly to consider whether it would not be wiser for our party to search in some constituencies for Unionist or Conservative working men who would be

⁵⁰ Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, p. 129.

⁵¹ J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (London: Longman, 1978) p. 26.

⁵² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 5 May 1906.

willing to serve efficiently as our parliamentary representatives instead of our going on in the old groove of the selection of candidates amongst a limited number of persons, who are higher in the social scale.⁵³

What Lord Penrhyn had identified was the need to modernise the party and incorporate a more diverse membership, including working class candidates. As a staunch supporter of Tariff Reform his recommendations reflected the wider aims of the Chamberlainite Tariff Reform faction to capture the party organisation, extend the party's appeal and remove opponents of Tariff Reform. As Dutton confirms:

Reorganisation and the ultimate triumph of tariff reform were inextricably linked in Chamberlain's mind...The old structure, Chamberlain believed, had been finally discredited 'and a great democratic and representative organisation' should now be substituted in its place...the party's representative association should now be reviewed with the object of popularising them, and of securing working class involvement.⁵⁴

Thus Lord Penrhyn hoped to make the party more inclusive, attract working-class votes and undermine the advance of Labour and its electoral pact with the Liberal party. It was with the intention of addressing this and the concerns of party activists that the following resolutions drafted at Eaton Hall were unanimously passed:

1. That it is desirable to perfect and extend the organisation of the Unionist Party so as to enlist the counsel and co-operation of all ranks in the promotion of its aims.
2. That it is desirable that every seat should be contested at the next election, and that every candidate should be selected with reasonable dispatch.
3. That it is expedient to enlist the services of women of all ranks in furtherance of the ends of the Party.
4. That this conference is of the opinion that several efforts should immediately be made in each constituency to raise by annual subscriptions a fund which all

⁵³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 31 March 1906.

⁵⁴ Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, p.127.

Unionists should be invited to subscribe, according to their means for the purpose of organisation and the furtherance of Unionist principles.

5. That a representative committee be appointed to confer with the committee appointed by Central Council of the National Union as to the best means for carrying into effect in conjunction with the county and borough Associations in North Wales the above resolutions.⁵⁵

The problems that faced the NWDNU were those it had faced prior to the 1906 general election – the constituency association was and is very much, as Stuart Ball points out, ‘the vital unit of organisation within the party’. Its centrality has been buttressed by a constantly re-iterated doctrine of local autonomy.⁵⁶ As a result not all constituency associations in North-east Wales complied with the resolutions and those that did only applied them in piecemeal fashion.

The West Denbighshire Constitutional Association proved receptive to Lord Penrhyn’s suggestions and the NWDNU’s resolutions. A review held shortly after the election revealed that there were difficulties in a number of areas – most notably the failure to appoint a parliamentary candidate and the lack of funds.⁵⁷ In this they were not alone. Russell confirms that by the end of 1905 ‘the whole Unionist organisation had become distinctly rather sleepy’ while T.A. Jenkins’ study of the Conservative party in Thornbury, a rural county constituency in Gloucestershire – not too dissimilar to West Denbighshire - reveals a Conservative Association in December 1906 ‘sunk by apathy’ in many areas with local committees ‘virtually moribund’ in others.⁵⁸ However, the West Denbighshire Association took the decision to appoint a sub- committee to ‘consider the present and future position of the party’.⁵⁹

After deliberating the four-man sub-committee reported to a General Meeting of the Association held on 23 April 1906, making a number of recommendations, which they proposed be adopted by the late Summer of 1906:

⁵⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 31 March 1906.

⁵⁶ Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation’ p261.

⁵⁷ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/204, Special General Meeting of the Association, 26 Feb. 1906.

⁵⁸ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p.51; T.A. Jenkins, ‘Political Life in Late Victorian Britain: The Conservatives in Thornbury, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 23 (part 2), 2004, p.223.

⁵⁹ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/204, Special General Meeting of the Association 26 Feb. 1906.

- a. Voluntary work be utilised in preparing the Register.
- b. A secretary be appointed without salary for one year, but whose travelling expenses and out of pocket expenses be paid by the Committee.
- c. An agent or agents be paid by the Association to appear in the Revision Courts on behalf of the four registration districts (Llangollen and Llansilin; Ruthin and Denbigh; Colwyn Bay and Abergele; Llanrwst, Pentrefoelas and Cerrig-y-Drudion).
- d. The appointment of a Chairman in each electoral division (i.e. County Council division).
- e. The formation of parish committees.⁶⁰

These resolutions did not directly address those concerns expressed by the NWDNU, but did address the problems of Conservative organisation in the constituency. All the resolutions were adopted, a secretary and four revision court agents were appointed, but bearing in mind the Eaton Hall meeting it was decided not to have them printed as rules as it was envisaged that the resolutions emanating from the NWDNU would in due course also be adopted.⁶¹ Indeed, over the next couple of years the West Denbighshire Association started to implement the NWDNU's as well as their own recommendations.

During 1906 the Association set about introducing a new organisation structure, including the appointment of a Chairman in each electoral division, and the formation of Conservative committees in each parish in the constituency.⁶² The new structure was adopted during the latter half of 1906 and by the end of 1907 the Association reported 'the scheme began in 1906 is being perfected as much as possible and has succeeded in breathing new life into the cause of Unionism ...parish committees have been organised in 43 parishes'.⁶³ To aid the new structure successful meetings were held in villages and towns throughout the constituency while thousands of leaflets were distributed.⁶⁴

⁶⁰DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/204, General Meeting of the Association, 23 April 1906.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶² Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/204, General Meeting of West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, 23 April 1906.

⁶³*Ibid.*, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, Report for the Year 1907.

⁶⁴ Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/204, General Meeting of West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, 23 April 1906.

Not content with these new ideas and structures the Association went one step further in 1908 and adopted a working-class candidate, Sam Thompson, as per Lord Penrhyn's recommendations. Thompson was an examiner who hailed from Tylorstown in the Rhondda Valley, where in 1902 he became Chairman of the town's Conservative club and Chairman of the Rhondda Conservative Association before becoming a member of the South Wales Division of the National Union. Thompson was engaged by the Tariff Reform League for the 1906 general election campaign and was a sub-agent to Griffith-Boscawen at the East Denbighshire by-election in April 1906. He was also one of the main speakers engaged by the West Denbighshire Conservative Association for a series of meetings held during January 1908 aimed at educating the farming community and working men into the benefits of colonial preference and protection policies.⁶⁵ As a result he came to the attention of party leaders who subsequently championed his candidature for West Denbighshire, still without a parliamentary candidate in June 1908. In recommending him to Colwyn Bay Unionists Lord Kenyon remarked:

That in Mr. Thompson, whom he warmly recommended as a candidate for the division, they had a man who would prove that the other party did not possess a monopoly of able workingmen politicians ...he would like to see a local resident come forward but as none suitable could be found, he hoped Colwyn Bay would support Mr. Thompson who was a good fellow and a very zealous worker.⁶⁶

Sam Thompson not only fulfilled Lord Penrhyn's ambitions to field working class candidates in North Wales, but also gave the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association an opportunity to adopt a candidate who knew the difficulties faced by Conservatives in the constituency, having previously campaigned in this Liberal stronghold. Although the leaders would have preferred a local candidate, Thompson's knowledge of Welsh was a bonus enabling the Conservative party to speak to the largely rural electorate in their native tongue. Consequently at a meeting of the West Denbighshire

⁶⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 4 July 1908.

⁶⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 27 June 1908.

Conservatives at the end of June 1908 Thompson was selected as candidate. The *Denbighshire Free Press* commented:

West Denbighshire in adopting a workingman Conservative candidate has given a lead to other constituencies. The importance of this step lies in the fact that there is a movement afoot having for its object the formation of a Conservative labour group in the House of Commons, and it only needs the return of Mr. Thompson and a few others like him to ensure the successful inauguration of the movement.⁶⁷

Parliamentary campaigns were expensive and according to Ball most 'local Associations expected their candidates to be men of standing and of means. They normally had to provide the expenses for each election, to pay a substantial annual subscription to the constituency association and of course to maintain themselves'.⁶⁸ This was obviously not possible with Sam Thompson, but the West Denbighshire Association's finances were in a healthy state - some of the wealthiest landowners in North Wales lived in West Denbighshire such as the Mainwaring and Wynne families.⁶⁹ Furthermore, to ensure that funds were in place the Association instituted a new subscription collection scheme in April 1907 whereby parish committees were made responsible for collecting small subscriptions and a new body of collectors was created to approach all probable subscribers with a view to maximising funds. So successful was this system that by the end of 1907 over £320 had been collected with a balance in hand at the bank of £85. This enabled the Association to support Thompson with campaign literature, some of which was in Welsh, and distribute free the newspaper '*The North Wales Conservative and Unionist*'. Even so, to fund Thompson's campaigns many West Denbighshire Conservatives doubled their subscriptions during 1909 and 1910.⁷⁰ This probably explains why Sam Thompson was one of only eight working class Conservatives standing at the January 1910 general election -

⁶⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 4 July 1908.

⁶⁸ S.Ball, *Conservative Party and British Politics, 1902-1951* (London: 1995) p.17

⁶⁹ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, DD/PN/204, Printed balance sheets, 1907-1915.

⁷⁰ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association and Committee Minutes 1903-1914, DD/PN/204, Report for the year 1908.

less well off constituency associations were simply unable to afford the expense of running such a candidate.⁷¹ Thus, what the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association did between 1906 and 1910 was re-invigorate Conservatism in Denbighshire by overhauling its organisation, adopting a systematic approach to subscription collection, furthering the political aims of the party with concentrated leaflet distribution, and appointing a working class candidate. In doing so it not only applied most of the NWDNU's resolutions but also introduced some of their own schemes.

In November 1907, on the retirement of G.T. Kenyon, the Denbigh Boroughs Association chose William Arthur Ormsby-Gore, son of the Third Baron Harlech, as their parliamentary candidate, thus ignoring Lord Penrhyn's advice (see Appendices, p323).⁷² His selection owed much to his family's political connections and the landed network that existed in the region. Lord Kenyon, Chairman of the Denbigh Boroughs Association, was Lord Harlech's cousin and thus had very strong family connections. Furthermore, Lord Harlech was the former Tory MP for Oswestry and Chairman of its Unionist Association, and, perhaps even more significantly, was a regular contributor to the Denbigh Boroughs Constitutional Association while his wife Lady Harlech, was President of the Wrexham Women's Unionist Association. Lord Harlech's subscription of £100 each year was obviously important, but the relationship between the Kenyon and Harlech families would surely have been the deciding factor in Ormsby-Gore's appointment. Nevertheless, the choice of a landed aristocrat did not appear an inspired one given that Wrexham was the largest town in the constituency and the centre of the mining industry in the region and was lost in 1906 so the party believed, to working class votes going to Labour.⁷³

Yet the Conservatives had developed strong ties with the working-class in the division. As early as 1905 the Wrexham Conservative and Unionist Workingmen's Association was formed and by 1908 it claimed to have 800 members, most of whom were on the electoral register.⁷⁴ This was in stark contrast to the Independent Labour Party, formed in 1897, which despite being

⁷¹ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 230.

⁷² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 3 August 1907.

⁷³ *Denbigh Free Press*, 27 January 1906.

one of the first four established in Wales, and the only one in the North of the country, suffered from low membership.⁷⁵ The allure of the Conservative party in the town was probably based on a deliberate move by the Wrexham Association to emphasise the social aspect of its organisation. The emphasis, as with most Conservative Workingmen's Associations, was on social events, spurning the puritanical temperance atmosphere of many Liberal and Labour Associations.⁷⁶ Between 1906 and 1910 the Association redoubled its efforts to increase working class membership: meetings were held on a regular basis and picnics, garden parties, fetes, social gatherings and snooker competitions were all held in a bid to generate working-class support. Attendances were often high, for example, the third annual picnic to Horsley Hall Rossett, five miles south of Wrexham, attracted approximately 500 people.⁷⁷ Yet to ensure that the Conservative cause was not forgotten every gathering was accompanied by a political speech introducing Conservative opinions under the guise of convivial entertainment.

Without permanent premises of its own between 1905 and 1908 the workingmen's movement met at several locations in the Wrexham area, but finally in May 1908 the Association moved to a permanent premises in the town centre. At the opening Dr. Edward Jones, chairman, in reviewing the history of the Association said:

It had now been in existence about three years and as they knew had been labouring under a very great disadvantage for want of suitable premises, but in spite of this their political enthusiasm was such that they had put up with the conditions. The membership had grown to such an extent that the leaders of the Conservative party thought that recognition should be given to what was undoubtedly that portion of the party which had always been ready and willing, although a new force in the town to throw in its lot in the time of need... The membership had greatly increased and he hoped during the next year to see instead of 800 a membership of 1800.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 15 May 1908.

⁷⁵ Jones, p91.

⁷⁶ J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', pp.636-637.

⁷⁷ *North Wales Guardian*, 12 June 1908.

⁷⁸ *North Wales Guardian* 15 May 1908.

With such large membership and now a permanent premises the future looked bright for the Association. Although no membership figures were published at the annual meeting in February 1909 it was reported ‘the membership had greatly increased and the balance in the bank [had more] than doubled’.⁷⁹

Unfortunately there is little information available regarding attempts by the Conservatives to harness working class support elsewhere in the region. It appears that in Flintshire there were no sustained efforts to increase working class membership. Nonetheless, the East Denbighshire Association appeared to be doing more to attract working-class members as at the end of October 1909 a new Unionist Club was opened at the Plas Kynaston estate, a few miles south of Wrexham, for the workmen of the Cefn, Rhosymedre and Acrefair polling districts which immediately attracted 130 members.⁸⁰ No further information exists as to the success of such initiatives in East Denbighshire and it was probably only in the industrial areas in and around Wrexham, perhaps understandably given the loss of working class votes in 1906, that most efforts were made.

Resolution 3 at the Eaton Hall meeting stated that it was ‘expedient to enlist the services of women’. This did not mean that Conservatives in North-east Wales suddenly anticipated an extended role for women in political debate. Female suffrage was still some way off and while every Conservative leader since Disraeli expressed sympathy for women’s suffrage they did not take the opportunity to extend the franchise when in office. As J. Lovenduski, P. Norris and C. Burgess have pointed out ‘the Conservatives were almost continuously in office between 1886 and 1905 and hence had no need to run the risks involved in extending the franchise’.⁸¹ With the change in the political landscape after 1906 the profile of women’s franchise increased in prominence, but even now attitudes towards the subject were mixed in the Conservative party – G. E. Maguire concludes that – ‘if the Conservative leadership was tepidly in favour of women’s suffrage, much of the rank and

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 Feb. 1909.

⁸⁰ *North Wales Guardian*, 29 October 1909.

⁸¹ Lovenduski, Norris and Burgess, ‘The Party and Women’, p 613.

file were not'.⁸² Yet their potential as party activists, women made excellent canvassers, was certainly acknowledged and this gave the Conservative party the incentive to embrace women as party workers.⁸³

The Denbigh Boroughs Association was the first in North-east Wales to organise a women's membership with the creation in June 1907 of the Wrexham Conservative and Unionist Women's Association.⁸⁴ The Wrexham Women's Association held a variety of functions, often heavily biased towards social and convivial entertainments, but as with the Workingmen's Association there was also some emphasis on political induction. As a result the Women's Associations meetings educated their members in the issues of the day including Free Trade and Tariff Reform. In Wrexham the Association proved to be so successful that by June 1907 it was, according to the *North Wales Guardian*, one of the 'most flourishing ladies organisations in the whole of North Wales and the Border counties'.⁸⁵

The Wrexham Association also gave women a political voice, albeit a minor one, for the first time. At the inaugural meeting of this body in June 1907, one of its members, Mrs. Collum, appeared eager to promote women's roles in politics while acknowledging their accepted position as Conservative women:

She need not apologise to those of the superior sex for women taking an interest in politics for she was sure at the present time everyone realised that women must take an interest in politics because politics meant the welfare of the nation. They could not separate women from the nation for a nation was only composed of homes after all and just as women had their proper sphere so they had their own sphere in the wider life of the nation ... she thought in influencing public opinion and in forwarding the Unionist cause in a legitimate way, the women would be doing a great public cause.⁸⁶

⁸²G.E Maguire, *Conservative Women, A History of Women and the Conservative Party, 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998) p.64.

⁸³B. Campbell, *The Iron Ladies, Why do Women Vote Tory* (London: Virago, 1987) p.22.

⁸⁴*North Wales Guardian*, 14 June 1907.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*North Wales Guardian*, 14 June 1907.

Mrs. Collum's speech very much reflected the dual roles Conservative women were expected to perform in the early twentieth century society. This was a careful blend of private and public roles, designed not to undermine men's dominant position in politics-supporting Conservative party policy, but emphasising the virtues of a stable home. As Beatrix Campbell concludes: 'Women, for Conservatism, embodied the link between private and public: for Conservative women, the home was never fully separated from 'the world', it was always the altar of Conservatism's moral values. The home and the family were the crucible and the cause of capital accumulation'.⁸⁷ Thus women were seen as vital for creating a happy domestic environment, the backbone of a secure wealthy stable capitalist state, from which men, and in particular Conservative men, could influence and direct political and economic affairs. It was by perpetuating this careful balancing act that the Wrexham Women's Association continued to flourish.

At the Association's First Annual General Meeting held in November 1908, Mrs. W.C Bridgeman (wife of William Bridgeman MP for Shropshire) lectured the members on party organisation and Mrs. Fletcher (wife of the Conservative MP for Hampstead) even spoke on Tariff Reform. Furthermore women remained important party workers. At a Wrexham Women's Association meeting in December 1908 Harold Tilby, candidate for Flint Boroughs, during his speech noted that 'ladies were infinitely better canvassers – they stuck to the job'.⁸⁸ However, despite their new found voice this was where the role of women in Conservative politics in North-east Wales chiefly stayed until the post-war widening of the franchise. Indeed, while the Women's Association played a vital role during the Denbigh Boroughs 1910 election victory working arduously behind the scenes with canvassing and clerical work it still remained an ancillary organisation. As elsewhere the leadership of the Women's Association came exclusively from the landed classes, but what it did do in conjunction with the Workingmen's Association was successfully build an army of party activists in the Denbigh Boroughs constituency which acted as a template for other associations in North-east Wales during the post 1910 election period.

⁸⁷ Campbell, *Iron Ladies* p.22.

⁸⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 4 December 1908.

Elsewhere implementation of the NWDNU's resolutions was less thorough. In East Denbighshire the Conservative and Unionist Association created a new divisional structure by 1908. Little evidence remains of how this structure operated, but it was based on the model in operation in West Denbighshire with a number of polling district committees created each with a chairman and secretary. At the Annual Meeting in February 1908, Major Radcliffe, organising secretary of the NWDNU, praised the organisational developments that the Association had undertaken. According to the *North Wales Guardian*:

He commended the arrangement the better organisation of the division and referred to the fact that for the 'first time for many years the finances of East Denbighshire showed a balance on the right side a circumstance which spoke highly of the President Sir Watkin and the agent Mr. Leah. It showed a great deal of work had been done during the past year and that there was much enthusiasm amongst the Party.⁸⁹

Unfortunately no further evidence exists to demonstrate how this situation was achieved. At this stage the East Denbighshire Association was the most secretive in North-east Wales – power was retained by just two officers: Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn as President and Treasurer and Lord Kenyon as Vice –President aided by Mr. J Leah as organising secretary and constituency agent. Amongst the Watkin Williams–Wynn and Kenyon papers there is no information about how Conservative affairs in East Denbighshire were run during this period nor are there any substantial articles in the local press concerning meetings or conferences, with the exception of the short article on the Annual meeting for 1908. Apart from the encouraging words uttered by Major Radcliffe on the re-organisation of the division and the opening of the new workingmen's club at Plas Kynaston in October 1909 there is nothing more on the adoption of the NWDNU resolutions. In addition Sir Watkin Wynn's almost omnipotent power as President of the Association and his authority as the major landowner in the region would have made criticism of his actions unlikely and so it becomes difficult to judge the progress of the

⁸⁹ *North Wales Guardian*, 28 February 1908.

party in East Denbighshire during this period, although the words of Major Radcliffe indicate that some form of reorganisation plan was instituted.

Only the Flintshire Constitutional Association failed to respond positively to the NWDNU's resolutions. When Harold Tilby, the Tory candidate for Flint Boroughs visited Caerwys in February 1908, he commented on the lack of Conservative workers in the area:

There were unattached men who owned no party - they were the most important men in the Kingdom, because it was the unattached who decided the fate of governments. If the Party was not a living organisation then they could be certain those unattached men would drift...into the camp of the opponent'.⁹⁰

Tilby's comments were designed to galvanise efforts in the constituency, warning his assembled audience that an election could be held 'before the Conservative party were ready for the fray'.⁹¹ His warning was ignored and organisation in Flintshire remained poor with the result that two more election defeats followed in 1910. The Association's 1910 general election report blamed the poor results on:

The leaders in the localities – with some bright exceptions - are much too apathetic-and leave the working of the campaign to the rank and file. This is most disastrous for experience shows that the rank and file generally will not attempt to carry on the necessary work except under the direction and with the assistance of their natural leaders.⁹²

By blaming the leaders in the localities the report diverted criticism away from the Association's failure to improve its organisation after 1906, which begs the question, why did the Association fail to adopt the NWDNU's resolutions and incorporate the much-needed changes? First, it is possible that Lord Mostyn saw the Eaton Hall resolutions as an attempt to undermine his authority. Mostyn had professed sympathies for the Balfourite position on fiscal reform and in opposition to the Tariff Reform wing of the party, which had captured

⁹⁰ *Flintshire Observer*, 20 February 1908.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910 –22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1.

the National Union, was thus in conflict with the NWDNU officers, who were all passionate Tariff Reformers. Once the Chamberlainite National Union set about in 1906 purging its own organisation of Central Office influence, a Balfourite such as Lord Mostyn would have been a potential obstacle to leading Tariff Reformers in North Wales and thus the object of attack which is how Mostyn interpreted the Eaton Hall resolutions. The fact that no Flintshire Constitutional Association member was elected to an officer's post at the NWDNU's elections in August 1906 would only have reinforced Mostyn's suspicions, breeding petty jealousies and resentment resulting in a resistance by the Flintshire Constitutional Association to implement changes emanating from this organisation. According to Ball, jealousies were not unusual in the party in Wales and he points out that in South Wales during the reorganisation of the National Union in 1906 'a good deal of mutual jealousy existed' as its organisation became fragmented. With so many landowners jockeying for position and holding differing views the possibility of petty jealousies growing and fermenting cannot either be discounted during the party's re-building exercise in North-east Wales.⁹³

On the other hand, petty jealousies and political rivalries do not necessarily explain why the Flintshire Constitutional Association failed to reorganise itself after 1906. Lord Mostyn must surely have been aware of the party's organisational shortcomings in Flintshire. A far simpler reason may be that Lord Mostyn was simply ill equipped and incapable of supervising change. Ormsby-Gore's description of him during a 1913 Flint Boroughs by-election campaign meeting hinted at his lack of leadership skills. 'Lord Mostyn was full of fuss', Ormsby-Gore informed his mother, 'but doesn't get much forwarder'.⁹⁴

Flintshire aside, what the evidence suggests is that between 1906 and 1910 significant efforts were made to improve the Conservative party's organisation in North-east Wales. These efforts were part of a National Union strategy to obtain control over the local constituency associations and propel

⁹³ S. Ball, 'The National and Regional Party Structure' in *Conservative Century (The Conservative Party Since 1900)*, eds, A. Seldon and S. Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp. 204-205.

⁹⁴ National Library of Wales, (NLW), Brogyntyn MSS Uncatalogued. Letter from Ormsby-Gore to his mother Lady Harlech, 16 January 1913.

them towards a firmer Tariff Reform commitment. At the same time the NWDNU's resolutions benefited those constituency associations which implemented them. New divisional structures were put in place, which brought the associations into closer contact with their members and the drive to incorporate working-class and women's membership had long-term benefits for the local organisations, both in securing votes and in improving canvassing. Even though the response to the NWDNU resolutions was somewhat piecemeal, in general organisation was still in a better state by 1910 than it was in other Welsh regions. According to Felix Aubel, in many Welsh constituencies prior to 1918 there were 'no active divisional Associations in existence'.⁹⁵ In North-east Wales the situation compared favourably with this picture, as associations now existed in every division. Furthermore, the attempts to revitalise the party organisation came at a time when strained relations between Central Office and the National Union was distracting unity of purpose. This according to Neal Blewett had an adverse effect on organisation as 'the slow corrosion of the once superb...machine and the strained relations between the National Union and Central Office had sapped the vigour and vitality of the constituency association, even the traumatic shock of 1906 had failed to revitalise them'.⁹⁶ This perhaps is too much of a generalisation as T.A Jenkins' essay on Conservatism in Thornbury reveals and as this thesis demonstrates reorganisation plans were established by constituency associations after the 1906 general election. Thus the evidence tends to confirm Dutton's assertion that 'the shock of defeat in 1906 induced many Unionist Associations to review their positions and initiate change'.⁹⁷ Even so, changes were not universally applied, inadequacies in organisation remaining in areas across the country, and the North-east Wales constituency associations would still suffer from organisational inadequacies at and after the 1910 general election despite the efforts made after 1906.

⁹⁵ F. Aubel, 'The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935' in *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*, ed. M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996) p. 103.

⁹⁶ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 271

⁹⁷ Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, p. 131.

RECOVERY AND REORGANISATION: TARIFF REFORM, CAMPAIGNING AND THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE 1906-1910.

In spite of his defeat in Flint County at the 1906 general election there appeared to be no imminent threat to the position of the Conservative parliamentary candidate Harold Edwards. However, subsequent attempts by his father, the Bishop of St Asaph, to reach an accommodation with the Liberal party over Welsh education had serious implications for his candidature. On 9 April 1906 the new Liberal government took the opportunity to amend Balfour's 1902 Act introducing a new Bill which proposed to bring all public schools under local authority control and to make religious instruction optional. The Bill attracted opposition from all quarters of the Conservative party and eventually met its nemesis in the House of Lords. Thereafter, education receded from the forefront of Welsh politics, but in March 1908 a compromise measure was introduced by the Bishop of St.Asaph after a consultation with Lloyd George. It recommended the transfer of all public schools to local authority control, with three days set aside for religious denominational education each week.⁹⁸ This measure also failed but not before it caused consternation amongst Churchmen and Conservatives alike. This was especially so in North-east Wales where the diocese of St.Asaph was situated.

In early 1909 L.A Brodrick, treasurer of the NWDNU, informed Harold Edwards that the financial support for his candidature would 'no longer be forthcoming because he thought that those persons who contributed to the fund would be no longer willing to do so because of... the Bishop of St.Asaph's education policy and because he entertained as his guest the Chancellor of the Exchequer'.⁹⁹ A perplexed Harold Edwards wrote to the chairman of the NWDNU, Lord Kenyon, who replied:

It is no doubt that the Bishop did excite a great deal of resentment by his Education Bill. It was ascribed by many to the influence of Mr.Lloyd George and colour was given to this by the visit paid to the Palace by Mr.Lloyd George... Now the question is how does this effect your position as candidate for the County? Are the sins of the father to be visited on the son? Mr Brodrick

⁹⁸ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.227.

⁹⁹ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/202, Circulars and Broadsheets re- elections in Flintshire.

says yes that he cannot raise money for your campaign...If this is the case I am afraid it does show that a certain number of your supporters are dissatisfied ...¹⁰⁰

Lord Kenyon further informed Edwards that there was no intention to replace him, but suggested that he lay the matter before the Flintshire Association which at this stage was unaware of the situation.¹⁰¹ Edwards wrote to P.T Davies- Cooke, Chairman of the Association's Finance Committee, who promised to put the matter before the party leaders. He received a reply from Basil Philips, Acting-Chairman of the party in the absence of Lord Mostyn, who said:

There has no doubt been a great amount of uneasiness among the rank and file of the party since the Bishop introduced his Education Bill and also entertained Lloyd George, and in the event of a contest a great many Conservatives and Churchmen will not give you the support they would like to on this account. Till I received your letter I had no idea that Mr. Brodrick and Lord Kenyon were taking action in this matter, nor has anyone discussed the situation with me...It is no use not looking facts in the face and I am afraid that after the events that have happened it would be useless for you to try and win the seat.¹⁰²

Finally, a meeting was arranged between Edwards and Davies-Cooke. Accompanying Davies Cooke was Randle Mainwaring, co-Treasurer of the NWDNU. Davies-Cooke informed Edwards that at a meeting held by the leaders of the Flintshire Association it was decided that:

I was not a suitable candidate because my views on Tariff Reform were not sound, and much emphasis was laid upon this unsoundness being the reason for my unsuitability. Not one of these gentlemen, however, asked me what my views on Tariff Reform were. I pointed out that I had never heard a hint that my views on Tariff Reform were unacceptable, and from the first had proclaimed myself a loyal supporter of Mr. Balfour. Their reply amounted to this that 'they wanted more than Balfour they wanted Birmingham'¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/202, Circulars and Broadsheets re elections in Flintshire

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Birmingham was the adopted home of Joseph Chamberlain, chief architect of Tariff Reform policies during the early twentieth century, and faced with this and finding his position untenable Edwards finally resigned, stating ‘that this dissatisfaction was quite sufficient to compel me at once to announce my retirement from the work of candidate’.¹⁰⁴

The leaders present at the meeting, which precipitated Edwards’ resignation, were Lord Kenyon, Davies-Cooke, Basil Philips, Hugh Peel, Frank Hurlbutt, P.P. Pennant, J Lloyd- Price and E.Morgan. All were members of the Flintshire Constitutional Association’s executive committee and Lord Kenyon, Pennant, Peel, Davies–Cooke and Hurlbutt were all known to be Tariff Reformers as was L.A.Brodrick, who in his role as a Treasurer of the NWDNU had initiated the move against Edwards. Lord Kenyon, Pennant and Randle Mainwaring were also senior members of the NWDNU, which was affiliated to the National Union, the organisation that had been captured by the Tariff Reform wing of the party. The assurance that Tariff Reform was the real reason for Edwards’ unsuitability is probably true; the evidence suggests that his father’s relationship with Lloyd George was merely an expedient to mount a campaign against him. After all, the Bishop of St. Asaph, Lord Kenyon, and Pennant were all involved with Lloyd George in attempts to find compromise solutions to the education question.¹⁰⁵ It was not suggested that disciplinary action be taken against these senior Tories.

Curiously, given Lord Mostyn’s announcements on Free Trade and retaliation policies, Harold Tilby, a businessman and county councillor, was adopted candidate for Flint Boroughs on 18 January 1908, and Colonel Howard, a landowner from St.Asaph, was adopted candidate for Flint County after Edwards’ resignation. Both were committed Tariff Reformers, so all Conservative candidates in North-east Wales now represented the fiscal reform wing of the party, indicating that the Chamberlainite movement against Free Traders and Balfourites had by 1909 succeeded.

Tariff Reform became an integral policy to the Conservative party in North-east Wales because it offered protection for British industry by placing

¹⁰³ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, DD/PN/202, Circulars and Broadsheets re- elections in Flintshire.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p. 189 and pp. 223-228.

taxes on imported goods and thereby promised to increase industrial output and create employment. It proposed preferential agreements with the Colonies, a move designed to secure unity in the Empire and prevent countries such as Canada reaching a fiscal alliance with the United States. As an agricultural policy it would, by placing taxes on imported foodstuffs including meat, encourage farm production and alleviate rural unemployment.¹⁰⁶ The revenue from such proposals might also be used to fund social amelioration and a reduction on land rates. Such a range of possibilities meant Tariff Reform was an infinitely malleable policy, which could be moulded to suit a number of political and economic contexts.

This was clearly the attraction in the economically and socially diverse regions of North-east Wales where it could be tailored to different social circumstances. Speeches by Harold Tilby in Flint Boroughs in February 1908 and by Sam Thompson a little later in West Denbighshire, demonstrate how they adjusted Tariff Reform to suit the different types of constituency in the region. Flint Boroughs was largely an industrial constituency, most of its contributory boroughs situated in and around the coal and quarrying areas of North-east Wales. At Caerwys, for example, Tilby outlined the employment advantages Tariff Reform offered and the apparent damage government Free Trade policies were inflicting on local industry:

They should deal...with the question of how to get more employment for their own people. Rhyl had borrowed for improvements £14,000 and one of the questions asked was where did they get the cement. They were told Belgium. Why not Caerwys cement so much nearer home? The reply was that Caerwys cement was sixpence a ton dearer. It was strange that cement could be made in Belgium and exported to this country at a cheaper rate than manufacturers within a few miles of where the cement was required.¹⁰⁷

According to Tilby the only way of protecting industry and increasing local employment was by implementing Tariff Reform policies.

By contrast West Denbighshire was the most rural constituency in the region with farming the largest employer. To turn the tide against the Liberal

¹⁰⁶ Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p.10.

¹⁰⁷ *Flintshire Observer*, 20 February 1908.

party Sam Thompson had to embrace these agricultural voters and persuade them that Liberal policies were not working. At Llanbedr near Ruthin, Thompson explained how Free Trade was impeding agriculture and what the Conservatives intended to do about it:

They had lost in this country by far the greatest part of the trade in all cereals; it had been taken way by foreign countries. The farmers had turned to breeding cattle and butter making. The foreigners were now taking away a great deal of their market in meat and they were selling a great deal of foreign meat as Welsh. The foreigners sent in these goods without paying a halfpenny towards the taxes of the country... what objection could there be to calling on foreigners to pay the taxation, which we had to pay? ¹⁰⁸

For Conservatives in North-east Wales Tariff Reform offered an attractive and an all-embracing cure for both industrial and agricultural ills. It gave a formulated policy that might galvanise the party in the same way Free Trade had the Liberals in 1906 and hopefully avoid the ignominy of another election defeat. It was of little surprise then, that by 1908 local Conservatives had moved to endorse the full programme, believing as Ormsby-Gore did ‘that the principles of Tariff Reform were of a national character, and that they made for building up and security of their industries, made for more employment and a more prosperous time than had existed during the past few years’.¹⁰⁹ Yet to win the next general election whenever it was called required more than just flexible and attractive policy, it needed organisation, volunteers, money and enthusiasm, the ‘nuts and bolts’ of electoral management to which the party had long-looked to the Primrose League to help facilitate. In the period between 1906 and 1910 the Primrose League extended the party message throughout the region. Without it the Conservative party’s ability to reach a wide audience and to maintain a large number of party workers would have been severely restricted.

However, despite its importance and the vital role it played in Conservative politics by 1906 the League was in decline. Pugh asserts that the Conservative general election victories in 1895 and 1900 ‘induced a certain

¹⁰⁸ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 20February 1909.

complacency in Primrose League circles' [and that] 'the peculiar dependence of local Habitations on patronage and initiative of leading families often inhibited their political vigour....some neglected their political function in favour of an unchanging routine of social activities'.¹¹⁰ This complacency inevitably led to a number of Habitations closing across the country as a result of which the League 'sometimes failed to provide effective assistance to the party'.¹¹¹ Between 1886 and 1904 a number of Habitations closed in North-east Wales, from a peak of 21 habitations in 1886 only thirteen remained in 1904 (see Table 2.4). Those that closed included the Rossett Habitation which had previously claimed over 200 members, and the Holywell Habitation whose Ruling Councillor was Lord Mostyn. All of the other Habitations that closed had less than 200 members, although the failure to re-open the Wrexham Habitation was more than offset by the flourishing Workingmen and Women's Associations in the town. In spite of these closures those thirteen Habitations that survived membership remained buoyant and League functions continued to play an integral role in North-east Wales society. For example, the Denbigh Habitation recorded a membership in excess of 800 during the period 1908-1909, with 136 new members joining in 1907-1908 and 58 in 1908-1909.¹¹² Regular well-attended meetings and functions were held by the Habitation. The most successful gathering during the period was the League fete held at Denbigh Castle in August 1909, at which over 1,200 members from the local Habitations attended. The proceedings followed their usual course and the *Denbighshire Free Press* reported that:

It was a great success from every point of view, the large number present, the excellence of the arrangements throughout, the splendid tea provided, the glorious fine weather, and the useful eloquent and convincing speeches made by speakers of proved ability, the pleasant relations between all classes, the charming music, the enjoyable dancing, every element combined to make it a memorable gathering.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 15 January 1910.

¹¹⁰ M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, pp. 166-167.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² See annual report for Denbigh Habitation as printed in *Denbigh Free Press*, 2 May 1908 and June 1909.

¹¹³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 21 August 1909.

Leading Conservatives from all over the region attended. In addition the fete was given a political slant with two open-air platforms upon which a string of speakers including Colonel Mesham, Orsby-Gore, Lawrence Brodrick and Colonel Howard, attacked Lloyd George's recently introduced Budget.

The League remained vibrant in Flintshire despite a number of closures. Here the Hundred of Maelor Habitation, whose Ruling Councillor was Lord Kenyon, retained a membership in excess of 300 and held regular functions and social events. The annual fete at Iscoyd Park in September 1908 attracted a large attendance and heard a speech by Harry Barnston, the prospective Unionist candidate for Eddisbury, Chester. The *North Wales Guardian* concluded 'the fete was a magnificent success'.¹¹⁴ This set the template for League activities in the region for at nearly every function held between 1906 and 1910 the political speech remained an integral part of the proceedings, communicating the Conservative message to a wide audience was after all its *raison d'être*. The League demonstrated this political potential when the Denbigh and Ruthin Habitations provided a number of party workers and canvassers to Orsby-Gore's successful general election campaign in Denbigh Boroughs in January 1910. Thus the Primrose League remained an integral component in the Conservative party machine in North-east Wales and the work undertaken by those remaining Habitations were vital to the success and survival of the party in the region.

¹¹⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 September 1908.

Table 2.4. Primrose League Roll of Habitations: Denbighshire and Flintshire 1904.

<u>Denbighshire</u>	<u>Habitation No</u>	<u>Founded</u>	<u>Officers</u>
Llangollen	563	August 1885	
Brynkinallt	1335	2 April 1886	Lord Trevor-Ruling Councillor Lady Trevor-Dame President
Ruthin	904	25 November 1885	George Denton-Ruling Councillor Llanrhaidr Hall
Henllan	921	December 1885	Mrs Williams-Wynn-Dame President Plas-yn-Cefyn.
Colwyn Bay	2505	26 June 1885	The Hon Mrs B. Brodrick-Dame President. Coed Coch Estate G.B. Mortimer Jones-Ruling Councillor Glan Conway.
Abergele	1503	12 May 1886	Countess of Dundonald-Ruling Councillor. Gwrych Castle The Hon M.F. Hughes-Ruling Councillor. Kinmel Park.
Llangedwyn	1586	4 June 1886	Dowager Lady Williams-Wynn-Ruling Councillor. Llangedwyn Hall, Oswestry.
Denbigh	1049	20 January 1886	Colonel Mesham-Ruling Councillor Pontruffydd Hall.
<u>Flintshire</u>	<u>Nos</u>	<u>Founded</u>	<u>Officers</u>
Mostyn, Llwynegryn	680	19 October 1885	Henry John Raikes-Ruling Councillor Llwynegryn Hall, Mold.
Hundred of Maelor	726	26 October 1885	Lord Kenyon-Ruling Councillor Lady Kenyon-Dame President Gredington
St Asaph	790	5 November 1885	Mrs Roberts Wynn-Ruling Councillor Plas-yn-Cefyn.
Hope	2111	19 July 1886	Mrs T.Roper –Dame President Plas Isa, Nr Mold.
Flint	1668	19 July 1886	Thomas Bate-Ruling Councillor Kelsterton Miss J.M. Evans-Dame President Flint

Habitations Closed 1886-1904: Holywell, Chwilir, Rhyl. Habitation Opened: Hope.
Taken from: Bodleian Library, (BLO), Primrose League MSS, 'The Roll of the Habitations 1904'.

LOCAL CONTESTS: THE EAST DENBIGHSHIRE BY-ELECTIONS, 1906 AND 1909 AND COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS OF 1907.

There were three tests of Conservative strength in North-east Wales between 1906 and 1910: the County Council elections of 1907 and two by-elections, both in East Denbighshire. The first by-election came in 1906, just six months after the general election, and was caused by the appointment of Samuel Moss, the sitting Liberal MP, as a County Court judge. The decision by the Conservatives to contest the election appears strange, given the constituency was uncontested at the 1895, 1900 and 1906 general elections. Several factors can explain the decision. First the Liberal party was experiencing difficulties in adopting a successor to Moss. E.G.Hemmerde was finally adopted but only after a tortuous election process that saw 21 Liberal and Labour nominations caused divisions amongst the party as district committees championed their nominee.¹¹⁵ Thus the Conservatives saw an opportunity, as the Liberals appeared uncertain and divided over whom to select. At the same time NWDNU meeting at Eaton Hall in March 1906 had appeared to energise the party in the region, especially with the selection of candidates, while an opportunity also arose to field an experienced parliamentarian, Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, whose Trevalyn estate lay a few miles north of Wrexham. After a successful academic career Griffith-Boscawen became a Conservative MP for Tonbridge in 1892 and from 1895 to 1900 he was a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks-Beech, and from 1900 a parliamentary charity commissioner.¹¹⁶ He was defeated at the 1906 general election, and consequently when the opportunity arose in East Denbighshire the party in London urged him to stand.¹¹⁷ Griffith-Boscawen was from the Tariff Reform wing of the party and provided the East Denbighshire Association with an opportunity to contest the election with a candidate who had strong local connections.

The early optimism that had greeted Griffith- Boscawen' selection candidature soon dissipated once the campaign started and the reality of the

¹¹⁵ See *North Wales Guardian*, 13 July, 20 July and 27 July 1906.

¹¹⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 13 July 1906.

task to be faced dawned. Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, the Unionist Association's Chairman admitted they faced a difficult task in the division, given the size of the Liberal majority, and a little fatalistically hoped that 'the majority would be greatly reduced even if their candidate was not returned'.¹¹⁸ Griffith-Boscawen privately accepted that defeat was likely, but remained determined to show 'that they, the Conservatives and Unionists of East Denbighshire were not the negligible quantity some people appeared to think they were'.¹¹⁹ The centrepiece of the Conservative campaign was Tariff Reform. Tariff Reform policies were, he believed, especially relevant to industrial constituencies like East Denbighshire, where coal mining and steel making were the prominent employers. In a speech at Wrexham on 19 July 1906 he sought to build working-class support by arguing that Tariff Reform policies were essential if coal mining was to survive in the district.¹²⁰ He stressed that even if East Denbighshire coal mining did not suffer from foreign competition, 'they must remember that their coal was largely supplied to manufactories of all kinds... and that if these works were closed by foreign goods being purchased instead of English goods, there would nationally not be the same demand for coal'.¹²¹ He went on to point out that coal mining would not be the only industry to suffer if the government persisted with Free Trade policies:

There were also great steel works in that district. A few years ago England led the way with regards to iron and steel, but they were now only third to Germany and America who were importing all kinds of iron and steel goods which could be made at home, but which they preferred to get from abroad instead of employing their own people. Mr Chamberlain advised that an enquiry be made...with a view of seeing if they could not arrive at a system which would better the conditions of the working-class, but the Radical party absolutely refused to look at the question and were quite content to employ the foreigner and did not care whether an article was made in England or made abroad.¹²²

¹¹⁷ A. Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories* (London: John Murray, 1925) p 57.

¹¹⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 20 July 1906.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

His Liberal opponent E.G Hemmerde, did not attack the Conservatives on Tariff Reform, but chose instead to campaign on the ‘scandal’ of Chinese slave labour in the Transvaal (the previous Conservative government was implicated in decisions made by mine owners in the Transvaal to employ cheap Chinese and not local labour) which had brought the Liberals success at the general election. The choice proved a good one, in demonstrating the Conservative party’s insensitivities to the working-classes, and both sides accepted that the election turned on this. When the by-election result was announced and it was revealed that the Liberals had comfortably held the seat with a majority of over 2,700, Griffith-Boscawen lashed out bitterly arguing he had been beaten by ‘downright misinterpretations on the subject’.¹²³ During a later interview with the *North Wales Guardian* he proffered a more sober if damaging analysis pointing to deficiencies in the party’s organisation:

The people want educating in Conservative principles. They have never heard a thing but from the radical standpoint. Start a Conservative organisation, fight every election from parish council upwards and I believe you would win.¹²⁴

Nor with the passage of time did his view alter, in his book *Memories*, published in 1925, he could write about the by-election with little fondness:

In July 1906 there occurred a by-election in East Denbigshire...I think from my personal point of view it was a mistake, since I had not the slightest chance of getting in. The constituency had never since its foundation returned a Conservative. It consisted chiefly of the North Wales coalfield, and to search for Tories in places like Coed-Poeth, or that delectable spot Rhos-llanerch-grugog, was like looking for a needle in a haystack.¹²⁵

The result suggested that little had changed since the 1906 general election. Despite the Eaton Hall meeting four months earlier, the Conservative party appeared to have made little progress with organisation in the constituency and Tariff Reform had once more brought scant obvious advantage. The only

¹²³ *North Wales Guardian*, 10 August 1906.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 August 1906.

crumb of comfort the Conservatives could draw from the result was that their share of the vote had not eroded significantly since the last time the constituency was contested in 1897.

Table 2.5

East Denbighshire By-Election 1906.

14.08.1906	Candidate	Party	Vote	%
	E.G. Hemmerde	Liberal	5917	65.4
	A.Griffith-Boscawen	Conservative	<u>3126</u>	34.6
			+2791	

Last time constituency contested:

By-Election 28.09.1897

Samuel Moss (Lib) 5,175, 64.5%: G.T. Kenyon (Con) 2848, 35.5%.

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Between the first by-election in August 1906 and the second in April 1909 the political situation altered considerably both at national and local level. The education question had receded from prominence by 1908. Church Disestablishment briefly caused some dissent in Conservative ranks when Asquith introduced a new Disestablishment Bill in April 1909, but it aroused little excitement and was withdrawn in June of the same year when the Budget debate took precedence over every other piece of Liberal legislation. One topic came to dominate politics when, at the end of 1908, Reginald McKenna, First Lord of the Admiralty, provided the Cabinet with evidence that suggested Germany was accelerating its naval building programme and demanded that the government build six dreadnoughts and not the four that it earlier agreed to. Asquith compromised and promised that four would be built immediately with four more to follow if deemed necessary. The compromise did not placate the Conservative party. The press helped fuel major panic as they and leading Conservatives pressed for the immediate building of eight Dreadnoughts to protect the country. The party was also concerned that Germany's naval building programme threatened to de-stabilise their major policy initiative, Tariff Reform, as any threat to British naval supremacy also threatened the security of the Empire and thus Colonial Preference.

¹²⁵ A. Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories*, p.57.

This provided the context for the East Denbighshire by-election, which took place in April 1909, triggered by the appointment of E.G. Hemmerde as Recorder of Liverpool. The Conservative candidate was Sir Foster Cunliffe, a local landowner, whose campaign concentrated on Tariff Reform and the naval crisis. Speaking at Cefn Mawr on 22 March 1909 Sir Foster Cunliffe said:

They were at present Free Traders in a protectionist world... There was first of all the need of protecting themselves against foreign commercial attack, which was known in one of its aspects as retaliation ... They were liable to the evils of dumping which upset trade, which had the effect of throwing a large number of people out of work and which had a detrimental effect upon the country from every point of view and they could not allow their trade to remain in the unstable and insecure position it was in the present day ... They proposed to fight the foreigner with his own weapon.¹²⁶

He also asserted that Tariff Reform was the only policy that could solve unemployment and help maintain Britain's trading position in the World by offering a preference to her Colonies thus consolidating the Empire as a single powerful unit. He further argued that Britain's position in the World and the security of the Empire could only be maintained by strengthening the Navy:

If the British race in all its varieties was to carry out its great work in the World they must maintain their power and consolidate the Empire, that was the policy he was asking them to support... a policy of Imperial consolidation against one which he was afraid savoured very much of...internal disruption and external insecurity.¹²⁷

This time Hemmerde was drawn into the Tariff Reform debate. During a speech made at the Caxton Hall, London, in February 1909 he said:

If you increase prosperity in this country by Tariff Reform, you increase it by throwing people out of employment in other countries. You are becoming prosperous by the misery of others.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 26 March 1909

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 2 April 1909.

The Conservatives seized on this as an example of the Liberals always putting the interests of the foreigner before those of the British, precipitating an angry exchange of letters between the candidates in the local press. Hemmerde accused Sir Foster Cunliffe of introducing an ‘infamous falsehood’ to the campaign, to which Sir Foster Cunliffe responded by stating that he had checked the contents of Hemmerde’s speech for accuracy, and was certain that he had interpreted Hemmerde’s words properly.¹²⁹

What is interesting about the exchange is that the Conservatives by advocating Tariff Reform and naval security for once set the agenda throwing Liberals onto the defensive. This in itself appeared to be a breakthrough for the Conservative party in the region having spent many years deflecting criticism of its policies from angry Nonconformists. However, the result hardly changed from the by-election in 1906, the Liberal majority was reduced by 70 votes and the Conservative share of the vote went up slightly by 1.5 per cent. Accordingly, the Conservatives felt that they had fought a successful campaign and was used by supporters to vindicate their stance on Tariff Reform, further convincing many that this policy was the only positive initiative that the party had.¹³⁰ It was less clear of course whether a full Tariff Reform programme benefited the party in the region, for the result had hardly shown a large swing to the party and since the area was largely unaffected by unemployment the appeal of Tariff Reform was much diminished. On the other hand it gave the Conservatives a broadly based, potentially attractive, policy to debate without repeatedly having to defend their position on Church Disestablishment, education and landlordism.

Table 2.6
East Denbighshire By-Election 1909.

<u>2.04.1904</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Vote</u>	<u>%</u>
	E.G. Hemmerde	Liberal	6265	63.9
	Sir F. Cunliffe	Conservative	<u>3544</u>	36.1
			+2724	

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

¹²⁹*North Wales Guardian*, 2 April 1909.

¹³⁰*North Wales Guardian*, 26 March 1909.

Although parliamentary polls were generally disappointing, the Conservative party performed well at local elections in the region. This was demonstrated by their achievement at the 1907 county council elections, which came shortly after the withdrawal of a new Education Bill in 1907. With this withdrawal popular support for another county council election revolt against the Act ebbed away. Disillusion set in amongst Nonconformists which threatened the security of many Liberal-held council seats. Even Welsh-speaking areas were threatened by a Conservative backlash caused by the Liberal party's inability to amend the 1902 Act. As a result, come the election Liberal seats fell to Conservatives everywhere and nowhere was this backlash felt more strongly than in Denbighshire and Flintshire.

In Denbighshire the Conservatives gained six council seats and the Liberal Party's majority was more than halved to ten. The Conservative party's gains were in the western part of the county with victories at Glan Conway, Colwyn Bay and at Abergele where two seats were taken and in the eastern part of the county with victories at Cefn Mawr and Llansantffraid Glyn Ceriog. The final outcome of the election was that the Liberals held 29 county council seats and the Conservatives 19. In Flintshire the Conservatives made seven gains, two losses and tied the number of seats on the council with the Liberals, each party winning 21 seats. Hawarden was captured by a Liberal Churchman, Canon Drew, son-in-law to former Prime Minister Gladstone, who was implacably opposed to the Liberal party's education policy. The implication for control of the council was obvious - should Drew vote with the Conservatives, as he would do on education, the Liberal control of the council would be threatened. As it was the Liberals retained control of the council, as thirteen out of fourteen aldermen were Liberals. Understandably the Conservatives felt aggrieved, a sense of injustice pervading the party when the number of votes each side had polled at the election became clear. The Bishop of St Asaph commented:

In this county which is Mr. Herbert Lewis's constituency the Radical Party polled 6,161 votes and their opponents 6,568 thus giving the friends of the

Voluntary schools a majority in the whole electorate of 407 votes, although the result in the council is the return of 21 on each side.¹³¹

An editorial in *The Denbighshire Free Press* asserted that ‘a closer inspection of the election returns reveals that....the Conservative reaction has been most strongly felt in the urban areas, and in the districts immediately associated with and influenced by them’.¹³² This was not strictly true. In Flintshire Conservative gains were made in the rural areas of Whitford (a small village between Mostyn and Holywell), at Cilcain and Argoed (two rural areas near Mold) and at Caerwys. Rhyl West was a strongly urban working-class community and Rhyl East was largely middle class. In Denbighshire gains were made in the urban middle-class resort town of Colwyn Bay, and in the rural areas of Abergele Rural, Glan Conwy, Llanfairtalhaiarn, and Llansantfraid Glyn Ceiriog. In the industrial town of Wrexham the Conservatives already held two wards, and it was in the urban working-class sprawl of Cefn Mawr, seven miles south of Wrexham, that the Conservatives made their other gain. Accordingly, the Conservatives were gaining seats in all types of areas – their strength not just reliant on an anglicised urban base.

The 1907 county council elections marked something of a political watershed for the Conservatives in Wales. Although the Liberals retained majorities on all county councils, with the exception of Flintshire, they had for the first time lost the political initiative. The Liberals lost a total of 59 council seats. In Radnorshire the Liberals held a majority of just seven, in Pembrokeshire four and in Breconshire the majority was only one. Throughout North Wales the Liberals lost ground. Six seats were lost in Anglesey, seven in Caernarfonshire, three in Montgomeryshire and one in the Liberal stronghold of Merionethshire. While by-election results confirmed Liberal strength in the Principality, the county council elections marked the first real turning point in Conservative fortunes. This was reflected in the results in Flintshire where the Liberals only retained power on the county council with the help of aldermen and in Denbighshire where the Liberal majority was greatly reduced.

¹³¹ *Flintshire Observer*, 14 March 1907.

CONCLUSION.

Failure to capture any parliamentary seats in 1906 should not obscure the relatively large, even respectable number of votes gained by the Conservative party in North-east Wales. The disappointment of the election precipitated a substantial re-organisation of the party through the implementation of resolutions passed by the NWDNU. These brought about an expansion in the number of Conservative district and parish committees as well as the introduction of new initiatives. For example, Women's and Workingmen's Association were successfully founded in Wrexham, parliamentary candidates were selected in all constituencies and the West Denbighshire Association took the bold step of adopting a working-class candidate. The East Denbighshire by-elections of 1906 and 1908 were similarly contested; revealing that the Conservative vote had indeed remained steady and comparable to the 1890's. The by-elections also provided an opportunity to engage the East Denbighshire electorate in political debate for the first time in nearly ten years. Finally, membership grew steadily in the Primrose League Habitations throughout the region. This was all evidence of a party not in decline but one stabilising its position and slowly adapting to the changed circumstances of the post-1906 political landscape. Such party activity in North-east Wales came at a time when apathy and infighting afflicted the party nationally. It is thus to their credit that the constituency associations in North-east Wales did much to improve their organisations, albeit not in all cases, and that the situation was a lot brighter here than perhaps could be expected for a party that had done so badly at parliamentary polls.

¹³² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 16 March 1907.

CHAPTER 3: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES, 1910-1914

INTRODUCTION: THE 1910 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND THEIR AFTERMATH.

At the end of April 1909 Lloyd George introduced his 'People's Budget', the object of which was to raise money for social reforms and provide revenue for naval defence.¹ This resulted in an overhaul of the existing tax system and seven new taxes including four new land taxes. For the Liberals the Budget had a galvanising effect, land taxes were popular with the public and party members, helping boost morale and drew the support of their electoral partners the Labour party.² For Conservatives the Budget appeared socialistic and confirmed their suspicions 'that Liberalism was abandoning Gladstonian principles of finance in favour of something far more radical and unpleasant'.³ By promising to redistribute wealth to pay for reform Liberals threatened the future of the landed elite, those who made up one third of Conservative MP's in the House of Commons, and two thirds of those who voted against the measure in the House of Lords.⁴ One important by-product of the Budget controversy was that Tariff Reform now emerged as a galvanising force, at last uniting the Conservative party behind a policy that for many was their only positive initiative and the only one capable of challenging the Budget. When the House of Lords rejected the Finance Bill on 30 November 1909 plunging the country into a general election, Balfour, who remained privately unconvinced of the policy's merits, made a joint pledge with Joseph Chamberlain, which committed the party to the Tariff Reform programme.⁵

The Conservative party recovered well at the January 1910 election, gaining 47 per cent of the vote, up from 44 per cent in 1906, and winning 273 seats, only two less than the Liberals. Most of the 116 seats gained by the Conservatives were won in the rural regions of southern England, with little headway made in the industrial and metropolitan areas of the North while they

¹ Dutton, *'His Majesty's Loyal Opposition'*, p.72

² Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p.72.

³ Green, *The Crisis Of Conservatism*, p.144.

⁴ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p.77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.120-121.

actually lost seats in Scotland.⁶ Moreover, the Liberal party was kept in power with the support of the Labour party and the Irish Nationalists who won 40 and 83 seats respectively. Ironically, given the party's improved showing, Tariff Reform came in for criticism in the months following with some Conservatives believing that it even cost them votes as Liberals returned to the dear food mantra of 1906. More alarming, election defeat left the House of Lords vulnerable to attack as the Lords' rejection of the Budget precipitated a showdown between the government and the Second Chamber with an alliance of radical Liberals, Irish Nationalists and Labour demanding the House of Lords veto be removed. The Liberal cabinet first vacillated, but eventually gave way and by mid March 1910 introduced proposals to curb the power of the Lords that later formed the basis to the Parliament Bill.⁷ With many peers threatening resistance to such reform, a political impasse was reached within parliament, which in turn raised the prospects of another election. In May 1910 Edward VII died suddenly and in a spirit of conciliation a conference was arranged to try and find a way out of the constitutional difficulties. When this failed in November, Asquith announced a dissolution and a second general election within twelve months. Balfour believing food taxes to be deeply unpopular, considered dropping them from the Tariff Reform programme, but opted instead for a compromise.⁸ At a political rally held the day after dissolution he declared that 'I have not the least objection to submit the principles of Tariff Reform to referendum', thus committing Tariff Reform to referendum, as a way of ridding the party of its food taxes incubus.⁹ His announcement alienated those committed Tariff Reformers in the party grouped around the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austen Chamberlain, and generated bitter arguments in the party and marked a retreat from the full Tariff programme agreed with Joseph Chamberlain.¹⁰

⁶ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp.134-141.

⁷ There were three resolutions that formed the basis of the Parliament Bill. The House of Lords could not amend finance bills, all other bills should be passed providing that two years had elapsed from the point of introduction and the maximum life of a parliament should be reduced from seven to five years.

⁸ J. Vincent, ed, *The Crawford Papers, the Journals of David Lindsay Twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) p. 176 entry for 16 November 1910.

⁹ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p.177.

¹⁰ R.J.Q. Adams, *Bonar Law* (London: John Murray, 1999) p. 44.

The December 1910 general election produced a similar result to January, although this time the two main parties were tied on 272 seats with the Liberal government kept in power by Labour and the Irish Nationalists. Following quickly on the second defeat the Commons passed the Parliament Act in May 1911 followed eventually by the Lords in August. According to R. J. Q Adams ‘the passage of the Parliament Act marked the end of 18 months of intense struggle which had cost [the] party much in unity and perhaps in confidence’.¹¹ Furthermore, three successive election losses proved disastrous for Balfour. He was heavily criticised for not displaying strong leadership and for alienating both the Tariff Reform and Free Trade wings of his party.¹² Finally, under severe pressure he resigned in November 1911 and was replaced by an inexperienced Andrew Bonar Law.

Although a keen Tariff Reformer Bonar Law was aware of the failings of the policy as an electoral strategy and its divisive affect on the party. As a result he concluded that a new strategy was required to unite the party. Between 1911 and 1914, Bonar Law attempted to construct support within his party around a tough campaign on defending and restoring the constitution to its pre-1911 status. Law built on the anxieties that many Conservatives expressed at attempts by the Liberal Government to introduce Welsh Church Disestablishment and Irish Home Rule before they made good their promise to reform the Second Chamber, as outlined in their preamble. In particular he utilised the campaign against Irish Home Rule to try force the government to the ballot box.¹³ On the surface this appeared to play upon their electoral strengths for between December 1910 and August 1914 the party won 16 by-elections. However, the government remained steadfast against an election and many-feared civil war in Ireland, as Unionist opposition to Home Rule and support for Ulster hardened between 1912 and 1914. Jeremy Smith asserts that the Conservative leader ‘fought the Home Rule on constitutional grounds; he

¹¹R.J.Q. Adams, *Bonar Law*, p.49.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp54-55.

¹³ Since 1910 Irish Home Rule became a distinct possibility as to remain in power the Liberal government was dependent on the support of Irish Nationalist MPs. For support to pass Lloyd George’s Budget Irish Nationalist demanded the removal of the House of Lords veto so that a Home Rule bill could pass with the will of the Commons. See Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People* pp.146-148. Conservative opposition to Home Rule was steeped in a belief that Home Rule would destroy British and Empire unity and threaten the protestant Anglican religion.

resisted a settlement and advocated extreme courses of action, such as amending the Army Annual Act or involving the King, in order to smash the Liberal Government. It was power politics at its most brutal'.¹⁴ The prospect of civil war was only finally avoided when European conflict broke out in August 1914 and an uneasy truce descended upon British politics.

This chapter will examine the political situation in North-east Wales during these dramatic years, exploring how national events impacted upon the local political environment. It will demonstrate how Tariff Reform first split the party then united it as the National Union wielded its influence in the region and then split it again at the December 1910 general election. It will explore the effects of the People's Budget and House of Lords Reform on the Conservative party and how William Ormsby-Gore succeeded in regaining the Denbigh Boroughs despite his landed background and total lack of parliamentary experience. It will analyse how and why Church Disestablishment came to play a pivotal role in Conservative politics, especially when the government introduced a new Bill in 1912, and why this issue overtook Irish Home Rule in importance to Conservatives in the region even though it dominated national politics. It will also show that by using Church Defence as a single issue strategy at the Flint Boroughs by-election in 1913 the party came close to toppling the Liberals and that by adopting much needed organisational changes its future looked far more optimistic in the region than at any time since 1885. Finally, this chapter will take a close look at organisation and the steps that the party took to improve it in North-east Wales.

THE JANUARY 1910 GENERAL ELECTION IN NORTH-EAST WALES.

In Wales Lloyd George's Budget dominated the January 1910 general election, and the proposed taxes on licences, mineral rents and land were popular with the majority of Welsh people.¹⁵ This did not extend to the

14. J. Smith, *The Tories and Ireland, 1910-1914, Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000). The Army Annual Act formally gave parliament authority over the armed forces, without which it would have no legal power over the army. For Conservative attempts to amend see Dutton 'His Majesty's Loyal Opposition', pp.227- 230.

¹⁵ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.249.

Conservative party in Wales which roundly condemned the People's Budget. In his capacity as Chairman of the NWDNU Lord Kenyon argued that the Budget 'was likely to have far reaching effects in a country district like this; the Budget would vastly add to unemployment. Country gentlemen and others employing labour would seriously consider how to reduce expenses, and the only way many of them could do so would add to the unemployed'.¹⁶ The Earl of Denbigh described the Budget 'as a downright swindle', and the introduction of a super tax on high incomes 'as one of those plausible socialistic measures for taxing people able to bear it, but is...certain to operate with great injustice on many individuals'.¹⁷

Consequently, when the Lords rejected the Bill on 30 November 1909, thus precipitating a general election, the decision was greeted enthusiastically by Conservative leaders in North-east Wales. To Lord Mostyn 'the Lords had acted within what they considered their rights, in saying in simple terms that the Budget should be laid aside for a few weeks and during that time, it was suggested, that the members of the House of Commons should consult the constituencies just to see whether they agree or do not agree with the Budget'.¹⁸ His response was typical of landowners in the region, but was also supported by Sam Thompson, the working-class candidate in West Denbighshire. At a joint meeting of the Denbigh Boroughs and West Denbighshire candidates at Ruthin on 7 January 1910, Thomson endorsed Ormsby-Gore's words that the Second Chamber had every right to say 'consult the people' on an unjust Budget that overtaxed the professional and middle classes, and claimed that the

Budget was 'a poverty incubator it was based on wrong principles. They could not make the poor rich by making the rich poorer. The only way to improve the workers was to lift them up from the bottom not reducing them from the top. It was a most disastrous policy setting class against class'.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 May 1909.

¹⁷ FRO, Birch Cullimore MSS, Earl of Denbigh Papers, D/BC/495 Undated Newspaper article circa June 1909.

¹⁸ *Flintshire Observer*, 13 January 1910.

¹⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 January 1910.

To have such a representative from a working class background supporting the local landed interest's view that taxing the wealthiest elements of society would only exacerbate the social divide appeared to be a coup for local Conservatives. It was exactly what the NWDNU had called for two years earlier - working class candidates who could demonstrate that the Conservative party was a socially inclusive institution while promoting its goals and aims. Yet if this was the party's intention in North Wales then the move seriously backfired in West Denbighshire. Thompson's campaign meetings during January 1910 were constantly disrupted by Liberal supporters and at Llandyrnog where local Conservatives attempted to portray the Budget as a revolutionary unconstitutional measure Thompson and other speakers were greeted with cries of 'chuck the Lords out'.²⁰ Worse was to follow at a meeting at Abergele. Here, when attempting to blame the Liberal government for introducing contentious legislation and dividing society Thompson was taunted with shouts of 'House of Lords' from sections of the audience before the meeting descended into an open brawl.²¹ Thus, rather than unite the voting public behind him as a working class candidate Thompson only seemed to alienate many voters. Even so in Flint Boroughs Harold Tilby sought to cast the Budget as a divisive socialistic measure which did nothing to improve the conditions of the working class in comparison to the wealthier sections of society. In the first week of campaigning he declared during a speech at Bagillt that:

The Budget does not do a single thing to equalise the proportions between the two classes...In the judgement of the Unionist party the Budget was socialistic. He did not object but the country had never given a mandate for socialism. If the Bill was socialistic the government was legislating without a mandate and surely there was in that justification for asking the opinion of the people.²²

Colonel Howard made similar claims to Tilby in Flint County, believing the Budget 'could inconvenience the rich man, subject him to considerable annoyance. It required no argument to show it was the poor man

²⁰ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 January 1910.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1910.

²² *Flintshire Observer*, 6 January 1910.

who felt taxation more than the rich man'.²³ As with Thompson in West Denbighshire Tilby and Colonel Howard's meetings faced heckling and constant disruptions when they attempted to portray the Budget as socially divisive finance bill that only impoverished the poor.²⁴ By contrast Liberal candidates were receiving positive responses to their platform speeches on the Budget and its plans to alleviate poverty and redistribute wealth were proving to be, as elsewhere in Wales, extremely popular in the region. As a result Liberal candidates stressed the importance of the Budget as part of the government's attempts to relieve social injustice while arguing that the House of Lords had merely acted in their own interests by rejecting it and other Liberal legislation.

Given the enthusiastic response to the Liberal position it is not surprising that the Conservatives failed to make any progress when attempting to portray the Budget as a divisive measure. Other measures that Conservative candidates supported in the region, in particular Tariff Reform and opposition to Liberal plans to disestablish the Church in Wales, also received a mixed response from voters. All candidates championed Tariff Reform, highlighting the benefits of the policy to British trade, employment security and social welfare. Accordingly, at Wrexham on 5 January 1910, Ormsby-Gore in addressing workers at the Cambrian Leatherworks warned that Free Trade was damaging the British leather industry and undermining their jobs by allowing the free importation of manufactured goods from Germany and America:

Free trade was neither free nor fair to the British workingman...the only effectual way to solve the unemployment problem was to expand the old industries and open up new ones and that could only be done means of Tariff Reform'.²⁵

Ormsby-Gore was joined on the platform by John Gill, the manager of the leatherworks, who said although 'he had been a Liberal all his life... [he] was induced by Tariff Reform... and other things to make a change, and in particular he should like Tariff Reform to have a chance of proving what good

²³ *Flintshire Observer*, 2 December 1909.

²⁴ See for example *Flintshire Observer* 6 and 13 January 1910.

²⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 7 January 1910.

it would do'.²⁶ This was a bold move as the directors of the leatherworks, including Edward Hughes leader of the Wrexham Liberals, were all staunch Free Traders. Gill's conversion during the campaign seemed to impress the workmen since Ormsby-Gore later claimed that the owners 'left no stone unturned to influence their men, in the direction of Free Trade, but the men voted for me in an overwhelming majority.'²⁷

Elsewhere the influence of local employers and the different economic circumstances worked against the Conservatives. Harold Tilby in Flint Boroughs and Colonel H.R.L Howard in Flint County advocated the adoption of Tariff Reform policies to help develop local industries and reduce unemployment in the area.²⁸ Unfortunately for them the Liberal candidate in the Boroughs division was John Summers, owner of the steel works at Shotton, and a supporter of Free Trade. Summers argued that 'as a panacea for unemployment it seemed to him that Tariff Reform was absurd. It would be proved that Free Trade had not only been successful, but was the only true commercial policy for the people of this country... With imports and exports free employment would be greater and wages would be higher'.²⁹ Circumstances bore his argument out, since Shotton employed over 3,000 men, this easily offset recent job losses in agriculture, lead mining and coalmining in the region. Tilby and Howard faced a daunting task if they were going to overturn the large Liberal majorities in the two constituencies upon these arguments.

Taking a similar line in East Denbighshire, David Rhys, Sir Foster Cunliffe's replacement in the division, tried to convince the electorate that Tariff Reform was beneficial for local trade and employment. Rhys' line on Tariff Reform was well aimed since East Denbighshire with its coal mining districts south and east of Wrexham was the most industrial constituency in the region. However, unlike South Wales the East Denbighshire coalfield was not dependant on exports as its coal supplied local industry, notably the Brymbo

²⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 7 January 1910.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1910.

²⁸ *Flintshire Observer*, 9 December 1909.

²⁹ *County Herald*, 21 January 1910

steelworks and the Ruabon terracotta works.³⁰ Unable to deploy with effect the full range of Tariff Reform arguments, Rhys' campaign was also hit by the distribution of a Liberal party pamphlet in the constituency during the last week of campaigning which argued that if the Conservatives were returned to power basic foodstuffs would be taxed.³¹ In West Denbighshire Sam Thomson faced a different but nonetheless uphill task in his advocacy of Tariff Reform. Thompson's constituency was the most rural division in the region, so he tailored his message to circumstances, arguing the imposition of agricultural tariffs would expand farm production and alleviate rural unemployment.³² Nevertheless, such a line was easily typecast as the old Tory landed policy of the Corn Laws and 'Hungry Forties' as Sir John Herbert Roberts, the sitting MP, stated at Prion, 'a tax on corn would eventually benefit the landlord and no one else, and such a tax would also mean a tax on every other consumable article'.³³

With the notable exception of Denbigh Boroughs, Liberal candidates successfully exploited the Conservative party's commitment to Tariff Reform. Most of their arguments had been fruitfully used before and there was very little new that Tariff Reformers could say, which would sway a predominantly Liberal electorate. As Neal Blewett points out:

The fiscal controversy had been debated continuously for the past seven years. It was virtually impossible to say anything new. Tariff Reform was presented as it had been for the past seven years as the panacea for all the country's economic ills from unemployment to the alleged flight of capital, and as it had been for the past eight months as the alternative to a detested Budget. Free Trade was defended as it had been for generations by a unique blending of economic facts and metaphysics for it was as much a faith as an economic system.³⁴

Furthermore, even though it was united in its support for Tariff Reform in January 1910, the policy did little to enhance the Conservative party's

³⁰ F.Holloway, 'The Inter-war Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', *Denbighshire Historical Transactions*, vol.27, 1978, p.55.

³¹ *North Wales Guardian*, 21 January 1910.

³² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 January 1910. For a discussion on Tariff Reform as an agricultural policy see Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp.186-190; pp.211-216.

³³ *North Wales Times*, 8 January 1910.

³⁴ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People* p.119.

chances of electoral success. Only in Denbigh Boroughs could the party claim that the policy had increased Conservative votes. Otherwise and elsewhere the policy proved a hindrance. Indeed, in areas such as Flintshire and East Denbighshire, which were not suffering from its worst excesses it was hardly worth advocating Tariff Reform as an ameliorative to unemployment. In West Denbighshire, a rural Liberal bastion, the policy was dismissed as one that would only extend the grip the aristocracy held over land.

If there was nothing new to say about Tariff Reform then surely there was little more that could be said about Welsh Church Disestablishment and Disendowment, which had been at the forefront of Welsh politics since the mid-nineteenth century. The issue, however, still had the potential to polarise opinion with many Nonconformist Liberals feeling aggrieved, especially after a Church Disestablishment Bill failed to progress beyond a second reading in April 1909, that little had been done by a Liberal government to disestablish the ‘alien’ Church in Wales. At the same time many Conservatives were determined to resist any attempt to disestablish the Church. This was especially true in North-east Wales with its high concentration of Anglican communicants (see Appendices Religious Communicants, North-East Wales 1905 p 318). Here landed Conservative leaders, all strong supporters of the Established church, in conjunction with local leading Churchmen led a rearguard action against the introduction of a new Disestablishment Bill. This had seemed unlikely after April 1909, but the re-emergence of Church Disestablishment as an issue was based on a promise that, if returned to power, the Liberals would introduce a new Bill. This was further fuelled when in December 1909 Asquith made references to religious equality in Wales during a speech at the Albert Hall.³⁵ Many Liberals now featured Disestablishment in their election addresses. As a result opposition to Disestablishment quickly formed a central plank of Conservative campaigns as crowded Church Defence meetings, attended by senior local Conservatives and Churchmen, were held during the first week of January at Wrexham and St. Asaph.³⁶ The Disestablishment campaign was thus drawn along political lines and the Conservative inclined *Denbighshire Free Press* appealed to Liberal

³⁵ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p. 259.

³⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 January 1910.

Churchmen to vote with Conservatives in defence of the Church.³⁷ As a result Thomas Williams, Vice-President of the Denbigh Liberal Club defected to the Conservatives.³⁸

Williams took the Conservative line that disendowing the Church would deprive it of vital funds it used to employ ministers and further religious causes in Wales. Williams argued that ‘a great injustice would be done to the cause of religion in Wales if the national Church was deprived of the resources which she had enjoyed since time immemorial and for those funds to be applied for secular purposes’.³⁹ Such a move was seen as a coup for the Conservatives in Denbigh Boroughs – one they exploited to the full as the local Tory press ran articles on Williams’ defection and his support for the Conservative position on Disestablishment and Disendowment.⁴⁰

Yet the Conservatives also found themselves under attack over the issue as it also came to the fore in East Denbighshire. Here, their candidate David Rhys, a Methodist preacher, astounded Nonconformists when he unwisely defended the role of the Established church during his campaign meetings. By repeatedly accusing Rhys of deserting his calling Liberals not only succeeded as branding him as a traitor to his religion, but also as traitor to Wales. According to the *North Wales Guardian*, ‘many Nonconformist ministers have stated publicly that a Tory Nonconformist, as Mr. Rhys happens to be - must necessarily be a traitor to his country. [This] in a stronghold of Nonconformity, render the candidate’s task all the more difficult’.⁴¹ Such comments did not bode well for Rhys in the pit villages and rural areas of East Denbighshire which were overwhelmingly Nonconformist. Disestablishment was thus an issue that, depending on the circumstances, could benefit both political parties in North-east Wales. Here the resistance to Disestablishment found a significant voice while on the other side of the argument many Liberals pushed for the introduction of a new Bill, ensuring that a major political battle continued in the region until a Disestablishment Bill became law in 1914. By comparison, even though 26 Liberal candidates

³⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 15 January 1910.

³⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 14 January 1910.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 January 1910.

⁴⁰ See for example, *North Wales Guardian* 14 January 1910.

⁴¹ *North Wales Guardian*, 28 January 1910.

featured it in their election addresses, in other parts of Wales the overriding issue was the Budget with little attention paid to Disestablishment.⁴²

It was not just that the Conservatives had to fight long and bitter rearguard actions with the Liberals on such contentious issues as Church Disestablishment in North-east Wales. Another factor that gave the Liberal party the ascendancy in the region was Lloyd George's own personal popularity. Elevated to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's post by Asquith in 1908 Lloyd George was held in high regard by the majority of Welsh people, even before the introduction of the 1909 Budget, and was highly revered in this corner of Wales which his own constituency bordered on to and where he had done much campaigning.

Such was the support for Lloyd George locally that towards the end of the campaign in Flint Boroughs Harold Tilby commented rather sourly:

My opponents have never been able to touch me by argument all through the contest and they have never been able to shake one's faith in one's cause; they adopt the tactics of trying to howl me down. The only argument I have had to face throughout the Boroughs has been the argument of 'three cheers for Lloyd George'. The Radical Party have abandoned principle and have started hero-worshipping. They have set up an image and they say 'let us bow down and worship it'.⁴³

In the final analysis Lloyd George's popularity in North-east Wales was not a decisive factor in the election results, although it clearly helped, as the circumstances surrounding the government's decision to go to the country and the issues debated favoured the Liberal party. Furthermore, despite the massive focus the Conservatives gave the issues what the campaign in North-east Wales seemed to prove, Denbigh Boroughs notwithstanding, was that Church Defence and Tariff Reform failed to move the public, given the subsequent Liberal successes. In all the constituencies, barring Denbigh Boroughs, Liberals were returned with large majorities. In Flint Boroughs the Liberals increased their majority by 51 votes while in East Denbighshire they improved

⁴² See Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp249-250 for an overview.

⁴³ *Flintshire Observer*, 27 January 1910.

their share of the vote by over three per cent compared to the by-election of 1909.⁴⁴ In West Denbighshire Sam Thompson was defeated by over 3,000 votes, his advocacy of Tariff Reform and working-class background evidently failing to make an impression on the constituency's largely agricultural electorate. Elsewhere there were encouraging signs for the party. In Flint County Colonel Howard reduced Herbert Lewis' 1906 majority by over 500 votes, increasing the Conservative share of the vote to 43.6 per cent. Liberals later claimed that their vote here was adversely affected by an inward migration of people from the West Midlands seeking new industrial jobs, which left the constituency more anglicised.⁴⁵ Certainly, an improved Conservative vote suggests that there was a solid block of support for Howard amongst the working classes but these might have been expected to vote Liberal for as Henry Pelling suggests 'a decline in distinctively Welsh characteristics was compensated for, so far as Liberalism was concerned, by the emergence of a solid industrial vote' in the constituency.⁴⁶ The increased Conservative vote therefore implies that the party message had been well received, and that the party was slowly climbing back to the position it had occupied in the polls at the 1900 election, when it claimed 46 per cent of the vote.

These trends in Flint County were evident in Denbigh Boroughs where a significant block of working class voters in the Wrexham area gave Ormsby-Gore his sensational victory. And sensational the victory certainly was for a comfortable Liberal majority of 573 was overturned by Conservatives who gained a majority of eight, demolishing previous Liberal predictions of a majority in excess of 1,000 for their candidate Clement Edwards.⁴⁷ Ormsby-Gore attributed his victory to Tariff Reform, declaring after the election that 'he would just like to call their attention to the fact that Tariff Reform was winning all up and down the country and he was proud to say that his was the first Tariff Reform victory in Wales'.⁴⁸ The situation was of course more complex than this and while Tariff Reform may have been a factor in Ormsby-

⁴⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 28 January 1910.

⁴⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 27 January 1910.

⁴⁶ H.Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London: Macmillan, 1967) pp.366-367.

⁴⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 22 January 1910.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Gore's victory, it was by no means the most important one. Problems had beset the Liberal campaign from the start. Edwards was not the most loyal of Welsh Liberals, objecting to the education compromise sought by Lloyd George and the Bishop of St Asaph, and rebelling over the Liberal position on Church Disestablishment.⁴⁹ This streak of independence alienated many of his supporters and was, as he himself acknowledged the major factor in his defeat:

I don't quarrel with my friends in the least but they were as conscientious in regarding my attitude as wrong as I was in regarding it as right. But it came out that some of them were rather lukewarm and did not work as strenuously and as vigorously as they had done in 1906. They voted I have no doubt all right, but when certain men assumed an attitude of less zeal and energy; their weakened brethren thought there was some cause for it and abstained from voting or voted the other way.⁵⁰

There was also much local apprehension at several planned Liberal reforms - for example, Thomas Williams' defection to the Conservatives over Church Disestablishment. Ormsby-Gore suggested, subsequently, his strong poll was based upon a 'considerable number of Socialist, Liberal Churchmen and even Nonconformist votes'.⁵¹ More significantly Ormsby-Gore's success turned on the increased support from the working class, a reversal of the 1906 results when G.T Kenyon lost because of a failure to canvass the workingmen of the constituency.⁵²

The January 1910 election demonstrated the extent to which Conservatives had developed strong ties amongst sections of the working-class in the intervening period. Ormsby-Gore's decision to visit factories and address the workingmen was well rewarded.⁵³ In Wrexham during the campaign he spoke at the Cambrian Leatherworks, the Cambrian Ironworks and the Great Western Railway sheds and Soames Brewery. The Brewing trade had long been associated with the Conservative party, which since the late nineteenth century had argued for 'the right of the respectable man to enjoy the pleasures of a quiet

⁴⁹ *North Wales Times*, 3 December 1910.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 November 1910

⁵¹ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 February 1910.

⁵² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 24 March 1906.

⁵³ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 February 1910.

pint free from the interference of Liberal temperance reformers', and gained useful political support as a consequence.⁵⁴ This support was encouraged by the Brewing trade, anxious to defeat such measures as the 1908 Licensing Bill, which not only donated to the Conservative party but also provided committee rooms and meeting places inside public houses.⁵⁵ From within his own local party Ormsby-Gore was guaranteed support from the brewing trade – Wrexham brewery owners Charles Murless and J.A. Chadwick were members of the Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association Executive Committee. He was also invited to speak to workers at the F.W. Soames brewery, one of the largest in Wrexham, where he attacked the Liberal party's record on temperance reform:

The Liberal record for the last four years had been one of continued hostility to the brewery trade, and the Labour party had surrendered themselves to the temperance fanatics who thought the people could only be made temperate by Act of Parliament and because the employer and employed in the brewery had banded themselves together to protect their legitimate industry. The Liberal party in the Licensing Bill and in the Budget had included unjust measures of political revenue.⁵⁶

This was a powerful political message to all those who enjoyed drinking alcohol, and especially to those workingmen in Wrexham where the breweries were one of the largest employers in the town. It was also reported that Wrexham brewers gave thousands of pounds to Ormsby-Gore's campaign which was put to good use as much of it was used for canvassing and maximising the Conservative vote by ferrying people in cars to the polls on election day.⁵⁷ By comparison the Liberals lacked the same support and supplies for their voters. The *North Wales Times* later claimed that one of the major factors in Ormsby-Gore's victory was the support he received from the 'landlord and the liquor trade'.⁵⁸

Ormsby-Gore also believed that a visit to the Independent Labour party at their offices in Wrexham, where he was invited to address members, aided his

⁵⁴ J. Lawrence, 'The Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1867-1914, in *Party, State And Society, Electoral Behaviour in Britain Since 1820* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997) p. 90.

⁵⁵ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 77.

⁵⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 14 January 1910.

⁵⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 22 January 1922.

⁵⁸ *North Wales Times*, 22 January 1910.

victory.⁵⁹ During his speech here he highlighted the social reform aspects of Tariff Reform and attempted to allay working class animosity to aristocratic landowners.⁶⁰ He subsequently claimed that ‘Independent Labour men voted solidly for my opponent in 1906, several supported me and many abstained this time’.⁶¹ Finally, Ormsby-Gore’s victory owed something to organisational improvements. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press*:

Another element in the triumph has been the splendid organisation of the Unionist party. Four years ago it was admittedly unsatisfactory, but the organisation has since been remodelled on more business like lines and the great utilisation of the working class element has been a great factor in its success. Yeoman service has been rendered by the members of the Wrexham Conservative Workingmen’s Association and the work done by the members of the Women’s Unionist Association in the clerical department, canvassing etc is beyond all praise.⁶²

Since the 1906 general election, the Denbigh Boroughs Association had made strides to improve its organisation determined to avoid the apathy that had infected the party and address the criticisms from leading Conservatives in the division. T.J Rouw, chairman of the Ruthin Unionist Association, for example, speaking at the end of March 1906 said ‘there was one thing they could not shut their eyes to and that was the apathy of the party; there was not the kind of interest thrown into the last election as was done in the past’.⁶³ In many places Conservative organisation had simply broken down and was in desperate need of overhauling.⁶⁴ This obviously left the Conservative party vulnerable to attack and Denbigh Boroughs was just one of many constituencies to feel the full force of a well organised Liberal party, which canvassed the constituency thoroughly and supported its candidate with leading party speakers, most notably Lloyd George. What was more surprising was the Denbigh Boroughs Association’s positive response to its

⁵⁹ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 February 1910.

⁶⁰ *Wrexham Advertiser*, 1 January 1910.

⁶¹ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 February 1910.

⁶² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 21 January 1910.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24 March 1906.

⁶⁴ Russell, *Liberal Landslide*, p.52.

organisational inadequacies; Conservative organisation in many areas was still poor by 1910, the party machine failing to learn the lessons of 1906 as electors went uncanvassed, registration was ignored and constituency associations became mere social venues for the landed rich.⁶⁵ In Denbigh Boroughs work commenced on repairing Conservative organisation soon after the 1906 election defeat as party activists combined with leaders to re-structure Conservative forces in the constituency.

The poor state of organisation, especially in Wrexham, was addressed. Shortly after his appointment Ormsby- Gore commented 'the organisation in Wrexham and Holt is much better than I expected. Since the general election the towns have been divided into wards, registers have been divided up among the leading Conservatives and are in goodish order'.⁶⁶ With the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association taking care of Denbigh and Ruthin's registration work in the revision courts, and thus helping reduce costs, the prospects for maximising the Conservative vote were a lot brighter for the Conservatives in the constituency.

When these developments were added to the progress made with the newly founded ranks of working-class and women members who systematically canvassed and distributed Conservative propaganda during the election campaign, the Conservative party had a committed and loyal party support, which contrasted totally with the shambolic state of Clement Edwards' following. This support concentrated its activities in Wrexham, where the overwhelming amount of electors lived, in an attempt to avoid a repetition of the dismal failure to canvass properly during the 1906 general election campaign. According to Ormsby- Gore it was this concentrated effort in Wrexham that delivered the Conservative votes and tipped the balance in his favour:

The increase in the Conservative vote was almost entirely in Wrexham. In Denbigh the Liberals have always had a majority of votes – votes in Denbigh do not change very much. In Ruthin the parties are evenly balanced. Holt has always provided a big Conservative majority out of its 200 electors. This time

⁶⁵ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p.271.

⁶⁶ *Brogyntyn MSS*, letter from Ormsby- Gore to his mother, 9 November 1907.

Holt was overwhelmingly Conservative. I fancy that 450 voters in Wrexham voted Conservative for the first time in their lives at this election.⁶⁷

Although canvassing and leaflet distribution did take place in other areas, especially in Denbigh where members of the Primrose League fulfilled this role, it was the decision to target their resources at Wrexham and develop thriving women's and working men's associations that paid dividends for the Conservatives.

Lastly, Ormsby-Gore benefited from forces favourably inclined to the Conservatives who were perhaps more deeply rooted in the Denbigh Boroughs than it might appear from the election result in 1906. Denbigh Boroughs while not a safe seat had returned Conservatives prior to 1906 at the previous five general elections, four of them won by the Tory landowner G.T. Kenyon. In part this was due to the anglicised nature of many Welsh boroughs seats. Aubel asserts that this was because they had voting patterns more akin 'to that of England' and had been 'ever since the Middle Ages... with their castles and fortified town walls... the outposts of English influence in Wales'.⁶⁸ Certainly all four boroughs in the Denbigh Boroughs constituency had middle age fortifications associated with Edward the First's conquest of Wales and the proximity of Holt and Wrexham to the English border made them vulnerable to English influences. In theory this made voters more inclined towards the Tory party in Denbigh Boroughs and there was every reason to believe that with the right candidate fighting a more disciplined campaign the Conservatives could win back the seat at this election. This was something that candidate and party leaders recognised alike. In his papers Ormsby- Gore recounts a meeting held between himself and Lord Kenyon in November 1907. Acknowledging that party organisation was vastly improved Ormsby- Gore admitted 'it will be my fault if I don't get in'.⁶⁹ In delivering victory in January 1910 and allaying Conservative fears of further marginalisation in the region Ormsby-Gore earned himself a fearsome reputation as a campaigner as well as this panegyric by Kenneth O. Morgan: 'William Ormsby- Gore returned for Denbigh District... was to prove

⁶⁷ *North Wales Guardian*, 11 February 1910.

⁶⁸ Aubel, 'The Conservatives in Wales 1880-1935', p98.

⁶⁹ *Brogyntyn MSS*, letter from Ormsby- Gore to his mother, 9 November 1907.

the by far the most able and articulate Conservative yet returned for a Welsh constituency,⁷⁰

Table 3.1

The January 1910 General Election

<u>Party</u>	<u>U.K Seats</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Wales Seats</u>	<u>%</u>
Liberal	275	43.2	27	51.1
Conservative	273	46.9	2	30.4
Labour	40	7.6	5	16.4
Irish	82	1.9		
Nationalists				

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Election, 1885-1997*.

Table 3.2

General election Results in North East Wales, January 1910.

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Majority</u>
Denbigh East	6865	67.4	3321	32.6	Lib + 3544
Denbigh West	5854	67.4	2829	32.6	Lib + 3025
Denbigh Boro's	2427	49.9	2437	50.1	Con + 8*
Flint County	6610	59.7	4454	40.3	Lib + 2156
Flint Boro's	2150	55.5	1723	44.5	Lib + 427

* Amended to 10.

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 3.3.

Percentage Vote of the Conservative Party.

<u>Region</u>	<u>General Elections</u>					
	<u>1886</u>	<u>1892</u>	<u>1895</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1906</u>	<u>1910(J)</u>
United Kingdom	51.4	47.0	49.1	50.3	43.4	46.8
Wales	40.0	35.6	41.4	34.5	29.8	30.4
North-east Wales	38.6	41.7	43.8	47.2	39.7	38.2

Taken from: *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

The victory in Denbigh Boroughs offset the other losses in Denbighshire while an improved performance in Flint County helped boost Conservative morale.⁷¹ In the five constituencies that the Conservative party fought in North-

⁷⁰ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.250.

⁷¹ *Flintshire Observer*, 27 January 1910.

east Wales, they averaged 38.2 per cent of the vote, slightly down on their share of the vote in 1906, but still nearly eight per cent ahead of what the party achieved in Wales as a whole. Indeed, the results confirmed trends since 1886 that in this corner of Wales the Conservative vote was far stronger and more resilient to the onslaughts of radical Liberalism, than it was in the Principality as a whole (see Table 3.3). In January 1910 the Conservative party was struggling to achieve a meagre 30 per cent of the vote in Wales, even though it also won Radnor. Furthermore, since 1886 the Conservative vote in Wales had dropped by 10 per cent, but in North-east Wales it remained approximately where it had been 24 years earlier. Even though the Conservative share of the vote in North-east Wales lagged some way behind what the party was achieving nationally what the results seemed to be indicating was that the Conservatives were still a strong and vibrant force in the region and were capable of winning seats given the right circumstances. Despite the disappointments in East and West Denbighshire the party also appeared far more entrenched than it was in Wales as a whole. Perhaps certain demographical factors favoured the party in North-east Wales, but the Denbigh Boroughs result demonstrated what could be achieved by the Conservatives in a region which otherwise was still overwhelmingly Liberal.

In terms of the national picture, the Conservative 116 gains included fourteen in London, eleven in South-east England, eleven in East Anglia and eleven in the West Midlands. This perhaps should have been the spark to re-ignite the party's hopes for a speedy return to government - some Conservative supporters even suggesting that the party woo the Irish Nationalists in bid to regain power. However, such a move was quickly dismissed by the leaders refusal to contemplate such a suggestion, dependent, as it surely would be on some sort of Home Rule measure, an inconceivable thought to the bulk of Unionists who believed that this would signal the end of Empire.⁷² As a consequence the Liberal party remained in office with the support of Labour and the Irish Nationalists who in return for supporting the Budget expected a limit on the House of Lords veto, which could possibly signal the passage of Irish Home Rule legislation. In North-east Wales the situation was far simpler – overwhelmed by the Liberal onslaught in 1906 the party had regained a foothold

⁷² *The Times*, 3 March 1910.

in the region. There was still a long way to go, but for the first time since 1900 the party was showing electoral growth and more significantly had won the Denbigh Boroughs.

‘ROUND TWO’ THE DECEMBER 1910 ELECTION.

For the Conservative party the months between the two general elections of 1910 were marked by internal arguments over the validity of Tariff Reform as a policy. The policy’s supporters rejected the criticisms that Tariff Reform was a vote loser and remained convinced that the policy was still the party’s trump card. Austen Chamberlain, one of its chief proponents, argued ‘where we won, we won on and by Tariff Reform. Even where we lost it was the only subject in our repertoire about which people cared’.⁷³ These comments were based on a belief that it was not Tariff Reform but the Peoples Budget and the House of Lords that caused the party problems at the previous election. Such implicit faith was placed in Tariff Reform that many of its advocates, rather than see its rejection or a dilution of its programmes, considered reform of the House of Lords and consorting with the Irish Nationalists, whom they saw as protectionists, in a bid to remove opposition and gain support for the policy. Yet many Conservatives were disenchanted with Tariff Reform as it had failed to deliver election victory or nullify the burdens of the 1909 Budget and cohesion was hardly helped when Balfour announced his pledge to submit Tariff Reform to a referendum, alienating those who implicitly supported the policy.⁷⁴ Furthermore, unlike the Liberals the Conservative leaders went into the Constitutional Conference in the spring of 1910 without any clear alternative to the government’s veto scheme and as result ‘the election was upon them before they had any agreed plan before the public’.⁷⁵ Thus when the conference broke down and Asquith sought a dissolution, announcing a second election within the space of a year the Conservative party was hardly ready for the rigours of campaign which would be fought on the terms of the Parliament Bill and the possible emasculation of the Lords’ powers.

⁷³ A. Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside* pp196-197 as cited in Blewett, *The Peer, The Parties and The People* p.161.

⁷⁴ Blewett, *The Peers, The Parties and the People*.p158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

By contrast divisions over party policy were ignored as the early part of 1910, went well for Conservatives in North-east Wales as they carried their strong performance in the January 1910 general election through to the county council elections, less than a month later. Little changed in Denbighshire where the Conservatives lost four seats and gained three. The Liberals claimed that their gain of one seat, which increased their majority to twelve, was a great victory for progressive politics, but only one seat swapped sides – a gain for the Liberals in Colwyn Bay West. However, in Flintshire the Conservatives successfully attacked the extravagant Liberal spending on education and pledged themselves ‘to observe the strictest economy and to put an end to the frequent building of new schools’.⁷⁶ As a result, the Conservatives obtained a clear majority on the council as they won 24 seats to the Liberals’ 18, representing their best result since county council elections began in 1889. They were helped by the return of nine Conservative councillors in twelve uncontested divisions. Walter Hargreaves, a Conservative was elected as Chairman of the Council and all the important police and education committees were dominated by Conservatives. Understandably the Conservative party was jubilant and the Flintshire Constitutional Association’s report for 1910 reflected ‘that in March the county council elections took place and for the first time in 21 years the Radical forces were routed’.⁷⁷

The breakthrough in local politics was a significant step forward for the Conservative party in North-east Wales, but the Conservative Associations still struggled to select parliamentary candidates for the December 1910 general election. After Sam Thompson decided he faced an impossible task in West Denbighshire and asked to be relieved from further candidature, the Constitutional Association unable to induce their preferred choice as candidate, R.Williams-Wynn, a vice president of the Association, to stand decided ‘to let the election go by default’.⁷⁸ In Flintshire the situation was more complicated. Colonel Howard who fought the County constituency in January, was selected for the more winnable Boroughs seat, and had began

⁷⁶ *County Herald*, 11 March 1910.

⁷⁷ F.R.O., Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, August 1910-22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Secretary’s Report for 1910.

⁷⁸ D.R.O., Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association Minutes, DD/PN/204, Meeting of Finance Committee 30 November 1910.

campaigning when the Constituency Association attempted to fill the vacancy in the County division. In November 1910 after several attempts to entice suitable candidates, the Association approached Sir J.D. Rees, Liberal MP for Montgomery, who then joined the Conservatives in protest against Lloyd George's Budget measures. The original intention of the Constitutional Association was to offer him the Boroughs division, with Howard returning to the County division. However, Rees declined the offer prompting Howard to return to the Boroughs Constituency and leaving the County uncontested. In East Denbighshire the Unionist Association appointed Alfred Hood, a local businessman and Anglican, thus ending the party's experiment with fielding Nonconformist candidates. The only other candidate was of course Ormsby-Gore, the sitting MP for Denbigh Boroughs. Despite these difficulties with selecting candidates, the party still had cause for optimism. In two of the three contested constituencies, the Liberals fielded new and relatively unknown candidates in the region. E.T. John, an industrialist, was elected for East Denbighshire and in Denbigh Boroughs, Caradoc Rees, a barrister replaced the hapless Clement Edwards.

At the December 1910 election the fortunes of the Parliament Bill took precedence over all other issues. Every election address, barring two, featured the question and 51 considered nothing else, while 86 per cent of them suggested the constitutional question was the most important issue facing the electors.⁷⁹ The December campaign in North-east Wales closely followed those held throughout the United Kingdom. In line with Conservative party policy, candidates characterised the Parliament Bill as a challenge to democracy and a threat to the unity of the Empire. Speaking at a meeting in Bwlchgwyn on 3 December, Alfred Hood, the East Denbighshire candidate said that 'the removal of the House of Lords veto would result in the passage of an Irish Home Rule Bill, and that if they gave it to Ireland it meant the breaking up of the unity of the British Islands. It was only the first part of it, and it would probably lead to the breaking up of the Empire'.⁸⁰

Similarly, at a Flintshire Constitutional Association meeting in early December 1910 Dr. Twemlow, an Executive Committee member, likened the

⁷⁹ Blewett, *the Peers, the Parties and the People*, p.327.

⁸⁰ *North Wales Guardian*, 10 December 1910.

government's desire to remove the Lords veto to 'an apparent socialist desire to remove the monarchy'.⁸¹ To Ormsby-Gore, in Denbigh Boroughs, the threat to the House of Lords veto surpassed any other issue in importance for if the veto was abolished then any Bill that the Liberal party 'brought to the House of Commons would be passed whether the people said yes or no'.⁸² As a result he modified his position on Tariff Reform and instead gave his support to Balfour and his referendum pledge on the policy:

After Mr. Balfour's statement ...it had been made clear that no scheme of Tariff Reform would be carried over the heads of the people. He meant that the scheme of Tariff Reform that the Unionist party would introduce would be settled by the referendum. They should appeal direct to the electors, and whether the electors of the country said the scheme was or was not to be passed, the Unionist party would abide by that decision. I am standing at this election upon the referendum.⁸³

His position brought him into conflict with intransigent Tariff Reformers who feared that members of the Tory landed classes presented an obstacle to their programme by their willingness to sacrifice protectionist policies in favour of their resistance to the emasculation of the House of Lords.⁸⁴ Certainly Alfred Hood and Colonel Howard remained faithful to the protectionist wing of the party by insisting upon the application of the full Tariff Reform programme should the Conservatives be returned to power, and thus the party was split once more in the region over the application of the policy. Ormsby-Gore's decision was perhaps influenced by his family connection – he was the son of the Third Baron Harlech, a diehard peer who was implacably opposed to the Parliament Bill. Fortunately for the Conservative candidates apparent divisions on Tariff Reform were not this time seized upon by the Liberal party who were concentrating their attacks on the House of Lords. However, Ormsby-Gore's status as the only son of a leading nobleman brought about charges of elitism and indifference to the plight of others less fortunate than him by Lloyd George and

⁸¹ *Flintshire Observer* 9 December 1910.

⁸² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 3 December 1910.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3 December 1910.

⁸⁴ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp.158-161.

Caradoc Rees during the campaign. At Denbigh during the first week of campaigning Lloyd George unleashed the full venom of his rhetoric in a personal attack on Ormsby-Gore, the only aristocratic MP in the region:

He [Lloyd George] had nothing to say about Ormsby-Gore who was no doubt a very nice and genial boy [but]...did he know the nation, did he know anything about its literature, could he speak its language, had he taken part in any phase in the life of Wales, except its rents.⁸⁵

The Liberal attack on Ormsby- Gore was continued by their candidate in Denbigh Boroughs, Caradoc Rees, who said during the first week of campaigning:

The contest was not between Mr Gore and himself it was between the two bodies of men who were in conflict for the simple reason that they represented different principles - Liberalism with its progressive policy or Conservatism which stood for the privileged classes against the masses'.⁸⁶

Yet despite these and other Liberal attacks on him it hardly affected the result in Denbigh Boroughs. On an unchanged electoral register the Tories held on to the seat by nine votes. This perhaps at first glance seemed unlikely when given the circumstances surrounding the election. Since 1910 Clement Edwards, whose candidature had divided the Liberal party in January 1910, had left to fight the East Glamorgan constituency and Caradoc Rees a new local candidate had been selected around whom local Liberals coalesced. Party workers also responded favourably to Rees and worked tirelessly to win back the seat for the Liberals, especially in ensuring supporters went to the poll.⁸⁷ At the same time the issue of the Parliament Bill seemed to be one that united the local Liberals in the constituency unlike the divisions brought about by Church Disestablishment in January 1910. Thus the Liberals represented a far more formidable opposition to Ormsby-Gore than they had in January 1910

⁸⁵ *North Wales Times*, 10 December 1910.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1910.

⁸⁷ *North Wales Guardian*, 16 January 1910.

and were confident they could win the seat back.⁸⁸ However, in the final analysis it should be noted that the Conservative party was well entrenched in the constituency and despite Liberal confidence about their prospects they still faced a difficult task in winning back the constituency. Indeed, Denbigh Boroughs had been Conservative since 1885 – the only defeat suffered since then the Liberal gain as part of their clean sweep of Wales in 1906. Since then Clement Edwards had done much damage to the Liberal party's reputation in the constituency - his decision to refuse to accept the result in January 1910 and petition the Royal Court of Justice to have the result overturned because of voting irregularities resulted in an embarrassing climb-down as Ormsby-Gore's majority was increased to ten. Local Liberals attempted to persuade him not to proceed with the action, and his subsequent defeat in the Court only succeeded in alienating many of his supporters.⁸⁹

Furthermore, Ormsby-Gore's growing reputation as a parliamentarian recorded in a series of weekly newsletters published in the local press could only have enhanced his candidature.⁹⁰ Finally, the same level of organisational efficiency that contributed to success in January 1910 was also achieved at this election. In his victory speech at Denbigh Ormsby-Gore praised the help he had received from his Conservative Association and the Primrose League in providing support during his campaign.⁹¹ This he noted had been particularly evident on election day as party workers ensured that all registered Conservatives voted while a fleet of over 30 cars conveyed them to the polls in Wrexham.⁹² As a result the Conservatives held on to the seat again by the narrowest of margins. Overall, the results in North-east Wales demonstrated that little had changed since January. In Flint Boroughs Colonel Howard lost to John Summers who increased his majority by 82 votes and in East Denbighshire Alfred Hood was defeated, though not before a creditable fight that reduced the Liberal majority by nearly 300 votes.

⁸⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 16 January 1910.

⁸⁹ For a full account see *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 February and 9 April 1910.

⁹⁰ *North Wales Guardian*, 9 December 1910.

⁹¹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 17 December 1910.

⁹² *North Wales Guardian*, 16 December 1910.

Table 3.4
The December 1910 General Election.

Party	U.K.Seats	%	Wales, Seats	%
Liberal	272	43.9	26	47.6
Conservative	272	46.3	3	30.7
Labour	42	7.1	5	19.1
Irish	84	2.5		
Nationalists				

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*

Table 3.5
General Election Results in North-east Wales, December 1910.

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Con.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Majority</u>
Denbigh West	Unopposed				
Denbigh East	6449	66.9	3186	33.1	Lib + 3263
Denbigh Boro's	2376	49.9	2385	50.1	Con + 9
Flint County	Unopposed				
Flint Boro's	2098	56.9	1589	43.1	Lib + 509

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 3.6
Percentage Vote of the Conservative Party.

<u>Region</u>	<u>General Elections</u>					
	1892	1895	1900	1906	1910(J)	1910(D)
United Kingdom	47.0	49.1	50.3	43.4	46.8	46.6
Wales	35.6	41.4	34.5	29.8	30.4	30.7
North East Wales	41.7	43.8	47.2	39.7	38.2	39.6

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

The results also confirmed the strength of the Conservative party's vote in the region. It averaged nearly 40 per cent of the vote in the three constituencies it contested, nearly ten per cent more than the party achieved in Wales as whole. Although the party lagged some way behind what it was achieving nationally the retention of Denbigh Borough was a boost to Conservatives in the region, many hoping that Ormsby- Gore's victories in 1910 would be a springboard for success in other constituencies.⁹³ While the result in Flint Boroughs was disappointing the increase in the Liberal majority of 82 votes hardly represented a large downturn in Conservative fortunes and Colonel Howard

⁹³ *North Wales Guardian*, 16 December 1910 see also *Denbighshire Free Press*, 29 January 1910.

still achieved 44 per cent of the vote (see table 3.5) At the same time in East Denbighshire Alfred Hood slightly increased the Conservative share of the vote compared to January 1910, as it topped 33 per cent.

What the results indicate is that although the House of Lords issue was well received by Liberal audiences it did not inflict any further damage on the party in North-east Wales. The results demonstrated actually just how entrenched the party was in the region despite the constant parliamentary election defeats and its failure to add to the victory in Denbigh Boroughs. Even though its average share of the vote was two per cent lower than it had achieved in 1892, and some way behind what it had gained in 1895 and 1900 - strong Conservative years nationally – since 1900 the party's share of the vote remained strong at nearly 40 per cent which compared favourably with the party's performance in Wales as a whole (see table 3. 6). In December 1910 it still only achieved just over 30 per cent of the vote in the Principality nearly five per cent less than what was achieved in 1892, although the party gained Montgomery Boroughs and Cardiff Boroughs off the Liberals, but lost Radnor again.

Nationally the party won the same number of seats as the Liberal party, but its share of the vote was slightly down gaining 46.3 per cent of the vote compared to the 46.9 per cent achieved at the January election. Despite the fact that the Conservative party was unable to gain power because of the support Labour and the Irish Nationalists gave the government the Conservatives and Liberals were equally matched. The status quo was also maintained in North-east Wales where the Conservatives were still searching for a breakthrough in Flintshire despite the continued substantial vote and were still unable to mount a serious challenge to the Liberal party in a Denbighshire county division. Yet with the retention of the Denbigh Boroughs seat, albeit again with the narrowest of margins, and with the outstanding performance at the county council elections in Flintshire in March 1910, the future looked much brighter for the Conservative party in North-east Wales.

PARTY ORGANISATION 1910-1914

Successive defeats brought the evident inadequacies of the national Conservative party organisation into stark relief. Decay in the party machine indicated that there was no supervision of constituency Associations to ensure efficiency and no procedures for selecting 'the right men for the right seats' while at the same time Central Office was in disarray.⁹⁴ Consequently, Central Office had no control of office routine there was no proper system of reports from District Agents and no control of their expenditure. Lapsed subscriptions were not chased up and even though urgent work was completed all other problems and responsibilities were shelved if possible.⁹⁵ Under the auspices of the Unionist Organisation Committee, appointed by Balfour in February 1911, which reported to leaders in April 1911, sweeping changes were introduced to party organisation. The responsibilities of the Chief Whip were to be limited to a management role in parliament, a Party Treasurer's post was created to oversee party funds, and the new position of Chairman of the Party was introduced to take charge of Central Office its staff, as well as the party outside parliament. Thus responsibility for party organisation, and the provision of propaganda and speakers remained in Central Office's hands while it and the National Union office were merged, but only Central Office retained executive authority.⁹⁶ These changes strengthened the party leader's position confirming his control over organisation.⁹⁷ According to Dutton they also had a positive long-term effect on the party as 'the new measures very considerably strengthened the Unionist party machine. In particular, the pruning of the Chief Whip's functions and the creation of the office of Chairman were landmarks in the party's transition into the world of modern politics'.⁹⁸ However, as part of this review it was also identified that there was 'a need to make wholesale improvements in the methods of the local parties'.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People* pp.266-277. See p.267.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p., 267. Blewett quotes from the new party chairman, Arthur Steel Maitland, in a report to Bonar Law.

⁹⁶ S.Ball, 'The National and Regional Party Structure', p.172. See also Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*, p.136.

⁹⁷ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ Dutton, *His Majesty's Loyal Opposition*. 136.

⁹⁹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p59.

How to further improve their organisational structure after the December 1910 election also remained a concern for the NWDNU. Notwithstanding the substantial vote in Flint Boroughs, a report on the general election written within days of the defeat by the Flintshire Constitutional Association, highlighted the problems the Conservative party were still having in the constituency and elsewhere in the region. It declared that the December 'result was extremely disappointing' and not helped by a lack of support from Conservative Central Office:¹⁰⁰

Head Office again failed entirely to render any effective help. Every kind of pressure was brought to bear in order to obtain platform assistance but without avail...Denbigh Boroughs, Cardiff and Montgomery Boroughs were fortunate in having the help of the heads of the Party and some of the leading speakers in the country went to the assistance of the candidates with the result that two of the seats were won and the other retained. In Radnorshire and Flint District Boroughs no assistance was received from leading men with the result that the former was lost and in the latter the majority was increased.¹⁰¹

The report was careful not to implicate anybody by name, even complimenting the Flintshire Constitutional Association's leaders and the NWDNU for the aid they had given during the campaign but it went on to criticise poor organisation, weaknesses in local planning and the ineffectiveness of local clubs:

The chief weaknesses are to be found in the local working. In the first place, canvassing, a most important part of the work was done badly. Our people do not begin a canvass early enough... It is to canvassing and re- canvassing that one must look at elections for results. As things are, it is not uncommon to find that canvassers take canvass books, sit down in their own houses and mark up the books as they think people will vote and the voters are never seen at all. One of the consequences is that some electors vote against us because they have

¹⁰⁰ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910-22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Report on the Election in the Flint District Boroughs, December 1910.

¹⁰¹ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910-22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Report on the Election in the Flint District Boroughs, December 1910.

never been asked to vote for us... The clubs in some cases should give much greater help than they do. At the beginning of an election the Committees should pass a resolution saying that the Billiard Tables will not be open before 9-00 p.m. (if at all) and that the Club premises shall be the Committee Rooms for the Election.¹⁰²

More optimistically the report indicated that there was 'little or nothing to complain of in the matter of work and enthusiastic service during the last day or two of the campaign', but that there was an urgent need for early planning and more central support.¹⁰³ Finally it concluded that 'what is required at once is, first, a Candidate, and secondly, more educative work amongst the Electors'.¹⁰⁴

The report's conclusions had wider ramifications. In early January 1911, the NWDNU met at Chester to assess the party's performance at the general election. The meeting drew heavily upon the report of the Flintshire Constitutional Association by deciding on the following resolutions to be adopted by all Associations:

- 1.Candidates should be chosen without delay.
- 2.Separate Associations should be formed for each constituency. Their Chairmen should not hold office for more than one year... Thus fresh ideas would certainly be brought into play and more men would take an interest in the political organisation. It is hardly possible for any man to keep up the necessary strain of concert pitch, which is really required in political work, particularly when the constant defeats are taken into consideration...
- 3.Clubs should be started everywhere and made to do political work and be used as political institutions only during elections.
- 4.Junior Leagues should be started in each town.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910-22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Report on the Election in the Flint District Boroughs, December 1910.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910-22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Report on the Election in the Flint District Boroughs, December 1910.

Resolution one was prompted by the failure of West Denbighshire and Flint County to field candidates at the December election.¹⁰⁶ Finding suitable candidates to contest constituencies, where Conservative prospects were poor, remained a problem. In January 1910 the Conservative party had contested all 34 constituencies in Wales, but in December only twenty Conservative candidates went to the polls, the same number as in 1906. Part of the problem was financial - funding candidates at parliamentary elections was an enormous expense and one that was difficult to justify if certain defeat was the outcome. At the same time finding a suitable candidate who was willing to risk his reputation in a Liberal stronghold was also extremely difficult.

In spite of these encumbrances the associations in North-east Wales attempted to find new and suitable candidates, but progress was mixed. The Flintshire Constitutional Association quickly resolved its selection difficulties. In April 1911, D.F Pennant, a barrister, scion of the Penrhyn family and member of the Association's Executive Committee was adopted to fight the County division, and in October Hamlet Roberts, a relatively unknown Welsh-speaking Nonconformist from Pen y Groes near Caernarfon, was selected for Flint Boroughs. The West Denbighshire Association took much longer to adopt a candidate. Ever since Sam Thompson stood down as candidate in April 1910 the Association had been searching for a successor and by May 1912 were still looking for a parliamentary candidate.

The situation worsened in December 1912 when E.W. Griffith, a local landowner, also turned down the opportunity to stand. Colonel Cornwallis-West was then authorised to approach Central Office in London in the hope that they could find a suitable candidate. This was not a preferred route – the Central Office choice often meant the imposition of a wholly unsuitable candidate, especially in this corner of Wales where it was deemed necessary to have a Welsh-speaking candidate with some knowledge of local rural affairs. To this end the Association finally found a solution, and avoided approaching Central Office, when in October 1913 it appointed W. H. Williams, a Welsh-speaking barrister who lived in Denbigh and was a member of the Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association. Both Williams and Roberts in Flint Boroughs

¹⁰⁶ The other North Wales constituencies that went uncontested by the Conservative party were Caernarfon Arfon, Caernarfon Eifon, Merionethshire, Anglesey and Montgomery County.

were unusual candidates for Welsh constituencies, Conservative Nonconformists who opposed Church Disestablishment. The vast bulk of Conservative candidates in Wales during this period came from the ranks of the landed and professional classes, most of whom were closely associated with the Anglican Church, and their candidature represented a risk to the Conservative party in the region.¹⁰⁷ In January 1910 the candidature of David Rhys, a Nonconformist minister, in East Denbighshire failed spectacularly when the Liberals successfully tainted him as a traitor to his country and his calling and the Conservatives fell to a heavy defeat. The risk was at its greatest in West Denbighshire where the highest numbers of Nonconformists lived in North-east Wales and it was quite possible that the voters would behave in exactly the same as they had in East Denbighshire in January 1910.¹⁰⁸

Selection problems also faced the Unionist Association in East Denbighshire. Having lost by substantial margins at the 1906 and 1909 by-elections as well as the two general elections in 1910 it proved extremely difficult finding a suitable candidate for the division. During 1912 attempts were made to lure Sam Thompson, who given his background appeared an ideal candidate for this coal-mining constituency, to stand. When this failed - Thompson preferring his role as a speaker on industrial matters and an organiser for the party - the Association again found themselves without a suitable candidate. In fact it was not until July 1914 that the Association finally solved their problem and selected J. Downes Powell, a Welsh-speaking barrister who lived in Liverpool and practised on the Chester and North Wales circuit. Downes Powell professed to be an expert on the Irish situation having lived in the country, which was appropriate at the time given the emphasis placed on Irish Home Rule by Bonar Law. The length of time it took to adopt candidates in East and West Denbighshire was a reminder to the local leadership of the difficulties in finding appropriate people to contest constituencies. Nevertheless, with Ormsby-Gore, the sitting MP due to stand again in Denbigh Boroughs, the Conservative party was again ready to fight all five constituencies in the region.

¹⁰⁷ Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935', pp226-229.

¹⁰⁸ *Royal Commission on the Church and other Religious Bodies in Wales- Denbighshire.*

To support their candidates the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales conducted a number of political campaigns between 1910 and 1914. In particular, having chosen two new candidates, the Flintshire Constitutional Association proved the most active. In the autumn of 1911, D.F. Pennant, the Flint County candidate conducted an extensive campaign visiting all the major towns and villages in the division including places where the Conservatives could not be expected to poll well. These included the industrial heartlands at the east of the county - Connaught Quay, and Shotton both Liberal strongholds. The topics covered were varied, but Tory opposition to Welsh Church Disestablishment and Irish Home Rule featured, but the high cost of implementing Liberal social reforms, especially the Insurance Bill, was given particular attention. This was especially the case the nearer the Bill got to passing in the Commons. Between October and December 1911 Pennant attended meetings at Connaught Quay, Buckley and Mold at which Liberal plans for National Insurance and compulsory employer contributions were debated.¹⁰⁹ At the meeting at Mold it was argued that the bulk of the cost for the Insurance Bill would be borne by employers, which would force the prices of goods up thus threatening the future of British industry. Pennant's views were in tune with Conservative thinking at the time. In June 1911 the South Staffordshire Ironmasters told Steel-Maitland, the party chairman, that National Insurance contributions would push up costs when they were already having difficulties competing in world markets and in August the Birmingham Chamber Commerce demanded that unemployment insurance be dropped from the Bill. Such opposition led to the Conservatives adopting a critical stance on National Insurance.¹¹⁰ It was surely no coincidence that Pennant was a candidate in a steel-making constituency where Conservatives claimed that increased taxation would threaten the stability of the industry.¹¹¹

Pennant's campaigning continued during 1912 taking the Conservative message to Rhyl, the biggest town in the constituency, as well as more Tory inclined places such as Hanmer in Flintshire Maelor and Cilcain and Nercwys in the centre of the division. Pennant also concentrated his efforts in Buckley

¹⁰⁹ *Flintshire Observer*, 1 December 1911.

¹¹⁰ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism*, p.288.

¹¹¹ See for example, *Flintshire Observer*, 2 December 1909.

where the local Conservative machine had fallen into neglect and where in November 1912 a new committee was founded with the aim of improving party prospects at any ensuing general election. Pennant's campaigning was less prevalent during the early 1913, as the Flint Boroughs by-election took precedence. However, at the end of the year and the early part of 1914 Pennant was again campaigning, visiting Hawarden, the home of the Gladstone family, Connaught Quay and the Primrose League fete at Gwysaney Hall near Mold. At all three Pennant and his supporting speakers attacked Liberal plans to introduce an Irish Home Rule and Welsh Church Disestablishment Bills.

Hamlet Roberts' campaigning in Flint Boroughs did not match that undertaken by Pennant in the County Division, perhaps a little surprising given that the Boroughs constituency seat was deemed more winnable. However, in 1911 Tariff Reform still remained a positive policy issue for the Flintshire Conservatives and in October Roberts attended a meeting of the newly formed Holywell and Bagillt branches of the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association. At the end of 1911, however, and in the period leading up to the Flint Boroughs by-election in January 1913, the Flintshire Conservatives switched attack, and moved away from Tariff Reform as a campaign issue. At meetings at Buckley, Mold and Flint Liberals plans for Church Disestablishment, and in particular Disendowment were attacked.

This was not unusual at this time – while the vast bulk of Conservatives saw Irish Home Rule as a threat to democracy and the unity of Empire, and coalesced around Bonar Law's opposition to it, many Anglican Tories also saw the impending Welsh Church Disestablishment legislation as a personal affront. The Cecil family, in particular the Conservative MPs Lords Robert and Hugh Cecil, regarded 'the protection of the Church as a special family responsibility and Lord Hugh was as moved to indignation by the Disendowment of the Church in Wales as by the People's Budget or the attack on the House of Lords'.¹¹² In North-east Wales there was also a pragmatic reason for opposing Church Disestablishment. Despite the fact that Nonconformists still outnumbered Anglicans it was in this corner of Wales where the highest concentration of Church-goers lived, and when used as a

¹¹² Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.99.

political tactic at Denbigh Boroughs in January 1910 Disestablishment had caused divisions in Liberal ranks. Thus, Church Disestablishment, rather than Irish Home Rule, started to dominate Conservative campaigning in North-east Wales.

After 1910 every Conservative candidate in the region featured it on their campaign platforms. This included W.H Williams in West Denbighshire and J.Downes Powell in East Denbighshire, who because of the timing of their selection hardly had time to campaign before the outbreak of war in September 1914. Although he was more conciliatory than Ormsby-Gore on the issue, as was witnessed by his comments once the Church Disestablishment Bill had passed, speaking at Ruthin in May 1914 Williams said ‘the present was no time to cripple an institution which had done so much for Wales in the cause of religion’.¹¹³ J. Downes-Powell also featured Church Disestablishment at his one and only public meeting held at Wrexham’s Conservative Club on 4 July 1914. In opposing Church Disestablishment he said that ‘the government is creating an entirely new and at the same time a very dangerous precedent in passing an act of parliament which so over-rides the law as it has stood for so long’.¹¹⁴

Representing the High Church wing of the party and closely associated with the Cecil family, through his engagement to Beatrice Cecil, Welsh Church Disestablishment almost became the sole preoccupation of Ormsby-Gore’s campaigning in Denbigh Boroughs between 1910 and 1914. This was especially the case after a new Disestablishment Bill was introduced in April 1912. Attending meetings to attack Disestablishment at Ruthin and Denbigh in late 1912 and early 1913 Ormsby-Gore became the leading Conservative party spokesman in North-east Wales on the subject. He was also centrally involved with other Church Defence campaigns across North Wales. At a demonstration held at Caernarfon on the eve of the Bill’s introduction, over 14, 000 people attended to listen to speeches from Ormsby-Gore and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Ormsby- Gore also spoke at the largest demonstration held against Disestablishment in the region at Wrexham on 9 August 1913 where 20, 000 people attended and heard speeches from Lord Robert Cecil, the Bishop of

¹¹³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 9 May 1914.

¹¹⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 10 July 1914.

St. Asaph and Alfred Cripps, Chancellor of the Diocese of London.¹¹⁵ What the size of these attendances demonstrates was the depth of opposition to a new Disestablishment Bill. That over 20,00 people attended the demonstration in Wrexham when there were less than 17,000 Church communicants in the whole of Denbighshire suggests that people were willing to travel to support the anti-disestablishment cause and how intense the opposition to it was.¹¹⁶

Even more impressive was Ormsby-Gore's involvement with helping raise a petition protesting against the Bill signed by approximately 15,000 Nonconformists from the Diocese of St. Asaph. At a Primrose League social held in Denbigh at the end of February 1914, Ormsby-Gore described the men who signed the petition, which included W. H. Williams and started in the Vale of Clwyd, as 'honourable and courageous men'.¹¹⁷ Taking the matter further Ormsby-Gore presented the petition and deputation of Nonconformists from Denbigh to Prime Minister Asquith in London, who unceremoniously dismissed the deputation and their petition, arguing that it was not the right way to present the document. 'It should be done by constitutional methods and addressed to the House of Commons', he commented.¹¹⁸ When it came to the matter of Disendowment Asquith was equally scathing, stating that 'if any specific reasoned objection to the financial aspect of the Bill were advanced he should be ready to pay weight to it...He did not think they had advanced their case'.¹¹⁹ Indeed, despite such protestations the Liberal government pressed ahead with the legislative process and a Welsh Church Bill received the Royal Assent on 18 September 1914.

Nonetheless, what the campaign against Welsh Church Disestablishment succeeded in doing was unite the Conservative party in North-east Wales leaving behind any friction caused by the Tariff Reform debate. It was not just that Conservatives were opposed to Church Disestablishment on principle; many in North-east Wales also saw it as an opportunity to take the initiative away from the Liberal party. At the same time it would be wrong to assume that after 1910 the Conservatives in the region did nothing apart from oppose

¹¹⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 15 August 1913.

¹¹⁶ *Royal Commission on the Church and Other Religious Bodies in Wales- Denbighshire*.

¹¹⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 28 February 1914.

¹¹⁸ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 7 March 1914.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Church Disestablishment. They shared the same fear of and opposition to an Irish Home Rule Bill that other Conservatives did in the country, but it was Church Disestablishment that galvanised them and on a political level gave them a topic upon which to attack the Liberals.

The NWDNU's second Resolution, and its recommendations to make organisation more democratic, caused several associations in North-east Wales problems. While electing new chairmen each year would according, to Lord Mostyn, 'introduce young men more in touch with events' at the a same time it would mean deposing men who had led their local associations for many years and had invested a lot of money and time furthering the Conservative cause in North-east Wales. The Flintshire Constitutional Association decided to put the resolution to a vote at its Annual General Meeting held in February 1911 and comfortably defeated it by twenty votes to twelve.¹²⁰ According to Colonel Hurlbutt, of the Executive Committee:

In Lord Mostyn they had had an admirable Chairman who had done more than his duty and it would be ridiculous to even suggest a change. Personally he should always be ready to propose Lord Mostyn as the best Chairman the Association could have. He did not agree with the resolution.¹²¹

In an apparent display of modesty Lord Mostyn responded:

He had no wish to stand in the way. He had desired to stand down for the last ten years, but they had done him the honour of re-electing him and he greatly appreciated it...He honestly thought it would be better if they had not done so. He had quite made up his mind not to consent to accept office. He was of the opinion that it would be better to elect a younger man ...However, as it had been so unanimous he would accept office for one more year. He hoped by next year they would have fully considered the question and that they would not think of electing him.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Flintshire Observer*, 24 February 1911.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

It is interesting to note that Lord Mostyn remained Chairman of the Association until his death in 1929 – demonstrating that the membership did not have the desire to remove one of Flintshire’s leading landowners whose family’s patronage dominated Conservative politics in the county. The Mostyn family had been the pre-eminent family in Conservative politics for some time in Flintshire and the Third Baron Mostyn was also the only Conservative aristocrat of any note in the county, apart from Lord Kenyon, and with his estate lands generating some of the highest return on rents in Flintshire this made Lord Mostyn one of the most influential figures in the county. When this was added to the regular donations he made to the Constitutional Association to keep it financially viable it was unlikely that anybody would wish to seriously challenge his authority. Perhaps, the only surprise was that the party Association even decided to put his position as Chairman to the vote. With Lord Mostyn’s continued tenure also came the decision to retain the system of one Association overseeing Conservative matters in two Flintshire constituencies. It was hardly likely having given Lord Mostyn their backing that the Association would then undermine his position by voting to split the Association into two separate autonomous constituency organisations.

The Flintshire Association was not the only one to reject resolution two for Colonel Mesham in West Denbighshire, Lord Kenyon in Denbigh Boroughs and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn in East Denbighshire all retained the Chairmanships of their associations without being subjected to an election. It was not that the local leaders necessarily wished to defy the NWDNU, some of them after all were officers in the organisation, but there were sound reasons why they maintained control. Ball points out:

Before 1945 most associations were dependent upon a subvention from the MP or candidate who commonly gave between £200 and £400 per annum and was also responsible for finding the election expenses usually between £800 and £1,000. The remaining subscription income came from a handful of leading figures.¹²³

¹²³ Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of Party Organization’, p.286.

In North-east Wales where Association often went long periods without a candidate it was clear where the main financial burden was going to fall. To continue the development of Conservative clubs and parish committees, to defray the expenses of delegates attending conferences, to provide the never-ending supply of propaganda literature and to fund the regular local and parliamentary elections, the associations needed to be on a sound economic footing. For this the local parties depended on their patron's donations, as well as their annual subscriptions. For example, in July 1914 Lord Mostyn offered £100 per annum for two years to solve the severe financial problems in the Flintshire Constitutional Association and in Denbigh Boroughs regular large donations from Lord Kenyon and Lord Harlech rescued the Conservative Association from insolvency.¹²⁴ It was not just that these Chairmen donated to their own Associations they also contributed to other party organisations. Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn made regular donations to the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, and Lord Kenyon gave £50 to the Flintshire Constitutional Association in 1914.¹²⁵ It would have been curious indeed to expect such people to stand down, give up their power, influence and standing, and in the process threaten the financial survival of the region's Conservative Associations.

Resolution three reflected the party's disappointment that insufficient numbers of workingmen's clubs had been established and those that had been formed had failed to fully participate in political work or deliver large numbers of working-class votes. With the notable exception of Wrexham, the failure of working class clubs or associations to engage in political activity was a constant source of irritation to the Conservatives in North-east Wales. However, any bid to politicise the workingmens clubs faced opposition. This was witnessed in Flintshire where using clubs merely as leisure venues rather than political institutions was partly blamed for the election defeat in Flint Boroughs in December 1910. Yet, it was difficult to promote Conservative clubs as political organisations when the party had previously promoted them as a place where workingmen could partake in leisure pursuits such as playing billiards while

¹²⁴ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910–22 January 1921; D/DM/307/1, Finance Committee Meeting 27 July 1914.

¹²⁵ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910–22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Flintshire Constitutional Association Committee Meeting, 27 July 1914.

indulging in drinking beer. This had been part of a wider Conservative party movement to identify itself with popular male culture and to reap the electoral benefits accordingly.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, after three election defeats between 1906 and 1910 this strategy had obviously failed the party and as a new enemy emerged, that of socialism, a new direction was demanded for working class Conservatism. So after 1911, the NWDNU, attempted to transform the roles of these clubs. This became part of an effort to construct a male working-class Conservatism that would act as, Lawrence comments, as ‘a bulwark against the threat of a socialist rather than that of an austere Nonconformist state’, which had been previously promoted.¹²⁷ Consequently, a number of new Conservative workingmen’s clubs were opened and the attempt to make existing clubs politically active intensified in North-east Wales.

In Flintshire during 1910 new Conservative clubs were opened at Buckley and Shotton and in a bid to make other clubs more politically active the Constitutional Association’s Report for 1910 commented that ‘a circular has been sent to the chairmen of all clubs’.¹²⁸ This was followed by a Secretary’s report in February 1912 which stated that during 1911 all clubs had been or were being visited.¹²⁹ However, the report went on to say that the response from the clubs had been mixed, despite the circular and visits, asserting that ‘some clubs are doing good work whilst others confine their attentions more to billiards than politics’.¹³⁰

The East Denbighshire constituency also witnessed Conservative attempts to make their workingmens clubs more politically active. Between 1911 and 1913 six new Conservative clubs opened in the East Denbighshire constituency. On the opening of the last of these at Gresford in December 1913 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn commented that he ‘hoped members would make

¹²⁶ Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914, p636.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.657.

¹²⁸ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910–22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, The Flintshire Constitutional Association, Secretary’s Report for 1910.

¹²⁹ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1 Secretary’s Report for 1912.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *North Wales Guardian*, 19 December 1913.

best use of it for both instruction and recreation'.¹³¹ There was also positive news in West Denbighshire where a new club was opened at Llantysilio in 1911. The Constitutional Association's report for the same year also revealed that 'the existing Conservative clubs at Abergele, Llangollen, Denbigh and Colwyn Bay provide rallying points for political work'.¹³² What the evidence demonstrates is that there was a real determination amongst the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales to develop their workingmen's clubs network and between 1910 and 1914 a number of new clubs were opened. Although results were mixed – not all clubs became politically involved - the mere fact that these clubs had been founded exhibited a will to embrace working class support and demonstrated that Conservative party was aware that it could not survive in North-east Wales as a narrow based elitist organisation.

Such an attitude was also discernible in the Conservative Associations response to the NWDNU's final resolution as they attempted to form Junior Leagues in the region. The Junior Imperial and Constitutional League was formed in 1906. Its aims were to create interest in politics amongst the young by forming junior associations in each constituency and throughout the British Empire with the intention of forging links with Conservative and Unionist Associations.¹³³ It was hoped that this would advance the 'cause of Imperial Unity...uphold Constitutional principles and ...further the Conservative and Unionist cause'.¹³⁴ The records show that only three Leagues were formed in North-east Wales – local party papers as well as press reports indicating that Junior Leagues were formed at Brymbo near Wrexham, Denbigh and at Wrexham itself - all in 1911. No membership records survive for any of the three branches and meetings of the Brymbo and Wrexham branches were rare; only one was recorded for each branch in February and October 1913 respectively with no details published about attendance figures or what type of function they were. Even so a set of rules deposited at the Denbighshire Record Office for the 'Denbigh Junior Imperial and Constitutional League' suggest that a successful branch was formed at Denbigh in 1910. Ormsby-Gore became its President and a

¹³² DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, DD/ PN/204, Report to Subscribing Members 1911.

¹³³ DRO, DD/PN/206, Plas Nantglyn MSS, The Rules of the Denbigh Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, 1910.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

committee of twelve was elected annually to oversee its affairs. As with the Primrose League emphasis was placed on social functions, but the League's rules emphasised its true purpose, the aim being to:

Enrol in its ranks the younger members of the Party, who are not attached to any party organisation, and who under ordinary circumstances would not for some time take part in political work [and]...to form a band of workers in the each ward or polling district who will act as an election intelligence, canvass, distribute literature, carry information and trace removals.¹³⁵

According to the local press during 1911 four functions were held which suggest that initially it was relatively successful. All of these were social functions, including a fancy dress party in February 1911, which was attended by approximately 60 people.¹³⁶ One more function was reported on - a joint social event with the Primrose League which took place in May 1912.¹³⁷ After this the League appears to have died with no further functions or events reported, and it may well have been that there was simply no interest in it amongst young people in Denbigh – especially if it meant becoming involved in political work, something that hardly enthused Conservative club members either. Nonetheless in 1912 the Ruthin Primrose League Habitation became a juvenile branch, which apparently had over 400 members in 1914. However, given the small numbers that attended the Denbigh function in 1911 – it is possible that these figures have been exaggerated or more likely that the Primrose League records which the numbers have been taken from referred to a joint adult and junior membership in Ruthin and not as intimated a juvenile branch.¹³⁸ There are no reports of any functions being held by the juvenile branch and thus the suspicions appear to be confirmed. Apart from the three Junior Leagues and the juvenile branch in Ruthin there were no Leagues formed in Flintshire or the West Denbighshire constituency. The Conservative Associations ultimately failed to create a mass youth movement in North-east Wales, but the evidence does demonstrate support for Junior Leagues in the bigger towns in the region, suggesting that this support

¹³⁵ DRO, DD/PN/206, Plas Nantglyn MSS, The Rules of the Denbigh Junior Imperial and Constitutional League, 1910.

¹³⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 25 February 1911

¹³⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 25 May 1912.

¹³⁸ BLO, 'Primrose League MSS', The Roll of the Habitations, 1912.

was strongest where there was a denser population and where transportation was easiest; rural areas failing to establish one League.

PARTY ORGANISATION: WOMEN IN CONSERVATIVE POLITICS AND THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE IN NORTH-EAST WALES, 1910-1914.

In other areas the party developed and improved its organisation and related bodies such as the Women's Unionist Association and the Primrose League. In Flintshire Conservative women's groups were clearly flourishing. In 1910 branches of the Women's Unionist Tariff Reform Association were established under the leadership of Lady Mostyn. These were expanded and by September 1912 Lord Mostyn reported that 27 branches of the Women's Unionist Association had opened since 1910 and that the membership numbered 2,534. This he asserted 'spoke well for the enthusiasm and strength of the Unionist women of Flintshire'.¹³⁹ In the Denbigh Boroughs constituency the Women's Associations were highly active holding regular demonstrations, meetings and outings. In May 1911 the Holt Women's Association held a meeting at which Tariff Reform and the threat of socialism was discussed. The meeting closed with a performance of 'John Bull at Market', a Tariff Reform play devised by local Conservative ladies. The *North Wales Guardian* concluded 'the play was greatly enjoyed and it was hoped that they will be prevailed upon to give the same production before members of other branches'.¹⁴⁰ In Wrexham the Women's Association held bazaars and fetes to raise money for local party funds.¹⁴¹ The annual outing was also a very well attended and much anticipated event. Approximately 1,000 attended the Wrexham Women's Unionist outing in 1912 and, over 900 people attended the outing to Belle Vue, Manchester in 1913. Such participation in party affairs as performing plays, holding bazaars, organising fetes and attending outings all conformed to the male image of the Conservative woman whose role in politics was still perceived as a supporting one, her main duties remaining in the home. As David Jarvis comments 'Conservatism could offer women many things, but nothing so vulgar as

¹³⁹ *North Wales Guardian*, 20 September 1912.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 May 1911.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31 May 1912.

feminism...politics for Conservative women would never take preference over domestic politics'.¹⁴² Nonetheless, women continued to be a vital part of the Conservative party's organisation as enthusiastic canvassers and fundraisers, and their growing use in this field now proved that their contributions could not be ignored.¹⁴³ It remained important to keep women 'on side', but channel their role in politics to furthering Conservative prospects at elections, while utilising them in the domestic household. As a result from 1906 they were also encouraged by the party to play an active role in defending the rights of the family against the unwarranted intrusions of a socialistic interventionist state.¹⁴⁴ In North-east Wales Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn even envisioned them as some sort of political vessel in the family home, a useful channel through which to disseminate the party message and so influence men to vote Conservative.¹⁴⁵ Speaking to the East Denbighshire Women's Unionists in August 1913 he emphasised:

Let them tell their husbands what was best for the country...the Unionist cause today was a better one than the Liberals' for a great change had taken place during the last three or four years. The Liberals were clinging to office like limpets to the wall...they must put their shoulder to the wheel and work. They must be prepared for an election at any time.¹⁴⁶

His speech was made to over 1,100 people who attended the Women's Unionist fete at Plas Power near Wrexham, and in general women's functions were some of the best attended Conservative party gatherings in the region.

Women in North-east Wales, as they did across the country, played a part in the party's defence of Ulster strategy; organising, attending and supporting rallies and demonstrations. In Wrexham, the largest group of Women Unionists in North Wales, held meetings in the late summer and winter of 1913 protesting at the passage of the Irish Home Rule Bill. Speaking at the Women's Unionist outing to Belle Vue, Lady Harlech said 'Home Rule

¹⁴² D. Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty, The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920's', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 5, No2, p. 137.

¹⁴³ D. Jarvis, 'The Conservative Party and the Politics of Gender, 1900-1939' in M. Francis and I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, eds, *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996) p175.

¹⁴⁴ Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism', p.646.

¹⁴⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 1 August 1913.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

[was]...being forced through parliament without consulting the electorate...the Unionists had asked that a chance might be given to people of this country either by referendum or a general election to express themselves on [the] question and the answer had always been a blank refusal'.¹⁴⁷ Such refusals made Bonar Law and the Conservative leadership even more determined to oppose Home Rule, believing it to be an Achilles heel for the government. With the possibility of the government imposing Home Rule and even coercing Ulster to adopt the terms of an Act, and Bonar Law became equally intransigent in his opposition and openly advocating resistance to it, the possibility of civil war in Ireland intensified. As a result women Conservatives/Unionists became increasingly involved with defence of Ulster plans. According to an article in the Times on 26 January 1914:

During the past twelve months ambulance classes for women Unionists have been held in almost every district in Ulster, rich and poor working side by side learning first aid and making hospital garments and equipment.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, the Flintshire Women's Unionist Association passed a resolution at a meeting held in October 1913 stating that 'they would assist the Women and children of Ulster in the event of Civil War'. It was not explained what this assistance would be, as once more no source material is available, but it demonstrated that even in this corner of Wales where Home Rule was apparently less important than the cause of the Church Conservatives were gearing up to support the defence of Ulster. It was also further evidence that as the party leadership cranked up the rhetoric and the country hurtled down the path to civil war that women in North-east Wales were again joining in political debate.

Many women were also members of and held high office in the Primrose League which was still the most important and largest exponent of Conservative party support in North-east Wales, and between 1910 and 1914 it remained a vital support cog in the party machine. By 1912, however, the League's membership in the region had dropped to 2,882 and two more

¹⁴⁷ *North Wales Guardian*, 1 August 1913.

¹⁴⁸ *The Times*, 26 January 1914.

Habitations had closed at Llangollen and Llwynegrin leaving only eleven in the whole of North-east Wales. Yet by 1914 membership had risen again to 4,305 – virtually every Habitation showing growth (see table 3.7).¹⁴⁹ These numbers compare favourably to those recorded in 1886 when there were 21 Habitations and 4,222 members, although no membership numbers were recorded for four Habitations this year.¹⁵⁰ By comparison numbers also dropped nationally- there were over two million members in 1910, but by 1912 this had dropped to 656,000. Yet in a similar pattern to that shown in North-east Wales membership had risen to 800, 000 by the spring of 1914. Martin Pugh has suggested that this revival in League fortunes corresponded with a revival in Conservative party fortunes – between 1910 and 1914 it claimed 16 by-election victories. He also argues that despite their steep drop from their high point in 1910 that the membership figures were ‘significant in that they suggest a formidable organised base for Conservatism’.¹⁵¹

The situation in North-east Wales appears to bear out such observations. A revival in League membership numbers corresponded with a strong showing in the Flint Boroughs by-election of 1913 and good performances in county council elections. As Pugh asserts League members also remained a formidable organising force. In a letter thanking the Denbigh Habitation for their help in canvassing and support work at election times Ormsby-Gore commented that ‘he wished to congratulate the Primrose League on being one of the most potent influences that made the Denbigh Boroughs once more the blue spot in North Wales’.¹⁵²

Furthermore, during 1912 a new Habitation opened at Buckley and District. This Habitation was led by P.T. Davis-Cooke, Ruling Councillor, who owned Gwysaney Hall a mile west of Mold. The Habitation only attracted a relatively small membership but hosted one of the largest pre-war League fetes in September 1911 when nearly 1,000 people attended. Moreover, by the summer of 1914 the League was still thriving as large crowds attended a

¹⁴⁹ BLO, The Primrose League MSS, ‘The Roll of the Habitations, 1912, No figures are recorded the Hundred of Maelor, Habitation in 1912 and 1913 or for the Hope habitation in 1914.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, ‘The Roll of the Habitations’, 1886.

¹⁵¹ Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, pp. 165-168.

¹⁵² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 June 1910.

garden party at St. Asaph in May and a fete at Mold in July.¹⁵³ Thus, the League still had the power to draw people to its functions in numbers reinforcing its position as a vibrant organisation in the region

As party organisation improved after the First World War and women, who formed the bulk of League membership, were absorbed into Conservative party Associations, there was no longer a need to embrace the Primrose League. Even so the support role that the League played between 1910 and 1914 in North-east Wales was vital to the party's survival and growth. All the major landed families were sympathetic to its cause and the League provided a social outlet for many rural areas starved of entertainment. It was successful not just as a Conservative body, but also as part of the social fabric of the region.

Table 3.7
Primrose League Membership in North-east Wales 1912-1914.

<u>Habitation</u>	<u>1912</u>	<u>1913</u>	<u>1914</u>
Brynkinalt.	---	184	253
Ruthin.	320	390	401
Henllan.	402	432	450
Abergele.	---	250	359
Colwyn Bay.	520	550	592
Denbigh.	813	848	803
Hundred of Maelor.	---	---	596
St. Asaph.	389	349	335
Hope.	250	299	---
Buckley and District (Gwysaney).	188	203	207
Mostyn Flint.	---	300	309

Taken from: BLO, Primrose League MSS, 'The Roll of the Habitations 1912.

Between 1910 and 1914 the Conservative party introduced a number of organisation changes, including a clearly defined command structure, which helped modernise the party and strengthen the role of the leader. The organisational changes made by the Conservatives in North-east Wales also marked an important step forward in the party's democratic evolution. A number of organisation improvements were made in response to the resolutions passed by the NWDNU in January 1911. Candidates were chosen for all five constituencies and by 1914 all had embarked on or were preparing for political campaigns. New workingmen's clubs were opened, with the hope

¹⁵³ See *Denbighshire Free Press*, 30 May 1914 and *Flintshire Observer* 30 July 1914.

that their political work would increase, and while this did not entirely achieve its purpose the Conservatives now had a network of clubs that covered the region, which gave the party an opportunity to reach many more workingmen on the electoral register. Junior Leagues were also formed, with variable results, but women's groups and memberships increased while the Primrose League remained popular in the region, thus ensuring vital support at election times. Organisation was still far from perfect but in comparison to the period prior to 1910 all local party Associations now embraced change as a means of advancing the Conservative cause.

By contrast to the efforts made in North-east Wales modernisation was slow elsewhere. Arthur Steel-Maitland, the new party Chairman, discovered that Central Office lacked the influence to enforce immediate change on constituency Associations which guarded their autonomy jealously.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, by 1914 more than £25,000 was poured into local constituency Associations to help improve organisation, provide propaganda literature and supply public speakers. Central Office district agents became the conduit for such money and Associations were encouraged to seek help from their Agent. By the outbreak of War in 1914 organisation had improved significantly in constituency Associations across the country aided by the targeting of money to those which needed reform most.¹⁵⁵ It is unclear how much of this money, if any, reached North-east Wales, but with all the region's Association's selecting parliamentary candidates, a target of Central Office, it is possible that they were rewarded with funds. Whether this was so or not the advances made in organisation in a region where electoral defeat was the norm, proved how determined the party was to survive, adapt and progress in North-east Wales.

LOCAL CONTESTS: THE FLINT BOROUGH BY-ELECTION OF JANUARY 1913 AND THE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS OF 1913.

The Flint Boroughs by-election, called on the death of John Summers in December 1912, was set for 21 January 1913 and could not have come at a worse time for the Conservative party nationally. In November 1912 Bonar Law withdrew the Conservative party's referendum pledge on Tariff Reform

¹⁵⁴ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p72.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

as he maintained that there was no need to put food taxes to a referendum when the Liberals refused to put Irish Home Rule to the electorate. This nearly cost him his leadership as leading Conservatives argued that removing the pledge would leave the party vulnerable to the cry of dearer foodstuffs. A memorial presented to Bonar Law on 10 January 1913, containing the signatures of 229 Conservatives MP's, while still pledging loyalty to him, asked him to reconsider his strategy. A few days later Bonar Law replied, arguing that he still saw the matter as a resigning issue, but maintained that the volte-face he was required to make to accommodate his party did not 'involve any principle the adoption of which would have prevented us from loyally supporting the course of action desired by the majority of the party'.¹⁵⁶ Bonar Law then agreed, safe in the knowledge that according to the party's membership 'a change of leadership would be fatal to the best of the interests of the party', to comply with the request and not make food duties an issue at any subsequent election.¹⁵⁷ However, having underestimated the will of the opposition in his party Bonar Law's move was divisive, re-opened wounds barely healed on Tariff Reform, and offered the Liberal party an opportunity to re-open the Tariff debate at any forthcoming elections.¹⁵⁸

This initially appeared to be the case in Flint Boroughs, the first test of political strength after Bonar Law's policy u-turn. With Conservative party campaigning underway in the constituency during early January, at virtually the exact time their members memorial was being prepared, the tensions between party and leader cast a shadow over Conservative prospects and left them vulnerable to Liberal attacks on the imposition of food taxes. Even so, *The Times* believed that Bonar Law's quick response ended speculation on the subject:

Mr. Bonar Law's reply to the Unionist members memorial will be received nowhere with more genuine satisfaction than in the Flint Boroughs. It puts an end to the chief difficulty with which the local leaders have been faced in this contest. Most Unionists have throughout been in agreement with the main stream of opinion in the party on food taxes, but it was obvious that effective

¹⁵⁶ Bonar Law's reply was reported in *The Times*, 15 January 1913.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ R.J.Q Adams, *Bonar Law*, pp.78-94.

action against the attacks of their opponents could hardly be take on the very eve of the publication of Mr. Bonar Law' letter. The happy settlement of the controversy has the hearty support of every section of the party here.¹⁵⁹

A number of factors also gave the Conservatives cause for optimism in Flint Boroughs. Having chosen Hamlet Roberts in September 1911, the Conservatives stole a march on the local Liberal Party, which by the second week of January 1913 had still not selected a candidate. This allowed the Conservatives a week of unchallenged campaigning, and when the Liberals finally selected a candidate it sparked acrimony and arguments amongst party activists. Thomas Parry, a county councillor from Mold, was adopted, but not before Herbert Lewis, and Ellis Griffith, the Liberal MP for Anglesey, were accused of persuading Max Muspratt, the local party's choice, to stand down in favour of Parry.¹⁶⁰ With the recent division over food taxes a major concern for Conservatives, their campaign centred on Welsh Church Disestablishment. This proved to be an astute move as the issue was causing the Liberal party election difficulties in Wales. Fighting on Church Disestablishment the Conservative candidate at the East Carmarthenshire by-election in August 1912 increased his poll by over a thousand votes.

What is interesting is that Irish Home Rule received little attention during the campaign. Surprisingly given its pre-eminence by Bonar Law, only once did it achieve prominence during the campaign. This was at the start of the campaign when at a meeting in Flint, A.L. Horner, Ulster Unionist MP for South Tyrone, made an impassioned plea for support for Loyalists in Ireland who wished to maintain the union with Great Britain. Otherwise Disestablishment, and in particular the Liberal government's plans to disendow the Church dominated the conservative campaign to the exclusion of all else. This was mainly because local Conservatives saw the benefits to be reaped from a campaign that centred on Church Disestablishment in a county where nearly half of those attending places of worship were Anglicans. Such a strategy caused concern in Liberal ranks as Thomas Parry, the Liberal

¹⁵⁹ *The Times*, 16 January 1913.

¹⁶⁰ University of Wales Bangor Record Office, William Jones MSS, GB 0222 BMSS WJMP, 5472, Letter No.68 from Herbert Lewis to William Jones.

candidate, noted in a letter to William Jones, Liberal MP for Caernarfon Arfon: 'I feel the struggle in Flint Boroughs is a very keen one. As you are aware the Church is stronger in these Boroughs than anywhere else in Wales'.¹⁶¹

With the Conservatives concentrating on Church Disestablishment, largely ignoring Home Rule and avoiding Tariff Reform, and the Liberals concentrating on food taxes to highlight divisions in the Conservative party, but side-stepping Church Disestablishment, there was little in the way of competitive speech making. *The Times* reported that there was little activity by Nonconformists in the constituency and that on the Conservative side Hamlet Roberts adopted a novel approach to campaigning:¹⁶²

On the Unionist side a more important means of reaching the elector than public meetings has been canvassing, or rather the method of personal interview, for the candidate has a strong view that the solicitation of votes is contrary to the spirit of the ballot, although every elector he holds, is entitled to familiarize himself with the candidate's views by talking with him face to face.¹⁶³

It is more likely that Roberts wished to avoid public debates that would leave him vulnerable to the Conservative bogey of dear food. Public meetings were left in the hands of senior Conservatives. Church Defence meetings were held in Flint and Mold at which F.E. Smith and Lord Robert Cecil spoke and where the Bishop of St Davids encouraged people to oppose the imposition of a Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill by voting Conservative.¹⁶⁴ Although the Liberals attempted to introduce the question of food taxes, the Conservatives adhered doggedly to their campaign strategy of defending the Welsh Church. An editorial in the *Flintshire Observer* commented:

This by-election must be considered as a test of Welsh feeling upon the Bill for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Welsh Church...This is essentially a fight upon one issue Mr Hamlet Roberts the Unionist has declared

¹⁶¹ University of Wales Bangor Record Office, William Jones MSS, GB 0222 BMSS WJMP, 5472, Letter No. 70 from Thomas Parry to William Jones.

¹⁶² *The Times*, 18 January 1913.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20 January 1913.

¹⁶⁴ *Flintshire Observer*, 16 January 1913.

... he is fighting upon the single issue of the Welsh Church Bill. As might have been expected the Liberals have introduced innumerable other issues of a comparatively minor importance and the question of Disestablishment and Disendowment does not occupy that position in their speeches to which its gravity entitles it.¹⁶⁵

The Liberals attempt to build an effective election platform was counteracted by infighting which detrimentally affected their campaigning from the start. Herbert Lewis noted:

I spoke at four largely attended meetings at Holywell, Bagillt and Flint last night and had a royal welcome, but I felt that there was something grandly wrong everywhere. At Flint only two men, one an Irishman would come on the platform...Mr Williams the best man in the Boroughs absolutely refused to attend the meeting. Secessions threatened on every hand.¹⁶⁶

Unlike the Conservatives, the Liberals found it hard to attract speakers and were still appealing for people to address meetings a mere week before polling, the lack of support further evidence of divisions within the party apparently caused by the interference of two of the region's MPS during the selection process.¹⁶⁷ What support that was made available also proved of little help to the Liberal cause. Leaflets distributed around the constituency were several years old and contained inaccuracies; one Liberal pamphlet even depicting Balfour as leader of the Conservative party.¹⁶⁸

Given the nature of the Flintshire Constitutional Association's complaints about lack of support and the disappointing general election result in December 1910, the by election was a triumph for Conservative party organisation and campaigning. The party halved the Liberal majority, came within 200 votes of taking the seat, and increased its share of the vote by over four per cent compared to the general election of December 1910. *The Times* commented:

¹⁶⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 16 January 1913.

¹⁶⁶ University of Wales, Bangor Record Office, William Jones MSS, Letter 68.

¹⁶⁷ University of Wales, Bangor, Record Office, William Jones MSS, letters no.68 and 71.

¹⁶⁸ *The Times* 16 January 1913.

The Unionists are well pleased with the result, the significance of which is shown by the fact that the majority is the smallest on record in the history of the constituency since 1895. The success of the Unionist campaign has exceeded general expectations the constituency having been always consistently Liberal, and the local party leaders are satisfied with the soundness of their decision to fight explicitly on the Church question.¹⁶⁹

Table 3.8

Flint Boroughs By-Election, 21 January 1913.

	<u>Party</u>	<u>Vote</u>	<u>% Share</u>
T. H. Parry.	Liberal	2152	52.6
J.H.Roberts	Conservative	<u>1941</u>	47.4
		Maj. +211	

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Political historians have made little of the Flint Boroughs by-election in 1913, the loss of the Unionist held Londonderry in Ulster in a by-election on 31 January attracting more attention. This is understandable as Londonderry was lost at a time when Bonar Law's chief policy initiative was to oppose Irish Home Rule, thus leading historians to question the success of such a policy. Also other by-election results between 1910 and 1914, even where the Conservatives won, have been used to explain the apparent weakness of the Conservative position leading up to the First World War.¹⁷⁰ Yet, Flint Boroughs appears to point towards some sort of change in the comparative strength of the Conservative and Liberal forces in Wales at the time. This was a Celtic fringe seat and while it can be argued that the improved performance was as a result of a well organised single-issue campaign in an area where Anglicanism was strong, the Conservatives had not held the seat since the 1840's. Two points need making. Firstly, the Flint result, especially when taken in conjunction with the East Carmarthenshire result a few months earlier, although not emphatic evidence of a Tory revival before the Great War indicates that the Liberals were not as strong as they once had been in Wales – radical initiatives such as the push for reform in the field of Nonconformist education, were now not as relevant as they had been ten years earlier. There was also opposition amongst many Liberals to the Disendowment of the

¹⁶⁹ *The Times*, 22 January 1913.

¹⁷⁰ In particular see Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, pp 268-269.

Church. *The Times* reporting on the by-election commented that ‘the Disendowment proposals have disturbed the conscience of not a few Liberal Churchmen and some Nonconformists’.¹⁷¹ Secondly, and more significantly for the Conservatives Bonar Law’s reversal seems not to have influenced voters. Of course, it can be argued that perhaps without his u-turn and the subsequent Liberal reaction the Tories might have won. This was not, however, considered in the final analysis as both local and national press pointed to the success of the Conservative strategy as opposed to the ‘dear food’ cry of the Liberals. The Flint Boroughs result was actually an indicator of what could be achieved with the right policy – opposition to Irish Home Rule was flirted with and quickly dropped from the campaign - and right organisation, even though the Conservatives did not win the seat.

Within two months of contesting the Flint Boroughs by-election the political parties were thrown into another round of county council elections. The elections proved a disappointment for the Conservative party in North-east Wales. In Denbighshire little changed as 36 divisions were uncontested - the Conservatives gained one seat at Henllan, leaving the Liberals with a majority of 10 on the council. In Flintshire the Conservative party lost its majority as Liberals successfully exploited the rate increases implemented by the Conservative council during its period in office.¹⁷² The Conservative party claimed that they ‘had put the affairs of the County on a sound business footing’ [and were] ‘animated by the desire to serve the best interests of the ratepayers’, but its defence failed as 21 Liberals, 19 Conservatives, and 2 Independents were elected.¹⁷³ The party lost the urban seats of Mold East, Rhyl South, and Rhyl West to the Liberals. This was a severe jolt to the Conservative party which had hoped to do better given their performance at the recent by-election, and demonstrated that there was still much work to be done at the grass-roots level. The loss at Mold was felt keenly by the Conservatives who blamed the lack of local support given to their candidate, P.T. Davies-Cooke, for the defeat. Basil Phillips claimed that the Mold Conservative club, was doing little for the party’s cause:

¹⁷¹ *The Times*, 15 January 1913.

¹⁷² *The County Herald*, 28 February 1913.

¹⁷³ *Flintshire Observer*, 6 March 1913.

He had heard that many men were not on the register who should have been...The club could do a little more in the division of perfecting the registration, and do a little more also than going there and using the club as a social club...As a political force he thought the club was worse than useless.¹⁷⁴

This proved that, despite the recent initiatives, little political work was undertaken in some clubs and the lack of political activity, in particular, at the Mold club highlighted the problems the party was still having energising a workingman's movement in the region. This continued until after the First World War when concerns over workingmen's votes in the age of full male franchise precipitated a concerted effort to embrace such support in North-east Wales.

CONCLUSION.

In spite of a disappointing showing in Flintshire at the county council elections of 1913, the evidence suggests that the period between 1910 and 1914 was one of steady improvement and consolidation for the Conservative party in North-east Wales. The party capitalised on organisation changes it introduced in 1911, as it developed its grass roots movement by extending its clubs and Junior Leagues network. Although results were mixed, few Junior Leagues were formed and those new clubs that opened fail to advance the Conservative cause in many cases, the mere fact that the local Associations had the will to establish such clubs marked a step forward from the apathy that had afflicted them in the early years of the twentieth century. In addition, new Women's Associations were established and memberships remained high, providing the party with a reservoir of enthusiastic canvassers and workers. These were roles that members of the Primrose League also fulfilled as it retained its position as the most important vehicle for disseminating the Conservative message in the region.

Significantly, the party won and held Denbigh Boroughs, giving it an important parliamentary foothold in North-east Wales, helping to re-energise

¹⁷⁴ *Flintshire Observer*, 13 March 1913.

the local Conservative Associations.¹⁷⁵ The Flint Boroughs by-election also demonstrated the potential for success if the party fought on a united and well-supported platform. In this respect Church Disestablishment had provided the party with just such a unifying cause, following the temporary retreat from the full Tariff Reform programme. Nationally the party's future looked less certain as E.H.H Green has argued:

Between 1910 and the outbreak of the Great War the Conservative party was in a mess. In 1909-1910 its main aims had been to win an electoral victory, defeat the People's Budget and secure the position of the House of Lords. By the summer of 1911 it had failed on all three counts.¹⁷⁶

Green also contends that Bonar Law's leadership was constantly questioned and that the party was far from united over his lead on Irish Home Rule.¹⁷⁷ Yet, by the outbreak of war, due to its string of by-election victories, the Conservatives had 287 MP's, thirty more than the Liberals. Between December 1910 and August 1914 the Conservative party gained sixteen seats at by-elections, nine of them in three way contests of which seven could be attributed to a division in the Liberal /Labour vote. As such John Ramsden has commented that 'by 1914 the Liberal party was on the ropes and the Unionists could look forward confidently to the election that could not be long delayed'.¹⁷⁸ Green refutes this, arguing that the fate of the Conservative party depended on the state of health of the Liberal/Labour election pact, claiming that 'reports of the Progressive Alliance's death before 1914 have been greatly exaggerated'.¹⁷⁹ He also asserts, that with the Liberal party planning to abolish plural voting in the near future, the Liberals might well have achieved a majority of 38 to 40 over the Conservatives in a May 1915 election.¹⁸⁰ Evidence appears to support Green's claims. Seven of the by-election victories were either gained in constituencies that remained marginals or won in exceptional circumstances. Two Conservative victories at Poplar and Bethnal

¹⁷⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 16 December 1910.

¹⁷⁶ Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, p.304.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.85.

¹⁷⁹ Green, *Crisis of Conservatism* pp.268-269.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Green in February 1914 also gave cause for concern. Sir Robert Sanders, a Conservative whip, commented: 'In both divisions the Unionist poll was almost exactly 25 per cent below the promises – a very big percentage to deduct. On the whole the elections show a turn in our favour, but it cannot be called a great wave'.¹⁸¹ Thus on the eve of the Great War the Conservative party's future still looked uncertain an extension to its long period in opposition remaining a distinct possibility. By contrast in North-east Wales the Conservative party had been marginalized even longer – not since 1886 had it won more than one seat in the region. However, a victory in Denbigh Boroughs in 1910 and an improved performance at the Flint Boroughs by-election in 1913 had given the party cause for optimism.

¹⁸¹ J.Ramsden, ed, *Real Old Tory Politics, 1910-1935, The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-1935* (London: The Historians Press, 1984) p.73.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH EAST WALES, 1914-1918.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of war in 1914 suspended the party political conflict over Irish Home Rule and in a spirit of conciliation Bonar Law and Carson offered Asquith a party truce for the duration of the hostilities. General elections were also suspended and an agreement was reached with the Liberal party to end the publication of partisan party literature and stop political speech making.¹ The War, however, did not end inter-party tensions. The government's decision to place the Irish Home Rule Bill and Welsh Church Disestablishment Bills on the Statute Book in September 1914 enraged Conservatives. Furthermore, by the spring of 1915 Conservatives were becoming concerned about the lack of commitment to war that the Liberal government was exhibiting. Asquith's grasp of war strategy seemed limited, the Liberals appeared unready for war and there was no machinery in place to prosecute the War.² Lord Kitchener, whom Asquith had appointed Secretary of State for War, also proved incompetent in procuring munitions for his armies, and splits occurred in the Liberal Cabinet about the direction of the War. Admiral Lord Fisher (First Sea Lord), who was concerned about the wisdom of diverting ships from other theatres of war to the Near East under Churchill's direction as First Lord of the Admiralty also resigned in May 1915.³

Having guaranteed support for Asquith at the start of the War Bonar Law was also having problems keeping his own party in check, – the Irish Home Rule and Disestablishment Bills as well as the apparent lack of war strategy causing unrest amongst Conservative MPs. Thus with both leaders facing a number of difficulties and wishing to avoid a confrontation that could result in a general election the Conservative leader was summoned to Downing Street to discuss the formation of a Coalition Government.⁴ However, the coalition

¹ J.Stubbs, 'Impact of the Great War on the Conservatives', in *The Politics of Reappraisal, 1918-1939*, eds, G.Peele and C.Cook (London: Macmillan, 1975) p.21.

J.Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics, 1900-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p.53.

³ J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War, Coalition and Conflict 1915-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p.58

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp56-61.

that emerged at the end of May 1915 was a government of unequal partners. The Liberal party kept all leading government posts with Bonar Law given the junior role of Colonial Secretary as Balfour took over the Admiralty. This alienated many Tories and also succeeded in disaffecting some Liberals who believed, somewhat prophetically, that coalition marked the end of the Liberal party.⁵ Nevertheless, the new government would have been acceptable if the prosecution of the War had gone well, but the advent of coalition brought no improvement with the withdrawal of allied forces from the Dardanelles in December 1915, and an inconclusive naval battle at Jutland in May 1916 where 6,000 British sailors lost their lives. These setbacks were further exacerbated by the launching of the Somme offensive in July 1916 where the British army suffered 60,000 casualties on the first day of battle. During Easter 1916 a failed uprising also occurred in Ireland. This was ruthlessly suppressed and then the government set about negotiating a settlement for Ireland, which gave Home Rule to the South, but left most of the North in the United Kingdom. Foolishly the government did not consult the Conservatives, which, only succeeded in alienating Unionist supporters further. The government ultimately dropped the idea but not before much damage had been done to Asquith's support.

The issue of conscription also polarised Asquith's Cabinet. To Lloyd George it was a necessity if Britain was to keep the army up to strength and wage war successfully. Lloyd George was ensured of support from Bonar Law, Churchill and the vast majority of Conservative MPs, Balfour was a notable exception, but was opposed by Kitchener, McKenna (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Runciman (President of the board of Trade) and Lord Grey (Foreign Secretary) who believed that sufficient troops could be raised by voluntary means. On more than one occasion Bonar Law and Lloyd George threatened to resign over the issue, but in the end Asquith succeeded in holding the government together while he successfully avoided resignations, apart from Sir John Simon (Home Secretary), by vacillating, making concessions where necessary and unveiling elaborate enlistment schemes with elements of compulsion. However, in December 1915 Asquith finally gave way and in

⁵ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, pp 56-61

January 1916 a Military Services Act was given royal assent enforcing conscription on single men and with a second act in May 1916 this was extended to married men.⁶ Yet the issue of conscription ultimately weakened Asquith's position – his very success in avoiding wholesale resignations and adroitly holding the Coalition Government together alienating those Liberals, especially anti-conscriptionists, who supported him. It had also raised the possibility of Lloyd George resigning and forming a new government with the support of Bonar Law and the bulk of the Conservative party.⁷

Moreover the withdrawal from the Dardanelles had shaken public opinion, the abortive naval battle in Jutland had further eroded confidence and the Battle of the Somme was 'a spectacular and bloody failure though the public was not allowed to know its magnitude',⁸ while in November 1916 Lord Lansdowne (Conservative leader in the House of Lords) even suggested an early peace. In this moment of crisis Lloyd George entered into negotiations with Bonar Law and Carson (Irish Unionist leader) to force Asquith to reconstruct the government as a means of successfully directing the War.⁹ In particular a small three-man War Committee, of which the Prime Minister would not be a member, was recommended to manage the day to day running of the War. Asquith first considered and appeared to agree to such a suggestion, but then on advice from supporters rejected the notion as unworkable claiming that such a War committee would be ineffective without the Prime Minister's presence. Under pressure from Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Conservative ministers Asquith resigned - perhaps to call his opponents bluff and as a means of fighting back, but to his surprise Lloyd George succeeded in forming a new ministry.¹⁰

Lloyd George now led a Coalition Government in which Conservatives played a leading role. Bonar Law became Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons while Lords Milner and Curzon were appointed to Lloyd George's five-man War cabinet. At the same time Balfour

⁶ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, pp 64-90.

⁷ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p169.

⁸ Turner, 'Britain and the First World War', p123.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For a full account of the fall of Asquith's coalition government see J.Grigg, *Lloyd George, From Peace to War 1912-1916*, (London: Penguin, 1997), pp435-474 and Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, pp112-151.

replaced Lord Grey as Foreign Secretary. By elevating Bonar Law and Balfour to senior positions in government and by appointing Curzon and Milner to his War cabinet, two influential leaders of party opinion, Lloyd George was restoring power and dignity to the Conservative party and assuring himself of Conservative support.¹¹

Even so many Conservatives still eyed the coalition, its Liberal partners and Lloyd George with suspicion. According to Turner ‘the Unionist party during the early spring and summer of 1917 was manifestly sullen about the coalition. A steady undercurrent of sectional grievances from the Irish question to the food production campaign rasped on Tory nerves’.¹² Nonetheless, Conservative support for the Coalition remained intact as opposition support remained badly organised, and many Conservatives were concerned that the alternative might be the return of a Liberal dominated administration. According to Pugh ‘once committed to Lloyd George it seemed inconceivable to part with him, for the alternative was a renewed Asquith premiership that might lose the War or negotiate a humiliating peace’.¹³ Yet, 1917 was still an extremely difficult year for the new Lloyd George government. On the War front Britain and her allies came close to defeat. In February 1917 the Russian Revolution and the subsequent overthrow of the Tsar threatened to end the participation of Russia on the Eastern front thus leaving British and French armies exposed to the full force of the German army in the west. Although Russia remained temporarily in the conflict shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917 Germany and Russia signed an armistice.¹⁴ A major German submarine offensive against Britain’s merchant shipping, which also deterred neutral countries from carrying stock bound for Britain, left the country with only six weeks of grain. The situation was only saved when a new strategy was deployed – that of organising merchant shipping in convoys.¹⁵

Misguided faith was also placed in a new offensive on the Western front, launched during the spring of 1917, which failed causing heavy casualties

¹¹ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p173.

¹² Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, p210.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ J.Joll, *Europe Since 1870, An International History* (London: Penguin, 1990) p214.

¹⁵ J. Grigg, *Lloyd George, War Leader, 1916-1918* (London: Penguin, 2003) p4.

leading to mutiny in the French army, threatening France's continuation in the War. Thus during 1917 the balance of power turned inexorably towards Germany, a situation which was only reversed when the United States entered the War, partly to protect its own shipping from the German submarine campaign and partly as result of German attempts to draw Mexico into an alliance.¹⁶

On the domestic front Lloyd George also faced problems. As increasing numbers of skilled working men were called to the Front to be replaced by less skilled men and women, resentment and industrial unrest set in amongst Britain's work force. In all over five and a half million working days were lost in 1917, more than double the amount for 1916, as workers downed tools in protest against the dilution of the skilled workforce and the fact that some skilled men earned less than those on piecemeal rates.¹⁷ Tensions increased in March 1917, when fears that workers unrest, similar to that in Russia, which overthrew the Tsarist regime, would occur in Britain. Strike organisers were arrested, but such fears forced the government to negotiate with the labour force. As John Stevenson comments 'the power of organised labour was strengthened. Dilution agreements, wage increases and greater political concessions ...illustrated their strong bargaining position'.¹⁸ This had long term consequences for British industry and politics during the post-War period as such actions and agreements led to an upsurge of interest in the problems of labour and the Labour party.

Indeed, the Labour party benefited from the political alliances and manoeuvrings that occurred during the War. Lloyd George had taken few Radicals into his government in December 1916, the bulk of his support came from the right wing of the Liberal party and the Conservative party. Moreover, Asquith largely failed to give a lead to any of the Liberals who had followed him into opposition, leaving it to backbenchers to oppose Lloyd George. As a result many radical Liberals became disaffected with both Asquith and Lloyd George and drifted towards the Labour party, which consequently was

¹⁶ Joll, *Europe Since 1870*, pp209-215.

¹⁷ J.Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (London: Penguin, 1984) p.196.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

transforming itself into the party of Opposition.¹⁹ It was also during the War that the electoral pact between the Liberal and Labour parties fell apart which had long term benefits for the Conservative party as it removed the electoral pact which had done so much damage to it before the War.

Yet the Conservative party's new found status as a party of power appeared threatened by extensions to the franchise and redistribution of constituencies being considered by the government during 1917. In August 1916 Asquith's coalition had set up a Speakers Conference to consider the franchise, but it reported to Lloyd George in January 1917. It recommended that all men over the age of 21 and women aged thirty and above be given the vote. Many Conservatives feared that this would enfranchise some of what they believed to be the most unstable elements of society – immature men without the experience of or yet the capability of considered opinion and women who were too emotional to make an objective judgement on political views.²⁰ They were also concerned that a redistribution of constituencies – it was proposed to establish uniform constituencies of between 50,000 and 70,000 inhabitants - would lose them a number of rural seats and that the proposed amalgamation of borough seats into existing county divisions would also deplete their stock of MPs. Even so the government adhered closely to the recommendations and the Representation of the People Bill was introduced, subsequently becoming law on 6 February 1918. In all the Act increased the British electorate from 7.7 million, the number of those registered in 1910, to 21.4 million.²¹ Of these 8.5 million were women aged thirty or over, who now represented 39.6 per cent of the total electorate, and 12.9 million were men.²²

What the Representation of People Act did was further tie the Conservatives to Lloyd George. In spite of Tory misgivings, Lloyd George seemed to offer the Conservatives a means of retaining power and avoiding electoral defeat. He was clearly the most popular leader and enjoyed the support of the masses, and would surely ensure a majority for the Coalition at

¹⁹ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, pp172-173.

²⁰ N.McCrillis, *The Conservative party in the Age of Universal Suffrage, Popular Conservatism 1918-1929* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998) pp10-19. See also Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, pp174-175.

²¹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p122.

²² M.Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1918-1999* (London: Macmillan, 2000) p4.

any subsequent general election while containing the growing menace of the Labour party. This not only guaranteed support from the Conservatives, but also underpinned their backing for Lloyd George's coalition until 1922.²³

In the final analysis the War thus benefited the Conservative party nationally as it returned to government, albeit as partners with the Liberals, but after December 1916 as the dominant party in Lloyd George's coalition. This situation seemed unlikely after 1910 when defeated for a second time within a year and with the subsequent marginalisation of the House of Lords, the Tory party's brake on radical legislation, many Conservatives feared a very lengthy period in the political wilderness. As Smith notes 'after a decade craving office, the coalition under Lloyd George returned the Tories from the wilderness and confirmed on them ultimate control of the executive, the lack of which had been the prime source of their pre-War distemper'.²⁴

On the other hand the War ushered in a very difficult period for the Conservative party in North-east Wales. Not only did it virtually lose its political identity as the War effort consumed the local leadership and organisation fell into decay, but the redistribution of seats in 1918 also saw it lose its only MP in the region. Moreover, the reduction in the number of constituencies from five to three – as the two Boroughs seats were disenfranchised and the two new county divisions of Denbighshire and Flintshire as well as the urban/industrial constituency of Wrexham now demographically favoured the Liberals and the Labour party. This chapter will therefore examine the issues and developments in national politics had on the Conservative party in North-east Wales between 1914 and 1918. It will analyse the relationship between the local Conservative Associations and their Liberal counterparts and compare it to the situation nationally during the period of war. It will show that despite the tensions over Irish Home Rule and Welsh Church Disestablishment, which polarised the two parties in the period leading up to and in the early part of the War, relations between the two parties generally remained cordial during the period of conflict. It will also demonstrate how the party survived the War even though the constraints put

²³ Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p175

²⁴ J.Smith, *The Taming of Democracy, the Conservative Party, 1880-1924* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997) p.64.

on it by agreements forged with the Liberal party and the loss of leadership to the War effort seriously hampered its progress.

THE EFFECT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES.

During the first eighteen months of War the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee ran the campaign for securing new recruits for the armed forces. This became an inter-party initiative with Conservative Central Office looking after the organisation of recruiting meetings, the Liberal offices providing recruitment literature and Malcolm Fraser, ex editor of the *Standard* and the *Daily Express* as well as press advisor to the Conservative party, helping with the management of the press.²⁵ According to Ramsden:

The entire effort was run like a political campaign with the canvassers, speakers, stewards and publicity all run on tried and familiar lines. District and Constituency Officers were similarly involved and in many areas the national example was followed with the agents of both parties working under a mayor or Lord Lieutenant.²⁶

This template was basically the same one followed in North-east Wales, with the Liberal and Conservative parties immediately promising to support the drive for recruitment for the War effort. As the *Denbighshire Free Press* noted on 5 September 1914 'all the political parties have agreed to devote their organisation to the work of stimulating recruiting'.²⁷ In Flintshire a county council recruiting committee was formed from representatives of both parties in early November 1914, the Flintshire Constitutional Association formerly agreeing to such a measure at their Finance meeting on 7 November 1914.²⁸ Unfortunately, there is no further source information to demonstrate how this committee functioned, but in Denbighshire where recruitment also became a function of a county council committee there are detailed newspaper accounts which describe the role local politicians played in the recruitment drive. Here

²⁵ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 5 September 1914.

²⁸ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Association Papers, D/DM/307/1, Finance Committee Meeting, 7 November 1914.

Conservatives in the West Denbighshire Constitutional Associations took senior posts as recruiting officials for the County, and became involved with placing adverts in the local press for recruits, organising public recruiting meetings and the canvassing of eligible males for service. The Recruiting Committee was led by the Lord Lieutenant of Denbighshire, Colonel W.C. Cornwallis-West, a former Liberal Unionist MP, Conservative County Councillor and Vice President of the Constitutional Association. In a reversal of roles Colonel John Mellor, Vice President, and Colonel Mesham, President of the Association, became Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively of the Recruiting Committee. Colonel T. Wynne Edwards, Chairman of the Constitutional Association's powerful sub-committee to appoint parliamentary candidates, was also appointed as the Recruiting Officer for the county. All of these men were wealthy local landowners who already held ranks in the Territorial Forces and saw the holding of such office as their patriotic duty.²⁹ To be at the forefront of recruiting at a time of War would seem natural for such men from affluent and politically influential backgrounds. It would be wrong to assume that local Liberals did not play a prominent part in supporting the War effort it was just that the county notables – those who were already officers in the county yeomanry or Lords Lieutenants tended to come from the ranks of the Conservative inclined landed elite. Indeed, there was overwhelming support from the ranks of Liberals for the War effort. This was especially true of the Liberal MPs and candidates in the region, with one notable exception, who threw aside political prejudices and joined with the Conservatives in lobbying for the country's involvement in the War.

As a result in Denbighshire and Flintshire inter-party co-operation replaced rivalry as political campaigning on the anticipation of a general election gave way to collaboration at the advent of War. On 5 September 1914 the *Denbighshire Free Press* acted as a mouthpiece for all political parties in the region when it stated that:

The political campaign which has been contemplated in the early autumn will resolve itself into a series of joint meetings in which the issues for which this

²⁹ See, for example, *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 August 1914.

country is fighting will be laid before the public by leading speakers and the need enforced for a general response to the call to arms.³⁰

The joint meeting held in Denbigh at the end of September 1914 by Sir John Herbert Roberts, Liberal MP, and W. Henry Williams, Conservative candidate for West Denbighshire, typified the political response to the War and the sense of outrage at what was perceived to be the threat that Germany had posed to the British way of life. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press*:

Sir Herbert Roberts said the 'War was the greatest war waged in the history of the World and the most appalling havoc to human life and property'. Mr. Henry Williams said 'a blow was being struck at the very roots of civilised society, for if the World was Germanised the cause of freedom and even handed justice would be put back a century to what it was when Britain overthrew Napoleon at Waterloo'.³¹

Such sentiments were reinforced by the outpourings of support for inter-party co-operation by Conservatives across North-east Wales. C.C.Mott of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association reflected the determination of Conservatives in the region to set aside political prejudice for the good of the British war effort:

For the present the utmost exertions of men of all parties are required for the unsparing prosecution of the most righteous war that this country has ever waged and to that end it is our duty to make common ground with all who are working towards that object.³²

It also appears that the Conservatives in North-east Wales supported the efforts of government throughout the early part of the War. This contrasted with the party at Westminster where resentment towards Bonar Law his leadership and his war policy were harboured by many leading Conservative MPs who also became increasingly dissatisfied by the lack of ruthlessness displayed by

³⁰ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 5 September 1914.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26 September 1914.

³² DRO, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association Rules and Correspondence 1915-1925, Account of the Association for 1915.

Asquith's governments in waging war and the failure of Conservatives to fill top positions in the coalition from May 1915.³³ However, no dissent was forthcoming from the Conservative party in North-east Wales as it remained silent about the efforts of Asquith's governments and their own party's leadership's between the outbreak of War in 1914 and December 1916 – there are no reports in the local press or party papers. It is unclear why this was so. It may have been that Conservatives in North-east Wales held an opinion similar to that of Sir Watkin Williams–Wynn who expressed 'a desire not to take part in any politics during the War'- his decision to allow part of his estate to be used as a munitions factory an expression of his support for the War effort. As a very influential Conservative in the region many party officers may have followed his lead and a number of Conservatives may also have seen their commitment to recruiting or other wartime activities as their most important function, ignored their political duties and therefore did not wish to comment. On the other hand, it may simply have been that the Conservative party in North-east Wales supported Bonar Law and his role in Asquith's government and had no intention of publicly undermining his leadership – displaying unity and loyalty, unwilling to contribute to any divisions in the party, while patriotically supporting the wartime Liberal government as well as Asquith's coalition.

This was in contrast to other Conservative Associations in Britain, such as the Newcastle Upon Tyne and Hornsey Conservative Associations which both wrote to the National Union in the summer of 1916 complaining about the way in which Asquith's Coalition Government was conducting the War. In particular, the Newcastle Upon Tyne Association expressed grave concerns about the way the War effort was being run:

The General Council of the Newcastle Upon Tyne regrets the dilatory, indecisive methods of which the War has hitherto been carried on and strongly urges the Unionist members of the Coalition Government to do their utmost to carry on the War more energetically with its view to an early and decisive defeat of the enemy.³⁴

³³ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, pp148-149. See also Smith, *The Taming of Democracy*, p.62.

³⁴ Liverpool University, Archives of the British Conservative and Unionist Party, Minutes of the National Union Executive Committee, 1897-1956. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978).

Such was the concern shown in Conservative circles that a special conference of the National Unionist Association was held on 9 August 1916 at which Bonar Law spoke and outlined the Government's position.³⁵ Furthermore, dissent at Westminster about the ineffectiveness of the government's conduct of the War intensified during 1916 as over 100 Conservative MPs joined the Unionist War Committee which, according to Smith 'proved a more effective vehicle for prodding the government, and their own leadership in the coalition towards a more rigorous approach to the War. Its influence...was decisive in repositioning Bonar Law alongside Lloyd George.'³⁶ Indeed, it was during the political crisis of December 1916 that Bonar Law played a major part in discussions that led to Asquith's resignation and Lloyd George acceding to the Premiership – his refusal to take the Prime Minister's post and his commitment that the Conservatives would serve under Lloyd George ensuring that a new government was formed. While a small number of Conservative MPs retained reservations about Coalition Government the vast bulk of the party embraced and remained faithful to Lloyd George's wartime administration.

This was also true in North-east Wales where in December 1916 Conservatives joined with local Liberals to support the advent of a new government. Here Lloyd George gained support from Thomas Parry Liberal MP for Flint Boroughs and his faithful lieutenants in the region - Sir John Herbert Roberts, West Denbighshire MP and leader of Welsh Liberals from 1915, and Herbert Lewis, Flint County MP and Under Secretary at the Board of Education from 1917. What is more surprising was the enthusiastic endorsement he received from his former foes the landed leaders of the Conservative party. These were the very people whom Lloyd George had condemned for their privileged lifestyles in speeches in the area during the 1906 and 1910 general election campaigns while his tax pledges contained in the People's Budget in 1909 had been roundly condemned by landed Conservatives as socialistic measures which threatened the livelihoods of individuals. Yet by December 1916 it had become clear that they saw in Lloyd George a dynamic energy that would reinvigorate

Meetings of the Executive Committee 8 June 1916 and 13 July 1916.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Special National Union Association Conference 9 August 1916.

³⁶ Smith, *The Taming of Democracy*, p.62.

the country and the War effort. Colonel Mesham, President of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, was one of the first politicians in the region to comment on Lloyd George's accession to the premiership when he said:

He had the greatest confidence in the new Prime Minister who had proved himself a man of energy, strength and individuality and great foresight. He would no doubt prove the right man in the right place and they believed he would bring the War to a successful issue.³⁷

Mesham's comments were echoed by Lord Kenyon, the leading Conservative in North-east Wales who had made no public announcements against Asquith but eagerly embraced the advent of Lloyd George's government in December 1916. Speaking at St. Asaph at the end of December 1916 he said:

Just now we were passing through a great crisis. We all hope, however, now that... Lloyd George has taken up the reigns that the government will worthily represent the spirit of action, which dominates this country. I little thought three or four years ago as a strong and ardent Tory I would welcome Lloyd George to the premiership. Yet with all my heart I do so now and I don't think there is a single Conservative I have met that does not say the same thing.³⁸

As an ex-chairman of the National Union, and one of the leading Conservatives not just in North-east Wales but also in the Principality as a whole, these were powerful words indeed. Moreover, his words appeared to strike a chord with Conservatives in the region for at a public meeting held in Denbigh on 23 December 1916, which was attended by members of both the Liberal and Conservative parties Lloyd George's new government was overwhelmingly embraced. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press*:

Colonel Mesham moved the resolution offering Lloyd George most cordial congratulations upon his attaining through his own personal merits and great ability the high office of Prime Minister and expressing its right hearty goodwill

³⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press* 30 December 1916.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 December 1916.

and confidence in him and the strong and powerful government he has appointed and determination to support in every way possible his righteous intention to bring this iniquitous war to a victorious end³⁹.

Mesham's speech also acknowledged the change in political emphasis of the new government. It was not just that local Conservatives saw in Lloyd George a dynamic and energetic leader who would conduct a more vigorous war campaign - there was a recognition that the Prime Minister had installed a 'strong and powerful' government, which now included and was dependent on Conservatives, and thus their party had a major say in the administration. Naturally with an administration that included Conservatives at the highest level, including Bonar Law as Chancellor of the Exchequer, any policy decisions would have to pay due deference to them. Consequently, it was not unreasonable for Tories to assume that a radical Liberal agenda would have to be dropped. As a result Conservative support for Lloyd George's government was assured in North-east Wales.

Yet there were dissenting political voices, and, in particular, the issue of conscription caused a breach in Liberal ranks in North Wales. Three of the MPs who voted or abstained during the First Reading of the Conscription Bill on 6 January 1916 came from this part of the Principality. While Ellis Davies in Caernarfon Eifion abstained on the First Reading then voted with the government on the Second Reading as did Caradoc Rees, E.T John, East Denbighshire MP, remained steadfastly against conscription and was one of only three Welsh MPs who voted against the Bill on the Second Reading. From this point John became a critic of Coalition Government and in particular an opponent of Lloyd George whom he later accused of cosyng up to the Conservatives and betraying his radical instincts. This had serious repercussions for John who then failed in his bid to be selected for the new division of Wrexham, which included most of the old East Denbighshire constituency in 1918. However, it would be wrong to assume that the issue of conscription caused any major political disruption in North-east Wales. The Conservatives universally supported it and while the issue

³⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 30 December 1916

brought a number of Liberal protests nationally and even divided the Cabinet the dissent was restricted to just E.T. John in North-east Wales.⁴⁰

Thus, what evolved during the War was an atmosphere of co-operation between the Conservative and Liberal parties in North-east Wales. This was initially fostered by the exigencies of the War situation. The Conservative party leaders were in the best position to further the recruitment effort; many in the region were active or former soldiers of senior ranks while many held positions of influence as county officials. At the same time Liberals were quick to establish their support for the War. Leading Liberals in the region joined up while most of their MPs spoke patriotically about defending their country and waging a justifiable war against the enemy. When conscription was debated in parliament and Lloyd George acceded to the Premiership and led what was a primarily Conservative coalition three of the four Liberal MPs in the region remained loyal to the Prime Minister. It would have been major surprise if they had not – Sir John Herbert Roberts in West Denbighshire and Herbert Lewis in Flint County were very closely associated with Lloyd George, they had been involved with him during the Temperance, Church Disestablishment and education campaigns in Wales and both had benefited from his election speeches in their constituencies when he achieved high office. In turn Thomas Parry in Flint Boroughs was a close ally of Herbert Lewis who had persuaded the Flintshire Liberal Association to adopt him in 1913 – he too became a close ally of the Prime Minister who remained in close touch with these North-east Wales MPs, referring to them as ‘his teetotal friends at Rhyl’.⁴¹ They therefore remained loyal Lloyd George men and were not going to desert him even if he consorted with the Conservative party. At the same time despite his support for Welsh Home Rule and his radical credentials E.T. John had only returned to Wales in later life having spent nearly forty years in the North-east of England and thus did not have the same sort of allegiance to Lloyd George or the same degree of ‘Welshness’ that other Liberal MPs had in the region.⁴² Consequently, his position was far more precarious with his constituency association, which supported Lloyd George, while the other three Liberal MPs, despite later

⁴⁰ See for example, *Flintshire Observer*, 21 October 1915.

⁴¹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.277.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p255.

misgivings in Flintshire, were able to carry their associations with them and help promote a bi-partisan approach to politics in North-east Wales.

For the Conservative party in North-east Wales such a bipartisan approach laid the foundation for close co-operation with the Liberals during peacetime. In particular support for Lloyd George's government fostered close ties with the Liberal party in Denbighshire and Wrexham. In Denbighshire the meetings conducted at the beginning of the War and the enthusiastic embracement of Lloyd George as Prime Minister saw such close ties forged between the two parties that by the end of the War it became universally accepted in the division that the Liberal candidate represented the Conservative party's best interests against the Labour candidate who was standing in the new Denbighshire division. Similarly in East Denbighshire the ties that were forged between Edward Hughes of the Liberal party, Lord Kenyon, and latterly Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn witnessed the selection of a mutually acceptable Liberal candidate for the new Wrexham constituency. In Flintshire a different set of circumstances evolved – while the Constitutional Association remained loyal to Lloyd George and his government, the local Liberal Association distanced themselves from the Conservative party as they attempted to reassert their radical credentials. Even so, Thomas Parry's loyalty to Lloyd George and his coalition and his ability to retain support from his Association also ensured Conservative support for his candidature.

Yet the experience of cross-party co-operation during the War was not entirely a positive experience for the Conservative party in North-east Wales. Indeed as war came to an end in November 1918 the Conservative constituency associations were struggling to survive in North-east Wales. A combination of factors including apathy, an unwillingness to become involved in partisan politics as well as financial concerns all threatened their existence. In particular the changes proposed in the Representation of the People Bill in 1918 threatened to permanently marginalize the party as a parliamentary force in the region.

THE EFFECT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1918.

During the War several leading Conservatives changed their mind on the franchise issue. Women, they believed, had proved themselves worthy of the vote by the responsibilities they had undertaken in the service of their country. Thus, despite their party's misgivings, the Conservative leadership decided not to oppose the Representation of the People Bill. Their decision was based, as McCrillis concludes, on a realisation 'that opposition to such a measure that enfranchised valiant servicemen and patriotic civilians would undermine the Unionist claim to represent all Britons'.⁴³

What is surprising, given the protests of Conservative MPs and the discussion amongst the party's leaders, is that the new franchise brought no comment from the Conservatives in North-east Wales. Perhaps this was because that by 1918 they viewed such an extension to the franchise as an inevitability. It is unlikely that they would have opposed an extension of voting rights to men, especially those who had patriotically served in the armed services, no matter what class they came from and their views on women voters also appeared quite enlightened. Indeed, before the War the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales attempted to develop the role of women in their organisations and the only Conservative MP in the region, Ormsby-Gore, was known to publicly support women's suffrage, although in private he had misgivings about female suffrage and the methods adopted by suffragettes to gain support for women's votes.⁴⁴ The Wrexham Unionist One Thousand were also known to support women's suffrage while Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn saw women as powerful political agents in the home - vessels through which men could be persuaded to vote Conservative. Although this is hardly evidence that he was pro-women's suffrage, his failure to comment on the subject suggests that he accepted the new franchise. Equally, the failure of the region's other most powerful Conservatives, Lords Kenyon and Mostyn, to comment on any aspect of the new enlarged franchise also suggests that they either accepted the situation as a *fait accompli* or viewed it with equanimity.

⁴³ McCrillis, *The Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p15.

⁴⁴ NLW, Brogyntyn MSS, Ormsby-Gore letter to his mother, Lady Harlech, 9 March 1912

It was the proposed redistribution of seats under the Representation of the People Bill that caused major consternation within the Conservative party in North-east Wales. The Bill promised to reduce the number of constituencies from five to three and under the guidelines set down for redistribution, Denbigh Boroughs would be disenfranchised and the East and West Denbighshire constituencies would be merged to create the county division of Denbighshire. A new single borough constituency of Wrexham would be created and Flint Boroughs and Flint County would be merged into the single division of Flintshire. It was forecast that these changes would benefit the Liberal party, as the new constituencies of Denbigh and Flintshire would include all the rural areas where Liberalism was strongest and offset the Conservative strongholds in the anglicised boroughs seats. The removal of Denbigh Boroughs also promised to deprive the Conservative party of their only MP in North Wales. Yet despite their stronger position viz the Conservatives the Liberals also had cause for concern – with a reduction in the number of seats they faced the possibility of losing at least one MP in the region even if they won all three of the new constituencies.

An attempt was made to challenge these proposed changes. On 7 July 1917 delegates from the Denbigh Boroughs, East Denbighshire and Flintshire Constituency Conservative Associations met at the Queens Hotel in Chester to discuss the imminent changes.⁴⁵ The meeting concluded that the region should retain four MPs and not the three proposed. A sub-committee consisting of D.F Pennant, Conservative parliamentary candidate for Flint Boroughs, J.M Leah, secretary of the East Denbighshire Association and R.C Roberts, secretary of the Denbigh Boroughs Association, was formed 'to endeavour to secure this result'.⁴⁶ A proposal was drafted whereby Denbighshire would retain two divisions, Flintshire one and a composite constituency consisting of the Denbigh and Flint Boroughs would be formed.⁴⁷ D. F Pennant presented the proposal to the Boundary Sub Commissioner who sat at Ruthin on 12 July 1917.

⁴⁵ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book1, D/DM/307/1, Meeting Held at Queens Hotel, Chester 7 July 1917.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

All to no avail, for on 5 November 1917 the Boundary Commissioners ratified the redistribution changes and Sir George Cave, Home Secretary, took an uncompromising stance towards those who sought to amend them.⁴⁸ On 15 November 1917 D.F Pennant's proposal was put to the House of Commons Committee sitting on the Representation of the People Bill. Sir Herbert Roberts Liberal MP for West Denbighshire, proposed that the 'existing contributory boroughs of Denbigh, Holt, Ruthin, Wrexham, Caergwrle, Caerwys, Flint, Holywell, Mold, Overton, Rhuddlan, and St.Asaph be constituted one constituency called the Denbigh and Flint Boroughs... [and] that the two counties [of Denbighshire and Flintshire] should have four members instead of five'.⁴⁹ Ormsby-Gore, Cardoc Rees (Liberal MP for Caernarfon Arfon) and E.G. Hemmerde (former Liberal MP for East Denbighshire) all seconded the proposal. The proposal received limited support from outside the region and in reality had little chance of success. Sir George Cave refused the amendment citing that 'each of these boroughs would have a population of under 70,000... a departure from the rules laid down. These boroughs were very scattered and some of them a good distance from each other. They had not much in common, some being industrial and some agricultural'.⁵⁰ Even the amendments proposers began to have second thoughts and Ormsby-Gore resigned himself to losing his seat well in advance of the final parliamentary verdict on the proposal in spite of the grievances aired by his Denbigh Boroughs Constituency Association. When asked by the London correspondent of the *Liverpool Courier* the sitting MP for the Denbigh Boroughs said, 'It is inevitable that in any redistribution we must be merged in the county. I accept the situation and am expecting to have to look out for another constituency'.⁵¹

The National Union estimated that the proposed changes contained within the Representation of the People Bill would have cost the Conservative party 105 seats at the previous election. Yet despite all the evidence the Conservative leadership remained steadfast in their decision not to oppose the Bill. Even a survey conducted by the National Union which revealed that

⁴⁸ M.Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace*, p.126.

⁴⁹ *County Herald*, 16 November 1917.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 9 June 1917.

constituency agents were overwhelmingly against reform, refused to alter their minds as they ignored the advice. Such resistance was later justified as sixteen rural seats were retained on amendment and a number of suburban constituencies favourable to the Conservatives were created. As a result the Conservative party, despite the grim warning from the National Union, probably gained about thirty seats from redistribution.⁵² Even so this was of little comfort to the Conservatives in North Wales as the loss of its only MP in the region under the terms of redistribution, threatened to undermine its hard fought survival. On the other hand relations between Ormsby-Gore, the Denbigh Boroughs MP, and his constituency party in Wrexham were less than straightforward.

WILLIAM ORMSBY-GORE AND THE WREXHAM UNIONIST ASSOCIATION.

On 8 August 1914 William Ormsby-Gore was called-up by his regiment the Shropshire Yeomanry. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press* his call-up meant that 'he would be unable to fulfil any political or other engagements as he will be entirely occupied with his military duties and can therefore take no part in politics of any kind'.⁵³ This, however, did not prevent him from becoming embroiled in political argument. Just two months later, believing that the Liberal party had made misleading statements about him, Ormsby-Gore wrote to the editor of the *Denbighshire Free Press* complaining that:

My political opponents are (again) spreading the report assiduously that I am not going to stand again for the constituency at the next election. This passes all bounds of fairness. My military duties prevents my taking part in any politics or in visiting my constituency and it is hard that such circumstances should be taken advantage of in order to spread those lying reports with the intention of doing me harm personally.⁵⁴

Such suggestions, according to Ormsby-Gore, and the fact that the Liberal government had placed the Welsh Church Bill on the Statue Book after the

⁵² N.McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.17

⁵³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 15 August 1914.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

War had started, a measure he had fought against from the moment he became MP, made him even more determined to stand again in the constituency. He commented that as ‘the government had placed the Welsh Church Bill upon the statute book at such a moment only redoubled his desire to meet Caradoc Rees upon this issue...and I am anxious for an opportunity of appealing to all fair-minded in the Denbigh Boroughs to reject a man who supports such a party’.⁵⁵

The Liberal party, however, rejected Ormsby-Gore’s assertions. At a special meeting of the Denbigh Boroughs Liberal Council held at Wrexham a week later Ormsby-Gore’s comments were discussed. D.S Davies, successful Liberal candidate in Denbighshire at the 1922 general election, who chaired the meeting said ‘that as far as he himself was aware there had been no attempt whatsoever on the part of the Liberal party or its leaders to injure Mr. Gore’.⁵⁶ Those Liberals present also ‘strongly denied the truth of the statement contained within Mr. Gore’s letter and the meeting strongly protested at such imputations’.⁵⁷

The meeting was also convened to hear from Caradoc Rees, narrowly defeated by Ormsby-Gore in December 1910, who announced his decision to stand down as the Liberal candidate in the division adding that:

So long as his opponent (Mr. Ormsby – Gore) was a member of His Majesty’s Forces and could not be in the division and might be called abroad it would be absolutely improper for him to do any political work. The War therefore compelled him to be out of action in the Denbigh Boroughs.⁵⁸

Rees’ decision to stand down helped divert an awkward situation, as there was meant to be a political truce in the division between the two parties. In particular Denbigh Boroughs was one of the most marginal seat in Britain and any assertions that the Liberals were unwilling to support Ormsby-Gore or spreading rumours that he was about to stand down could have undermined

⁵⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 15 August 1914.

⁵⁶ *North Wales Times*, 24 October 1914.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 24 October 1914. Rees was later elected unopposed at a by-election in Caernarfon Arfon on 6 July 1915.

Conservative chances to retain the only seat they held in North Wales. Yet there appeared to be some truth to Liberal assertions that Ormsby-Gore was going to stand-down. At the Liberal party's special meeting it was claimed that 'Mr Gore had intimated to more than one of his constituents his intention of withdrawing his candidature'.⁵⁹ A trawl of the local press and Conservative party papers provides no evidence of this, but a letter to his mother in March 1912 provides an insight in to how Ormsby- Gore felt about his party, both locally and nationally, and his intentions towards the Denbigh Boroughs constituency, in particular the Wrexham Unionist Association:

I don't think I had better refer to the continued and insatiable dissatisfaction at Wrexham. I certainly do not want to stand anymore, but suppose I shall have to. I am conscious all the time that I a doing no good and that the Wrexham people will never cotton on to me and that I hate the work and the Welsh more every day. I feel the Church is worth defending but have little hope that we shall be successful... In fact I think the whole attitude of the Unionist party is indifferent to the Church Question. If there is an election I shall be beaten so perhaps the Wrexham people better look out for an understudy who will satisfy their unending demands financial and social better than I do.⁶⁰

His apparent determination to continue fighting the seat was at odds with the above comments and by the time War broke out Ormsby-Gore held different views on many topics to leaders in the Denbigh Boroughs Association as well as those held by Conservatives elsewhere in North Wales. By October 1914 his views on and actions against Welsh Church Disestablishment were well documented, but by this date dissent against the Bill was starting to evaporate within his own party in North-east Wales. Ormsby-Gore's words suggest that his own constituency party were tiring of the issue and in West Denbighshire the Conservative candidate, W.Henry Williams, accepted that Disestablishment was inevitable and was now prepared to work with his political opponents 'in a Christian spirit' to solve the difficulties over the issue.⁶¹ While it made strategic

⁵⁹ *North Wales Guardian*, 24 October 1914.

⁶⁰ NLW, Brogyntyn MSS, Ormsby- Gore in an undated letter to his mother, Lady Harlech, marked March 1912

⁶¹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 20 June 1914.

sense for the Conservatives to fight an anti-Disestablishment campaign at Flint Boroughs in January 1913, it no longer made sense to fight a measure that had successfully passed its parliamentary stages, gaining a majority of 84 on its second reading in April 1914. As Morgan points out the subject of Disestablishment could no longer 'lend passion to debates, in which every argument had long been exhausted'.⁶² As passionate as he was in his defence of the Welsh Church and the loss of its endowments Ormsby-Gore was becoming an increasingly lone voice on the subject within his party, both locally and nationally.

Secondly, Ormsby-Gore's involvement with the diehard element, those vehemently opposed to the loss of the Lords veto, in both Houses of Parliament also appear to have caused a breach with his party as early as 1911. During the December 1910 general election campaign he broke ranks with other candidates in North-east Wales who were appearing on Tariff Reform platforms, as he believed opposition to the Parliament Bill and the House of Lords veto took precedence over any other issue. Throughout 1911 Ormsby-Gore was then involved with a group of diehard MPs in Parliament in coercing members in both Houses to vote against the Parliament Bill. He attempted to gain support from the Bishop of St. Asaph, a close ally in Church Defence campaigns, and prompted his father, Lord Harlech, to secure support from Lords Powys and Penrhyn, both leading officers in the NWDNU. However, he failed with all three – the Bishop of St. Asaph actually voted with the government and Lords Powys and Penrhyn abstained from voting. In fact of those who voted against the Parliament Bill, only the Earl of Denbigh and Lord Harlech had any connections with North-east Wales. Conspicuously, Lord Kenyon, Ormsby-Gore's constituency Association's chairman, and Lord Mostyn walked out of the House of Lords before the vote was taken on 10 August 1911. Whether he knew well in advance that their support was not forthcoming, the failure to secure such support must have been a blow to Ormsby-Gore.

Thirdly, and finally the other main area in which Ormsby-Gore differed with his Association party was over women's suffrage. In November 1910 Ormsby-Gore publicly supported female suffrage in a treatise he wrote for the

⁶² Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.270.

Unionist Women's Franchise Review. This publication 'charted the support for women's votes within the party and made an essentially Conservative case for the enfranchisement of women'.⁶³ Ormsby-Gore's support for female suffrage was very much in line with many influential party figures who were becoming increasingly convinced that women would actually favour the Conservatives. Yet his public views were at odds with those he held in private, and with those held by the Wrexham Association which supported women's suffrage and had a very active and well supported Women's organisation. Writing to his mother in March 1912 he commented 'aren't the suffragettes too awful. If it wasn't for the Wrexham people I'd vote against the Bill'.⁶⁴ Even though MPs have often supported Bills that they do not personally agree with, to appease their constituency parties, by 1914 Ormsby-Gore must have felt increasingly isolated within his own Constituency Association, especially the party at Wrexham.

Ormsby-Gore was not likely to face the same fate as the hapless Harold Edwards who was forced to resign as candidate for Flint County in 1909. He had far too many influential friends and relations for this to take effect. These included his father, Lord Harlech, chairman of the Oswestry Association, and Lords Hugh and Robert Cecil, whose sister Beatrice he married in 1913. Thus any move to stand down would surely have to be initiated by his own volition. This lends truth to the Liberal assertions that indeed it was Ormsby-Gore who had intimated he would resign. It also explains why he seemed so philosophical when asked about redistribution and the loss of his seat at Denbigh Boroughs. Here was a candidate who was obviously desperate to move constituencies even if it was forced upon him by the terms of the Representation of the People Act. At the same time his distaste for political work, the Welsh people and his own constituency people at Wrexham, demonstrate how far in a relatively short period relations between him and his local party had deteriorated.

Given his position as one of only four Conservative MPs in Wales, the influence and connection of his landed aristocratic family in local Conservative party circles, such ill feeling towards the Welsh also appear to reinforce Aabel's conclusion that the social exclusiveness of the Conservative party's leadership in

⁶³ Lovenduski, Norris and Burness, 'The Party and Women', p .613.

⁶⁴ NLW, Brogyntyn MSS, Ormsby-Gore letter to his mother, Lady Harlech, 9 March 1912.

Wales had a negative impact on its prospects in the Principality.⁶⁵ On the other hand Ormsby-Gore's views were not typical of all landed Aristocrats in Wales. As Cragoe points out there were very few landowners 'who would have been prepared to run the gauntlet of communal hostility and public censure' that an overt display of social exclusiveness and hostility to local Welsh people would have brought with it.⁶⁶ In particular, and fortunately for Conservative party prospects the landed leaders in North-east Wales were also amongst those unwilling to take such risks. Having learnt the lessons of the late nineteenth century the landed Conservative leadership were careful not to harbour such an antagonistic attitude towards the Welsh people in the region. Indeed, Ormsby-Gore's views were not generally shared by the party in North-east Wales or nationally. In November 1918 Ormsby-Gore stood and won the safe seat of Stafford, a constituency he held until he was elevated, on the death of his father, to the peerage in 1938. After the War he moderated his views on many issues, seeing himself as being on the left of his party⁶⁷, but his strident support for the diehard cause, his intransigent opposition to Church Disestablishment and latterly his antipathy towards Lloyd George were at odds with the pragmatic and more inclusive brand of Conservatism that was being purveyed by the Conservative party in North-east Wales during the Great War.

PARTY ORGANISATION, 1914-1918.

At a special meeting of the National Union Executive Committee held on 6 August 1914, its chairman Sir Arthur Steel Maitland explained that:

The meeting had been called with the object of obtaining the Committee's approval for arrangements for the temporary cessation of political activity during the War. He stated that he had seen Mr. P. Illingworth, the Liberal Chief Whip, who had agreed and instructed that all his speakers should be closed down and that all his allied organisations were to cease operations too.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ F.Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885- 1935', pp440-441.

⁶⁶ Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy*, p172.

⁶⁷ Brogyntyn MSS, Fourth Baron Harlech Autobiographical Notes.

⁶⁸ Liverpool University, Archives of the British Conservative and Unionist Party, Minutes of the National Union Executive Committee, 1897-1956. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978). Special Meeting National Union Executive Committee, 6 August 1914.

The inter-party truce, including the suspension of election activities, was extended to local constituency associations. Initially, the truce was beneficial to the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales as it meant that costs could be reduced, in particular the expensive outlay of running parliamentary candidates and campaigns. However, as the War drifted on support for the coalition deprived them of the canvassing and registration work, no matter how expensive, that remained their primary responsibility and a loss of individual political identity duly followed.

The long-term consequences brought about by the disruption of war meant that when it ended Conservative party organisation, in particular in Denbighshire, had to rebuild from scratch. This was in part due to the boundary changes contained within the Representation of the People Act, 1918, but the situation was exacerbated by the inactivity of the NWDNU, which failed to meet during the period of conflict. Again it is unclear why this was so – the most simple explanation being that its leaders including Lord Kenyon and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn were occupied elsewhere with the War effort, including recruitment and munitions manufacturing, and showed little interest in becoming involved in politics. A search of party archives, including a search of National Union records and the Bonar Law papers also failed to discover any responses from the NWDNU to those subjects and matters that animated Tories in other regions – even to such controversial measures as Irish Home Rule. Without such a body the constituency associations were left rudderless in North-east Wales and with no clear directives to follow, it is perhaps not surprising that decay and apathy set in amongst the party organisation.

Yet it would be wrong to assume that there was no Conservative party activity in North-east Wales between 1914 and 1918. For example, the constituency agents, unlike the Area agents, whose role as Ball points out, were to be faithful servants ‘to the association, carrying out in detail the instructions of its officers’ services’ were retained.⁶⁹ With the associations wary in the early stages of war that an election could still be called they remained important cogs

⁶⁹ S.Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and Party Organization’ p. 281

in the machine.⁷⁰ In East Denbighshire J.M Leah kept his post even though the Conservative Association failed to meet for the first three years of the conflict. In West Denbighshire C.C. Mott was retained, despite his recruiting work for the county, while the sub-agents for the polling districts were put to work helping with the War effort. In Denbigh Boroughs all four-borough agents were retained and in Flintshire the Association secretary, J.Emlyn, oversaw the work of two agents until he joined up in January 1915. The agents kept their posts and continued to work alongside the Liberal agents in the county ensuring that all registration matters were settled before any appearances in the Revision Court.⁷¹

Left to their own devices the associations in North-east Wales met infrequently during the War, but were not unlike many Conservative and Liberal associations the length and breadth of the country that failed to meet on a regular basis even prior to the conflict. As Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe and Mathew Worley point out ‘in most instances, the Liberal and Conservative executives met irregularly, primarily at election times, on occasion to appoint a prospective parliamentary candidate, or to confirm arrangements for the annual general meeting’.⁷² In East-Denbighshire, the Unionist Association failed to meet at all until June 1918 when at a special meeting of the Finance Committee it was decided to produce a list of potential subscribers, Mrs.Fitzhugh was appointed as Vice-president and the Wrexham Unionist Association, as result of constituency redistribution, was formally invited to merge with the Association. The failure of the Association to meet until this date reflected the decision of its President and Treasurer Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn not to become embroiled in politics during wartime. As Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn provided much of the finance and the facilities for this Association it is hardly surprising that it failed to meet during the War.

The Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association also held very few meetings during the War. With their MP, Ormsby-Gore on military service and their

⁷⁰ See DRO, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association Rules and Correspondence 1915-1925, DD/PN/204, Account of the Association for 1915 and FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Party Papers, D/DM/307/1, Finance Committee Meeting, 30 January 1915.

⁷¹ FRO, Flintshire Unionist and Conservative Party Papers, D/DM/307/1, Finance committee Meeting 14 July 1915.

⁷² S.Ball, A.Thorpe and M.Worley, ‘Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency Party Members in Britain between the Wars’ in Labour’s Grass roots, Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918- 1945, ed, M. Worley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) p.9.

chairman involved in war work again this was hardly surprising, but an entry in Major Hugh Peel's papers indicate that a meeting of the Denbigh Boroughs Executive Committee was held at the Queens Hotel in Chester on 17 August 1917 to discuss the Representation of the People Bill, finance and any other business. No further comments or reports in the local press can be traced about the proceedings or conclusions drawn, but one further meeting is noted in Major Peel's papers. This was of the Finance Committee which met on 4 June 1918, and agreed the transfer of £128 from Denbigh Boroughs to the new Wrexham constituency Association when it was formed in June 1918.⁷³ The failure of this Association to meet regularly during the War is perhaps unsurprising, but it hardly met as a cohesive unit prior to the conflict, as the distances between the two boroughs of Wrexham and Holt in the east of Denbighshire and the more westerly boroughs of Ruthin and Denbigh, approximately thirty miles away, were hardly conducive to the regular holding of meetings. Indeed, prior to the War the Holt Unionist Association, the Wrexham Unionist One Thousand, the Denbigh Conservative Association and the Ruthin Unionist Associations all held separate annual and regular meetings at which delegates were chosen to sit on the Executive committee of the Central Unionist Association of the Denbigh Boroughs. As was pointed out by the Home Secretary in 1918 in geographical terms the redistribution of the constituency under the terms of the Representation of the People Act made much sense.⁷⁴

The West Denbighshire Constitutional Association which held regular finance, general and annual general meetings before the War – meeting at least five times a year between 1910 and 1914 – met just twice during the War, but produced bank statements and generated a small amount of correspondence. On 10 February 1915 an agreement was reached between C.C. Mott, the Association's secretary, and the Liberal Association for a political truce to last for the duration of the War. In a letter to Colonel Mellor, Vice-president, confirming the agreement, Mott also advised that the Association's sub agents be retained, in case a return to political activities became necessary.⁷⁵ The two

⁷³ FRO, Bryn-y-Pys MSS, D/BP/1014, Letter from Lord Kenyon to Major Hugh Peel.

⁷⁴ *County Herald*, 16 November 1917.

⁷⁵ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, Minutes, Committee Minutes and Correspondence 1915-1925, DD/PN/204, Letter from C.C Mott to Colonel J. Mellor, 10 February 1915.

meetings held sadly went unreported apart from a few lines in the Association's Minute books. The first meeting held at Ruthin Castle on 25 October 1915, discussed financial matters and agreed to retain the services of the agents.⁷⁶ The second meeting held at the end of June 1917 merely agreed the appointment of G.Denton as Secretary, who then informed Lord Kenyon of his new position.⁷⁷ After this the West Denbighshire Association went into decline and failed to meet again, an Association only reforming formerly on 1 March 1923. A number of factors were responsible for this. Firstly, many of the leading officers of the Association became involved with recruiting and the War effort. This appears to have bred apathy towards party work. Also in a climate of political co-operation, the Association seemed more than willing to allow Sir Herber Roberts, Liberal MP for the division, to represent their cause in opposition to the Representation of the People Act - perhaps deferring to him because of the experience he had as a parliamentarian and as leader of the Welsh Liberals.⁷⁸ Finally, the death of William Mesham from natural causes in May 1918, who had led the Association since its creation in 1886, was a blow. Only a minor member of the landed gentry William Mesham presided over a highly successful Conservative Association. Under his leadership the Association was not only financially viable, but also funded a working-class parliamentary candidate, helped finance the Boroughs Association in Denbigh and formed a successful Junior Imperial League in the constituency. Mesham also presided over the most successful Primrose League Habitation in North Wales, at Denbigh. His death removed one of the major driving forces of Conservatism in the region.

Only the Flintshire Constitutional Association met on anything like a regular basis during the War, meeting at least once every year between 1914 and 1918 and twice during 1915. Although this did not match the regularity of the meetings held prior to the War, the Flintshire Association held more meetings than any other Association in the region. The Finance Committee met most often, assembling not just to discuss financial affairs, but also other matters. It was at the Finance Committee meeting held on 14 July 1915 that a Central Office communiqué was read out instructing the Association to meet with the Flintshire

⁷⁶ DRO, Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, DD/PN/204 Meeting of West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, 25 October 1915.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; Executive Committee Meeting 30 June 1917.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Letter from Hugh Vincent to G.Denton, 30 June 1917.

Liberal Association and ‘settle most of their differences in Registration work before appearing in the Revision Court’.⁷⁹ As a result the Secretary reported that ‘he had met the Liberal Agent and they had jointly framed an agreement to cover the contentious points’.⁸⁰ At the end of January 1916 an Annual General Meeting was held at which officers and an Executive Committee were elected.⁸¹

Co-operation with the Liberal party continued throughout the War, but in March 1918 the Constitutional Association met to discuss the possibility of fielding a parliamentary candidate should a Labour candidate run in the new division of Flintshire at any future election. While the decision was deferred, and on the conclusion of the War the Association supported the candidacy of a Liberal, the meeting demonstrates the nervousness of the Conservatives with regards to the Labour party. As it turned out the Conservatives had good grounds to be wary about the influence of Labour in the division, when after the War relations with the Liberals quickly turned sour as accusations that they had formed a secret alliance with Labour at local elections turned out to be true. This, however, provided the impetus for the Conservative party to look to their own survival and prompted a review of organisation – leading to the formation of a very successful constituency Association.

PARTY ORGANISATION – FINANCE 1914-1918.

Given the sporadic nature of meetings and the ending of partisan politics caused by the inter-party truce and the support for the War effort, party subscriptions and donations dried up, threatening the very survival of the associations in North-east Wales. To prevent complete collapse cost cutting became a priority. Already in difficulties, with a substantial overdraft and having to be bailed out by Lords Mostyn and Kenyon during 1914, the Flintshire Constitutional Association was now in extreme financial trouble. In November 1914 the Secretary agreed to accept half his salary for the War, and a meeting with the Bank Manager was arranged. As a result further cost savings were undertaken. In January 1915 the Association decided that local agents were to be

⁷⁹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1, Finance committee Meeting 14 July 1915.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Flintshire Constitutional Association Meeting, 30 January 1915.

paid at half the usual rate for 1915 with no pay at all for 1916.⁸² During 1915 it was also decided to sell the Association's chief propaganda outlet, *The Flintshire Observer*, which was a huge drain on resources.⁸³

In West Denbighshire similar financial arrangements were made. In February 1915, C.C. Mott, the secretary of the Constitutional Association, suggested that sub-agents accept half pay for the duration of the War, and reduced his own salary accordingly.⁸⁴ At the end of October 1915 the Executive Committee also decided that from then until the end of the War salaries would be paid at 1915 levels, with Mott receiving nothing but a pension payment. Yet the annual accounts show that with subscriptions drying up the Association made a loss of £23 in 1914. Fortunately after 1914 with political campaigns stopping the few subscriptions and donations the Association received meant that it had balance of over £73 at the end of 1916, but it dropped again to a mere £29 in 1918. This was a paltry sum when compared to, for example, 1912 when the Association collected over £420 in subscriptions, paid out £365 in expenses but still had a balance of £140 in its bank account.

In Denbigh Boroughs the Unionist Association's financial condition deteriorated more quickly than most as subscriptions plummeted. A set of accounts produced by Major Hugh Peel, Treasurer, show that in 1914 the Association amassed £125 in subscriptions but that between 1915 and 1918 a mere £57 was collected.⁸⁵ As in other associations remedial action was undertaken to ensure survival. After 1914 the Wrexham ward secretaries received no pay until an appeal for remuneration was made in August 1917, leaving a balance at the bank in July 1918 of £128.⁸⁶

While cost cutting exercises were undertaken in an attempt to ensure survival, lack of funds still had serious repercussions for the associations in North-east Wales. Without adequate funds it would have been impossible to organise regular meetings, pay agents and secretaries, run political campaigns of

⁸² F.R.O., Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910–22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Finance Committee Meeting, 15 January 1916.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Finance Committee Meeting, 14 July 1915.

⁸⁴ D.R.O., Plas Nantglyn MSS, West Denbighshire Constitutional Association, Correspondence, 1915-1925. DD/PN/204, Letter from C.C. Mott to Colonel Mellor, 10 Feb. 1915.

⁸⁵ F.R.O., Bryn y Pys MSS, D/BP/1014, Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association, Statement of Accounts 1911- 1919.

⁸⁶ FRO, Bryn y Pys MSS, D/BP/1014, Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association, Finance Meeting 4 June 1918.

any kind (whether in support of Liberal candidates or not), pay for party literature or defray expenses. This, in part explains why the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association failed to meet after the War. Its funds would have been expected to go to a new party organisation in the new constituency of Denbighshire but the paltry sum of £29 would not have funded much and was hardly likely to supply the impetus to an already apathetic party organisation in the county. By contrast the new organisation in Wrexham was the benefactor of the sums collected by the Denbigh Boroughs Association. It is interesting to note, however, that the Wrexham Constitutional Association also failed to meet on a regular basis in the period directly after the War and quickly ran out of funds as it failed to attract subscribers. Thus lack of funds, in particular the failure to attract subscriptions, made it virtually impossible for Conservative Associations to operate at pre-1914 levels. The failure to attract subscribers was in part caused by economic conditions. During wartime many people made economies and subscriptions would have been seen as an unnecessary expense while subscribers seemed unwilling to donate once inter-party truces were made.⁸⁷

What emerges is a mixed picture of Conservative party organisation during the War. Indeed, as the War progressed and inter-party rivalry ceased depriving Conservative Associations of their *raison d'être* – to field and support candidates – the party's source of income dried up. While economies were introduced resulting in the survival of the party for the duration of the War its long-term future was hampered by its lack of funds. At the same time other factors had a negative effect on party organisation. The continuation of Coalition Government after 1916 and the support for Lloyd George meant that the Conservative message was muted and became increasingly irrelevant in a Liberal dominated region. In East Denbighshire Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn decision to avoid politics and his omnipotent control over Conservative politics in the constituency meant that the Unionist Association failed to function as a body until June 1918. Fortunately for Conservative politics in the area, a new Association was formed for the Wrexham constituency, but it subsequently suffered from a degree of apathy as the initiative passed to the local Liberal party once their choice of candidate had been selected to fight the division in 1918.

⁸⁷ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, 11 August 1910–22 January 1921, D/DM/307/1, Annual Meeting of Association, 1 Feb. 1919.

In West Denbighshire matters were simply left to drift after the death of William Mesham and the Association ceased to function once constituency boundaries were re-drawn in 1918. This would have been fine if the Borough Associations of Ruthin and Denbigh had seized the initiative and established an organisation to represent the new division of Denbighshire. As it was apathy and decay set in and the result was that a new large constituency of over 30,000 voters, including the resort town of Colwyn Bay, the market towns of Denbigh and Ruthin as well as many rural areas, were left without a central Conservative organising body. On the other hand, the Flintshire Constitutional Association continued to meet, even if on an irregular basis, spurred on by financial difficulties, and concerns over the emergence of Labour in the county. Consequently, a determination to maintain an organisation existed amongst Conservatives in the county that stood the Association in good stead for the battles ahead with the Liberal and Labour parties.

CONCLUSION.

The Great War largely had a negative effect on the Conservative party in North-east Wales. Unlike the party nationally which found itself revitalised by its participation in Coalition Government, the local parties found themselves submerged in their alliance with the Liberals, their effectiveness as separate entities seriously curtailed by local agreements especially on electioneering and voter registration. Furthermore, many leading Conservatives in the region became involved in the War effort, helping raise troops and manufacture munitions, if not actually serving themselves. This meant that such influential Conservatives as William Mesham, Lord Kenyon, Lord Mostyn and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn were deflected from their work as leaders of their Conservative Associations.

The Representation of the People Act reduced the number of constituencies in the region to three and those that remained because of boundary changes favoured the Liberal party. This naturally had an adverse affect on the Conservative Associations in the region, which were already struggling to survive. The combined factors of the War, political agreements with the Liberals, the death of William Mesham and redistribution under the Representation of the People Act witnessed the demise of the West Denbighshire Association, and the

Denbigh Boroughs Unionist Association also ceased to exist as a result of redistribution. Moreover, Sir Watkin Williams–Wynn’s decision not to participate in politics for the duration of the War left the East Denbighshire organisation rudderless as matters were left to drift without its autocratic president and treasurer. Only the Flintshire Constitutional Association soldiered on during the War and it emerged reinvigorated as conflict with the local Liberal Association at county council elections ensured that it remained in fighting trim.

Thus by the time the General Election was called in November 1918 the Conservative party appeared to be in a sorry state in North-east Wales. Yet the War did present some advantages for the party in the region. A potential schism was avoided between the party in Wrexham and Ormsby-Gore, which given the antipathy from the MP towards his local Association would surely only have resulted in his resignation and a major propaganda coup for the Liberals. At the end of the War the Flintshire Association reorganised itself as a single constituency Association ending one of the major bones of contention between itself and the NWDNU. Finally, the merger between the Wrexham and Holt Unionist Associations and the East Denbighshire Unionist Association to form the new Wrexham Constitutional Association helped democratise Conservative politics in the area. Out went the secretiveness of the old East Denbighshire Association to be replaced by an organisation that included women and working class members, which had its accounts regularly audited and publicly disclosed. Even though these were only small crumbs of comfort to the party, which felt it was making inroads into the Liberal hegemony prior to the War, it at least showed that the party could survive and adapt. Furthermore, the effect of national politics meant that the Liberal party in the region also had cause to be concerned as Labour now started to emerge as a force. The challenge for the Conservatives in the post-War world now involved deciding how far to submerge themselves in a political marriage with the Liberals to marginalize Labour or whether to invoke an early divorce and present themselves as the only viable alternative to the new perceived socialist threat.

CHAPTER 5: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH-EAST WALES 1918-1922.

INTRODUCTION

The Conservative party was revitalised by its participation in war-time government. The return to government in May 1915 allayed pre-war fears that the three general election defeats represented permanent exclusion from power. Becoming the major partner in Lloyd George's Coalition further bolstered the party's position, and its ascendancy was confirmed at the 1918 coupon election when it won 332 seats, just short of an outright majority, compared to their Coalition Liberal partners who won 127. The opposition parties could only muster 234 MPs between them, which included 58 for Labour, leaving a majority of 239 for Lloyd George's coalition.¹ However, from the outset the new Coalition Government was beset by problems. Industrial disruption increased, with nearly 35 million working days lost during 1919.² High levels of income tax helped fund social policies such as expensive building programmes, but bred discontent amongst the middle classes as concerns grew about the unstable economy and the damaging effects of income tax on people's livelihoods. The Middle Class Union, a body formed to express the grievances of the middle classes, was borne out of such concerns.³ Along with ratepayers associations they agitated for reductions on government expenditure and a return to fiscal orthodoxy. Their anxieties coincided with sentiments held by many Conservative backbenchers whose constituency associations were becoming concerned about the party's direction, policies, and even future independence. These latter concerns were exacerbated by an attempt to fuse the Conservatives and Liberals into a single party in 1920. The plan was only scuppered when Coalition Liberal MPs, whose co-operation had been taken for granted by Lloyd George, rejected the notion.⁴ At the same time the government's failure to control public expenditure and the excessive demands this subsequently made on the tax

¹ All figures for the 1918 general election have been taken from C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment, Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972) p.5.

² J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984) p. 99.

³ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p.122.

⁴ M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924, The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) pp. 112-114.

payer convinced many Conservatives that the coalition was failing in its duty to provide a successful defence against the growing menace of socialism.⁵

Conservative anxieties intensified when in 1920 the Anti-Waste League emerged under the leadership of the Fourth Marquis of Salisbury, which enjoyed support from the highly influential press barons, Lords Rothermere and Northcliffe. Fielding independent Anti-Waste candidates, often against the coalition candidate and campaigning under traditional Tory issues, the League won a series of by-elections in late 1920 and early 1921, seriously threatening to undermine the Conservative party's prospects, tied as it was to Coalition Government.⁶ As a result the call for Conservative independence amongst party associations rose to a clamour.⁷ Consequently, by 1922 Lloyd George's authority over the Coalition went into serious decline, his only support coming from a small group of senior Conservatives including Austen Chamberlain, who replaced Bonar Law as Conservative leader when he retired due to ill health in March 1921. Chamberlain believed that the increasing demands for Conservative independence which came from the constituency associations was indicative of 'pre-war Tories who have learned nothing and forgotten nothing and who are I am quite convinced unrepresentative of the bulk of the electorate'. Yet it was Chamberlain who was clearly out of touch with the constituency grass roots and an increasing number of party backbenchers who were becoming increasingly disaffected with their leader's position.⁸ During 1922 the signs of party revolt became more evident. According to Green 'the desire amongst Conservatives to re-establish the independence of their party grew apace in the first half of 1922 and...by September evidence that local Conservative Associations were increasingly willing to disregard the orders of CCO [Conservative Central Office] and run independent candidates was indeed widespread.'⁹

If this was not bad enough other matters also engulfed the government. A settlement was finally reached over Ireland in the Autumn of 1921, but not before Lloyd George had threatened to resign and the government given

⁵ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, pp119-121.

⁶ K.O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity, The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 98-99.

⁷ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, pp119-121.

⁸ C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p. 15.

⁹ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p129.

reassurances to disaffected Unionists not to coerce Ulster. Lloyd George's moral standing, already brought into question by the Marconi Scandal in 1913, was also challenged by his apparent readiness to sell honours on the open market. Such were the rumours of corruption that surrounded the June 1922 Honours List Lloyd George had to accept the appointment of a Royal Commission, which investigated the whole system of awarding honours. In September and October 1922 the Chanak Crisis also brought the Prime Minister into conflict with Lord Curzon, the Coalition's Conservative Foreign Secretary, and probably sealed the government's fate. With Lloyd George supporting Greece in their conflict with Turkey, despite Britain's historic position as a defender of the Turks, and Turkish forces routing their Greek enemies and thus threatening British troops at Chanak in the Near East the possibility of another war loomed. In their reluctance to support another war many Conservatives also harboured fears that the government might exploit the crisis to hold a 'khaki style' general election.

These fears were realised when the Coalition leadership attempted to bring the party into line by calling a general election.¹⁰ When this was met with resistance Austen Chamberlain, called a meeting of the party at the Carlton Club on 19 October 1922 to reassert his authority. The move backfired as Bonar Law, re-emerging after illness, and Stanley Baldwin, President of the Board of Trade spoke out against Coalition. A vote taken to continue support for Lloyd George's government was decisively lost, and over seven years of Conservative participation in Coalition was abruptly brought to an end. On 23 October 1922 Bonar Law formed a Conservative ministry and one of his first tasks was to dissolve parliament and call a general election.

Such anti-coalition sentiment did not develop in North-east Wales. Part of the reason lay in the fact that every constituency in the region returned couponed Liberals at the 1918 general election and as a result apathy and neglect infected party organisation in many areas resulting in a failure to register Conservative opinions until the coalition had fallen in 1922. At the same time leading Conservatives in the region, most notably Sir Watkin

¹⁰ J. Ramsden, *Real Old Tory Politics 1910-1935, The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders, Lord Bayford, 1910-35*, p. 191.

Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon, still believed, as Austen Chamberlain did, that the coalition was the best form of defence against the spread of socialism.

This chapter will therefore examine the effects of the 1918 general election and the resultant extension of Coalition Government on the Conservative party in North-east Wales. It will conclude that the support for coalition proved a mixed blessing for the Conservatives in North-east Wales. It will demonstrate that continued support for Lloyd George's coalition had a negative impact on Conservatism in Denbighshire, where the party only survived because of the diligence shown by the two surviving Primrose League Habitations in the county. On the other hand it will establish that a general distrust of the local Liberal party's aims and ambitions, but not Coalition Government, in Flintshire saw the party slowly revive and re-organise itself. It will also show how the party in Wrexham took the opportunity to reorganise itself during the period of coalition, and how despite their emasculation caused by participation in coalition politics, the Conservatives in North-east Wales incorporated the working class and in particular women into their organisations, which had long term benefits for the party. It will finally attempt to explain why the Conservatives in North-east Wales seemed less concerned with matters of national politics and anti-coalitionist concerns, including the Honours Scandal and the Chanak Crisis, and concentrated more on addressing problems within their own associations.

THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION.

As the War entered its final conclusive phase in the autumn of 1918, Lloyd George started to make plans for a general election that would, he hoped, be conducted under an electoral pact with the Conservatives, the aim being to extend Coalition Government into a period of reconstruction. On 5 November 1918, six days before the Armistice, Lloyd George saw the King and requested a dissolution and an election date was set for 14 December.¹¹ Yet many Conservatives viewed the Coalition Government and continued support for Lloyd George with suspicion. As Green asserts 'Lloyd George's pre-war actions and rhetoric left a legacy of bitterness that was difficult if not

¹¹ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, p.317.

impossible to erase'.¹² Thus, to allay Conservative fears and ensure that the Coalition Government survived an election programme needed to embrace Conservative policies. Consequently, an election campaign programme was hastily agreed between Bonar Law and Lloyd George, which included two major elements - patriotism and stability. Unity was the key word, outlined by Bonar Law at meeting of Conservatives on 12 November 1918, as meaning that 'Britain's problems needed to be approached with efficiency and pragmatism, not partisan rancour'.¹³

At the same time Lloyd George agreed to Conservative demands on Imperial Preference, Protection, provisions for Ulster in any Irish Home Rule Settlement and the Welsh Church. In a letter to Bonar Law, Lloyd George outlined the Coalition Government's election programme. Amazingly, given his previous dogmatic rejection of the Conservative twin policies of Imperial Preference and Protection, he now said:

I have already accepted the policy of Imperial Preference...to the extent that a preference will be given on existing duties and on any duties which may subsequently be imposed. On this subject I think there is no difference of opinion between us...I am prepared to say also that in order to keep up the present standard of protection and develop it to the utmost extent possible it is necessary that security should be given against the unfair competition to which our industries have been in the past subjected by the dumping of goods below the actual cost of production.¹⁴

Lloyd George's volte-face has to be understood in the context of Coalition Government. Having split with those Liberals who supported Asquith in December 1916 and become dependent on Bonar Law and virtually the entire Conservative party for survival he had to abandon much of his political heritage and throw sops to those whose support he needed. To this end Lloyd George's letter also promised that in any settlement on Irish Home Rule he could not 'support the forcible coercion of Ulster'. In addition the Prime Minister confirmed that as the War had created 'financial problems which

¹² Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p118.

¹³ McCrillis, *The British Conservative party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.35.

¹⁴ House of Lords Record Office (HLRO), *Bonar Law Papers*, BL/95/1, Copy of Letter sent from Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 2 November 1918.

must be taken into account', he would without making any definite proposals 'ensure that the Welsh Church would receive financial compensation in lieu of its lost endowments'.¹⁵ Given his concessions there was little resistance from Conservatives to the programme. However, the letter also contained references to the need for social reform and reconstruction after the War, which would 'improve the physical condition of the citizens of this country through better housing, better wages and better working conditions'.¹⁶ This it was anticipated would also keep social reforming Coalition Liberals on side.¹⁷

Many Conservatives believed that the party had to co-operate with other sympathetic elements so that the rise of the Labour party and socialism could be checked. They also believed that to achieve long lasting post-war reform and reconstruction sectional interests 'had to be submerged in a party of national unity'.¹⁸ As a result, Liberal and Conservative party organisers divided up the constituencies, an agreement being reached between Conservative party leaders and Frederick Guest, the Coalition Liberal whip, not to contest 158 seats in which Lloyd George candidates were standing.¹⁹ Conservative and Liberal supporters of the Coalition 'were automatically to be returned', and the half-dozen Labour MPs who had opposed the War were to be challenged with 'the patriotic section of the Party being left alone'.²⁰ In all 362 Conservatives and 145 Liberals were awarded government support, or the coupon, as it was later called.

In Wales nineteen Liberals and eight Conservatives who supported the government sought representation. But the election was marked by the number of Labour candidates who stood for parliament. In all twenty-eight Labour candidates went to the polls, the majority of them in South Wales, the highest number the party had ever fielded in the Principality. In addition ten anti-Coalition Asquithian Liberals were selected to fight Welsh seats. In North-east Wales under the election agreement thrashed out between the party organisers, three Coalition Liberal candidates were selected to fight the three

¹⁵ House of Lords Record Office (HLRO), *Bonar Law Papers*, BL/95/1, Copy of Letter sent from Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 2 November 1918.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity* pp35-36.

¹⁸ McCrillis, *The British Conservative party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

²⁰ Turner, *Britain and the First World War*, p.132.

constituencies. In Flintshire, both County and Boroughs seats had consistently returned Liberals before the War, which made the selection of a Liberal appear likely for the new county division. The sitting Boroughs MP, Thomas Parry, was the Liberal Association's nomination despite the opposition of many in the Liberal organisation who supported Asquith, and regarded Parry as an ally of Lloyd George. There was some discussion amongst Conservatives as to whether the Association should field a candidate of their own if Labour stood at the election.²¹ But at a meeting of the Flintshire Constitutional Association held on 16 November 1918 a succession of speakers pledged loyalty to the Coalition as the best defence against the spread of Labour. As a result the Executive Committee agreed to support Thomas Parry providing the Liberal party confirmed his candidature.²² On 23 November the acting Liberal agent confirmed Parry's nomination and the Constitutional Association finally agreed to support him. *The Flintshire Observer* noted that 'among the Unionist Party the feeling seems general to adhere to the Coalition policy',²³ and in spite of the rumours that the Labour Party would field a candidate Thomas Parry was returned to Westminster unopposed.

In Wrexham and Denbighshire contests were assured when Labour candidates were brought forward in both divisions. Moreover, in Wrexham E.T. John failed in his bid to win the Liberal nomination. Given that John was the Liberal MP for East Denbighshire he might have expected to win this nomination, but his views were clearly unacceptable to the Wrexham Liberal party Chairman Edward Hughes - he could hardly have endeared himself to Hughes, one of Lloyd George's closest allies in North-east Wales when he said he was an 'out and out opponent of Lloyd George's Government considering it a Coalition of the classes against the masses'.²⁴ It was not surprising therefore, when Sir Robert Thomas won the Liberal nomination at a selection meeting held in Wrexham on 13 November 1918, beating John by 31 votes to 22.²⁵

²¹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 1, D/DM 307/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 November 1918.

²² FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 1, D/DM 307/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 16 November 1918.

²³ *Flintshire Observer*, 14 November 1918.

²⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 14 December 1918.

²⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 15 November 1918.

Thomas, who claimed to be an enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Lloyd George and the government, was a shipping magnate, a director of several public companies, and a former High Sheriff of Anglesey, and was thus a different type of Liberal to those who had represented the radical cause prior to the War.²⁶ He was also supportive of his party's accommodation with the Conservative Party.²⁷ As such on 18 November 1918 he was invited to address a Wrexham Unionist Association meeting held to discuss his candidature. According to Thomas:

He declared himself an enthusiastic supporter of the policy enunciated by Mr. Lloyd George in agreement with Bonar Law and hoped the new government would be a business government with the give and take, which the times demanded. He did not wish to conceal the fact he was a Liberal, but he was a sane Liberal and believed it was possible for Conservatives and Liberal to work together.²⁸

By echoing the sentiments of Lloyd George and Bonar Law and thus reinforcing the need for Conservatives and Liberals to work together, emphasis being placed on the need for a business government and not a tax and welfare reforming government that had antagonised so many Tories before the War, the Unionist Association expressed approval at such conciliatory words and unanimously decided to adopt him as candidate.²⁹ Sir Robert Thomas' selection also shows how far the local Liberal party had moved to accommodate the Conservatives. In part this was motivated by the fact that the Liberals needed Conservative votes in the constituency. While the new constituency contained all the industrial areas formerly in the East Denbighshire division, traditionally inclined towards the Liberals, it also contained the town of Wrexham, where a large number of workingmen had voted Conservative in 1910 to win the Denbigh Boroughs seat for Ormsby-Gore. In addition there were many more working class as well as female votes

²⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 15 November 1918.

²⁷ Jones, *The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales*, p.60.

²⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 23 November 1918.

²⁹ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Vol 1, Minute Book of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 1918-1926. Special meeting of the Association 15 November 1918.

unaccounted for in the new constituency now that the franchise had been extended. With a strong Conservative presence in Wrexham, which included the support of successful workingmen's and women's Conservative organisations, the Liberals surely had to take account of Conservative sensibilities. The selection of Sir Robert Thomas was one way of accomplishing this.

At the same time the selection of Sir David S. Davies, a local wealthy industrialist who enthusiastically embraced Lloyd George's and Bonar Law's election programme, as Coalition Liberal candidate in Denbighshire emphasised the desire amongst leading Liberals and Conservatives in the constituency to reach an accommodation with each other. However, his selection exposed differences of opinion within the Liberal ranks. Delegates from the Liberal Associations of West Denbighshire and the Denbigh and Ruthin branches of the Denbigh Boroughs attending the Liberal selection meeting at the end of November 1918 were surprised to discover that Sir John Herbert Roberts, the sitting Liberal MP for West Denbighshire, had suddenly retired and nominated Davies as his successor, who was subsequently selected. A number of delegates were unhappy about the situation believing that they were faced with a *fait accompli* 'before anyone had time to think' and attempted to persuade Aneurin Evans, a solicitor and Denbigh Liberal Association member to stand.³⁰ Consequently Evans received support from 'a considerable body of agriculturalists and other electors in the division who thought that as an industrialist Davies [was] an unsuitable candidate to stand as an Independent Coalition Liberal' in the rural constituency.³¹ Evans initially agreed and nomination papers were prepared for him. At the last minute a split in the division was avoided when Evans withdrew stating that his candidature would mean a serious division in the Coalition forces. But, it is not hard to see why many Liberals were concerned and considered Davies an unsuitable candidate. Sir John Herbert Roberts represented a link to the past and pre-war radical Nonconformist policies. Moreover, as a fearsome defender of Free Trade his decision to stand down and nominate Davies, an industrialist who embraced protection policies, must have seemed a betrayal of radical

³⁰ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 30 November 1918.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1918.

principles to some Liberals in Denbighshire. The ideological lurch towards Conservatism by endorsing the government's election programme and in particular the twin policies of Imperial Preference and Protection must have encouraged some radical Liberals to look elsewhere for their political affiliations. Nonetheless, in 1918 the Liberals fought the election under one banner but by 1922 the fissures that appeared here opened up and resulted in an Independent Liberal being brought forward.

Even so there were many who supported Davies and despite the internal bickering within the Liberal party local Conservatives met the choice of Davies with approval. Indeed, by supporting the government's manifesto which included a degree of preference and protection and advocating that those responsible for the War had to be punished so that reconstruction could promote the 'unity and development of the Empire', Davies guaranteed himself the full support of Conservatives during the election campaign.³² The Conservatives went even further in supporting him by entering the internal Liberal dispute. A meeting of Conservatives held at the Ruthin Constitutional Club passed a resolution stating that 'this meeting supports the candidature of Sir David S. Davies the recognised official Liberal candidate in order to prevent as far as possible the unfortunate split which threatens to occur in the ranks of the Coalitionists in the division'.³³ Local Conservatives were urged to vote for Davies, the *Denbighshire Free Press*, the constituency's leading Conservative newspaper, issuing a rallying call:

In the absence of a Conservative candidate the members of that party will undoubtedly be anxious to support that candidate pledged to support Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law and the Coalition Government who have by their guidance, determination and wise statesmanship made it possible for our magnificent soldiers, sailors, and airmen to win the war and secure the blessings of peace. If the late government could be trusted to do this surely they are now to be trusted to secure the full benefits of a righteous and lasting peace....it will be the duty of every true Unionist loyally to support and vote for Sir David S. Davies.³⁴

³² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 7 December 1918.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Such unequivocal support for the coalition demonstrated the determination of Conservatives to shore up support for the government in opposition to Labour in the constituency.

Finally, what the selection of Sir Robert Thomas in Wrexham and Sir David S. Davies in Denbighshire and the endorsement of Thomas Parry in Flintshire suggested was how far the two main political parties in the region had shifted ground politically since 1914 to accommodate each other. This reflected the national political situation in November 1918, as much had changed since the outbreak of war. The Liberals were now irrevocably split – the events of war dividing their party into disparate blocks and the Conservatives had returned to government. However, it was the man who had been the radical scourge of Conservatives in his pre-war incarnation, but now led what was essentially a government of the right who appeared to have changed the most. Once nearly a Liberal Unionist and an admirer of Joseph Chamberlain the War had as Smith concludes ‘brought out his Chamberlainite qualities...of boundless energy and a determination to defend Britain’s imperial inheritance’ while Tariff Reformers in his government were allowed a free reign.³⁵ Such moves must have seemed an abnegation of Liberal principles by his former Radical colleagues. But it wasn’t just the Prime Minister who had shifted ground his faithful lieutenants in North-east Wales had also done so. In particular Sir John Herbert Roberts in West Denbighshire and Edward Hughes leader of the Wrexham Liberals had helped install candidates who were acceptable to local Conservatives while Thomas Parry Liberal MP in Flintshire remained a faithful supporter of coalition and willingly embraced Bonar Law’s and Lloyd George’s election programme and its sops to the Conservative party. Their apparent lurch rightwards to embrace Protection and government based on business principles agitated many in their local parties, but in 1918 these remained mere grumbles as the Liberal Associations supported their candidates.

However, a similar lurch to the left could be detected amongst the local Conservative Associations. Their support for Liberal candidates perhaps could be attributed to the coupon, which was awarded to them under the local agreement

³⁵ Smith, *The Taming of Democracy*, p 65. See also Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity* p 21.

that stopped Conservatives bringing forward their own candidate. Their view of Lloyd George's government was also possibly tempered by the promise to take into account any financial difficulties faced by the Welsh Church, as a result of the Welsh Church Disestablishment Act – a piece of legislation resisted by North-east Wales Conservatives more forcefully than Home Rule in the period leading up to the First World War.³⁶ Their support surely also reflected Bonar Law's appeal for unity and the rejection of coercion in Ulster. However, Lloyd George's endorsement of preference and anti-dumping policies that reactivated radical Conservatism – not seen in the region since the 1910 elections when most Conservatives in North-east Wales believed that Tariff Reform was a solution to local industry's ills as well as a means of raising money for social welfare – helped steer the Conservatives towards an accommodation with the Liberal party. As Smith points out 'wartime collaboration also encouraged a centrist political ethos amongst some of the Conservative and coalition leaders which welded the Liberal progressivism of Lloyd George to a revitalised radical Unionism'.³⁷ When he commented in December 1918 that Lloyd George had made it 'possible for our brave sailors and soldiers to win the War and that gratitude as well as the country's wisdom should be shown in sending Mr. Lloyd George and the Coalition Government to carry out the equally important work of peace and reconstruction', Lord Kenyon, one of the region's chief proponents of pre-war Tariff Reform policies, was surely signalling Conservative approval for centre ground politics in North-east Wales – a meeting of radical Conservatives and Coalition Liberals in the middle ground to help the cause of peacetime reconstruction and all the welfare programmes that came with it.

Even so to support Lloyd George and those Liberals he led was still a bold move – especially when one considers the antipathy that he engendered amongst local leading Conservatives with his direct taxation proposals contained in his 1909 People's Budget. Ironically, it was surely the protection of Lloyd George and his Coalition Government that ultimately they sought in 1918 as a bulwark against apparent socialistic measures, including a major threat to landed wealth, contained in Labour's manifesto. In particular, Labour's manifesto

³⁶ Ramsden, ed, *Real Old Tory Politics, The Political Diaries of Sir Robert Sanders*. As stated in a letter to Bonar Law, later used as a campaign leaflet. See copy of letter from Lloyd George to Bonar Law, 2 November 1918.

³⁷ Smith, *The Taming of Democracy*, p 65.

pledge to 'introduce large schemes of land reorganisation'... to free the 'soil from landlordism and reaction' must have struck fear into the very hearts of those powerful landowners in North-east Wales such as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Mostyn.³⁸ At the same time Labour's plans to nationalise much of Britain's industry, including the coal mines, threatened the business interests of many landowners in the region. Therefore it is not hard to see why local Conservatives saw in Lloyd George and the conciliatory election programme he had devised with Bonar Law an opportunity to sideline Labour's prospects and protect their own interests in North-east Wales.

THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

Campaigning began during the last days of November. Such was the nature of the programme and the wording of the subsequent manifesto which appeared on 21 November 1918 that both coalition partners had little difficulty supporting it. According to John Turner:

Most Conservative addresses were devoted to general support of the coalition and an appeal to the electors to return the government which had won the War and could be relied upon to govern well in peace. The coalition programme was supported in general and anodyne terms. Coalition Liberals addresses were little different, though more detailed emphasis was laid on the proposals for reconstruction in the Coalition manifesto.³⁹

What was not anticipated or planned for was the type of election campaign that emerged. Initial concerns were raised that apathy existed amongst the voters, but during the last two weeks of campaigning reports from Unionist agents showed that obtaining reparations from Germany, punishing the Kaiser and the exclusion of former enemy aliens were the most important election issues, even surpassing reconstruction and social reforms in significance. The least important issue was seen as the safeguarding of British industries.⁴⁰ Thus, the coalition election campaigns became overtly patriotic and jingoistic as candidates presented the government, in particular Lloyd George, as successful War leaders while arguing

³⁸ 1918 Labour Party General Election Manifesto [Online] Available: <http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1918>.

³⁹ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, p.325.

⁴⁰ HLRO, *Bonar Law Papers*, Summary of Reports from Unionist Agents Indicating the Subjects in which the electors are most interested, BL 95/2, 4 December 1918.

that Germany be forced to pay the maximum in reparations. It was the same in Wales, where, according to Morgan:

The so called coupon election of December 1918 was marked... by intense patriotic frenzy. The Welsh elections were described as a great ceremony of congratulation, a national tribute to the greatest Welshman ever born. Thus in Cardiff there were 'hang the Kaiser' rituals. In Aberdare the newly enfranchised women electors were urged that a vote for the ILP meant an acquittal for the filthy murderous Huns who had defiled women and children, tortured Welsh troops and strangled British trade.⁴¹

The rhetoric was less pronounced in North-east Wales, but even so the Coalition Liberal campaigns were tinged with patriotic fervour and accompanied by anti-German sentiment. While speaking to a crowded meeting in the pit village of Rhos near Wrexham at the end of November Sir Robert Thomas praised the role that Wales played and the contribution made by the local coal miners to the War victory. 'No part of the British Empire had played a more glorious part in bringing the war to a triumphant conclusion...he also wished to pay a tribute to them as colliers for their glorious contribution to the war. If they had not flung bombs at the enemy they had flung coal at them—so that the men could be kept going'.⁴² Similarly, at a campaign meeting in Denbigh on 13 December 1918 Sir David Davies argued that 'Germany should pay to the last farthing and the guilty ones punished to the full. The German nation could well afford to make reparations to the full and it must be such that she could not again be in a position to force the nations into war for generations to come'.⁴³

Thomas and Davies also kept to the government's election programme laid down at the beginning of the campaign by Lloyd George and Bonar Law. Campaigning in the Wrexham constituency on the need for unity to solve the country's problems in peacetime Thomas also argued that 'Home Rule for Ireland was essential...but there must not be coercion of the North-east corner

⁴¹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.282.

⁴² *North Wales Guardian*, 29 November 1918.

⁴³ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 14 December 1918.

of Ireland'.⁴⁴ These sentiments were guaranteed to appease Conservative concerns over Ireland and on fiscal policy Thomas declared himself a Free Trader, who was opposed to the imposition of tariffs that raised the price of food, but that 'if they could give some mutual preferential treatment to the Colonies which would result in drawing closer the bonds of unity between the old country and the Dominions he would say 'Amen' to it'.⁴⁵ This followed the lead Lloyd George's had taken in his letter to Bonar Law and was clearly designed to ensure Conservative support while not alienating the large Liberal vote in the division. Such was the care that Thomas took to ensure support from both sides of the political divide that at a major campaign meeting held at the Drill Hall, Wrexham during the first week of December those who appeared on his platform included Conservative Councillor Thomas Sauvage, who presided, Sir Ellis Jones-Griffith, Liberal MP for Anglesey, Edward Hughes leader of the Wrexham Liberals and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. According to Sir Ellis-Griffith 'the presence on the same platform of Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Sir Robert (Thomas: candidate) was a good omen and an indication of real unity in the contest they were waging in the division'.⁴⁶

Such unity was also evident in Denbighshire where Sir David S. Davies argued 'that in the work of reconstruction agriculture and its development would play a very important part'.⁴⁷ If the content of his campaign speeches was a little vague as to how such reconstruction would be achieved, his programme nonetheless was designed to please members of both local Coalition parties. In particular Davies' campaign concentrated on promises 'that reconstruction must be such as to promote the unity and the development of Empire and be worthy of the sacrifices our brave men have made, must involve wise legislation in regard to public health, housing, conditions of employment, wages and other kindred important matters'.⁴⁸ Consequently, his programme contained elements that would appeal to local Conservatives, most notably on the development and protection of Empire, and would also satisfy

⁴⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 23 November 1918.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1918.

⁴⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 6 December 1918.

⁴⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 14 December 1918.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1918.

the demands from Liberals for social reform. His programme was clearly successful in its intentions for as the *Denbighshire Free Press* noted one of his campaign meetings held in Denbigh, was ‘crowded by men and women of all parties ...the platform was as regards chairmen and speakers as representative of both parties in the Coalition as the audience; to be precise there were four Nonconformist Liberals and four Church Conservatives supporting the candidate’.⁴⁹

Such a situation would have been unthinkable before the Great War when divisions between Liberals and Conservatives, especially over the Church Disestablishment question, seemed intractable and even post-war the issue still had potential to cause division. In his election programme letter to Bonar Law, the Prime Minister had kept his promises vague on the amount of compensation to be awarded to the Welsh Church in lieu of its lost endowments and any anti-Church rhetoric would be sure to alienate potential Conservative supporters and voters. As a result in Wrexham Thomas was keen to ensure the pre-war political friction remained moribund, especially since the Church Disestablishment Act was yet to finally receive the Royal Assent. Speaking to a meeting of Wrexham Conservatives at the end of November 1918, Thomas careful not to alienate such a group said:

If there was to be a question of the rearrangement of details he should be perfectly in favour of a round table conference to discuss the matter...if there were any sharp differences of opinion on Disendowment he should desire to come down and consult the wishes of his constituents.’⁵⁰

This pacified local Conservatives on the issue and Disestablishment failed to make any impact during the election campaign. In Denbighshire Davies totally avoided the issue, no doubt aware that in this more rural constituency, where in many areas the Welsh language and Nonconformity still dominated, Disestablishment still had the potential to split his support.

What emerged from the campaign was just how far the Liberal candidates had compromised radical ideals to shore up Conservative support in the

⁴⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 14 December 1918.

⁵⁰ *North Wales Guardian*, 23 November 1918.

constituencies. While their pledges remained in line with Bonar Law and Lloyd George's programme their utterances on Tariff Reform and Church Disestablishment, unheard of from pre-war Liberals, must have pleased local Conservatives. At the same time by appearing on the same platforms where Liberals promised to pass legislation on public health, housing and employment the local leading Conservatives must have assuaged any doubts that the Liberals may have harboured about securing their support. This was not unusual and was symptomatic of what was happening elsewhere. According to Morgan:

The emphasis during the campaign on new issues such as housing was noted. The literature of a Unionist minister such as Laming Worthington-Evans in Colchester which stressed pensions and other social themes was not untypical. Generally the 'coupon so much maligned, was a verdict, soberly arrived at, on the new politics of wartime, that centralised politics' for which Lloyd George had called during the campaign.⁵¹

With this new 'centralised politics' also being practised in North-east Wales and contentious issues being avoided so as not to offend the Conservatives' political sensibilities the campaigns were largely dull affairs. The *Denbighshire Free Press* commented that 'the war has so mollified the political atmosphere that very few of the differences are recognised nowadays'.⁵² The *North Wales Guardian* reported that in Wrexham 'the excitement aroused by the close contests in Denbigh Boroughs seemed a remote memory'.⁵³ As if sensing that Labour were not going to make headway against the coalition forces the electorate seemed apathetic to the campaign despite the massive increase in the number of voters. Turnout in both constituencies was low in comparison to the 1910 general election. In Wrexham nearly 70 per cent of the electorate went to the polls compared to the 93 per cent who polled in Denbigh Boroughs in December 1910. In Denbighshire the turnout was just over 58 per cent compared to the 83 per cent turnout in West Denbighshire in January 1910, the last time the constituency was fought. The results also reflected Lloyd George's continued

⁵¹ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p42.

⁵² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 30 November 1918.

⁵³ *North Wales Guardian*, 20 December 1918.

popularity in the region as well as an ascendant patriotism that accompanied the War victory. Both factors were significant in limiting the appeal of Labour. In Denbighshire E.T John, who had swapped allegiances to join the Labour party after his failure to be selected as a Liberal in Wrexham, made no impact as his campaign speeches contained demands for Home Rule for Wales and disarmament.⁵⁴ These were hardly issues that were going to endear him to voters who were shrouded in patriotic fervour. In Wrexham Hugh Hughes, the Labour candidate also made the mistake of attacking Lloyd George as a hypocrite whose government now depended on big landowners, or as he put it ‘a vote given to the Coalition was a vote for Toryism’.⁵⁵ Both Labour candidates were subsequently heavily defeated, E.T John obtaining less than 17 per cent of the poll and barely three thousand votes. In Wrexham Hughes fared a little better, but was still defeated by over fourteen thousand votes.

Table 5.1 The 1918 General Election.

<u>Party</u>	<u>% Share</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>MPs elected</u>
Coalition Conservative	32.5	362	332
Coalition Liberal	12.6	145	127
Coalition Labour	0.4	5	4
Coalition Independent	0.1	1	1
Coalition NDP	<u>1.5</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>9</u>
Total Coalition	47.1	531	473
Conservative	6.1	83	50
Liberal	13.0	276	36
Labour	21.4	361	58
Sinn Fein	4.6	102	73
Others	<u>7.8</u>	<u>260</u>	<u>17</u>
Total	100.0	1,623	707

Taken from: C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment, Electoral Politics in Britain, 1922-1929* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972).

Table 5.2 The 1918 General Election in Wales.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats Won</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Vote</u>
Coalition Liberal	19	208, 116	39.3
Labour	10	180, 414	34.0
Conservative	4	59, 592	11.2
Liberal	2	51, 382	13.0
Nat Democratic	1	22, 824	4.3

Taken from: C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*.

⁵⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 14 December 1918.

⁵⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 29 November 1918.

Table 5.3. 1918 General Election Results in North-east Wales.

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Vote</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>T/O</u>
Denbigh	D. S. Davies (Co Lib)	14, 773	83.3	58.2
	E.T. John (Labour)	<u>2, 958</u>	16.7	
		+11. 815		
Flintshire	T. Parry (Co Liberal)	Unopposed		
Wrexham	R.J. Hughes (Co Lib)	20, 874	76.3	69.7
	H. Hughes (Labour)	<u>6, 500</u>	23.7	
		+14, 374		

Taken from: B.Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

The support for Coalition Liberal candidates was more substantial in North-east Wales than it was in Wales or in the United Kingdom as a whole. In Denbighshire Davies gained 83.3 per cent of the vote and in Wrexham Sir R.J. Thomas won 76.3 per cent compared to 39.3 per cent the Coalition Liberals achieved in the Principality (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3). This reflected the strength of Liberalism that had been carried over from pre-war days as well as the undoubted support Lloyd George still had in the region. Lloyd George's reputation was obviously still strong in North-east Wales and voters were not about to desert the man they had so faithfully supported at campaign rallies in all three constituencies prior to the Great War – despite any internal grumblings local Liberal Associations might have. The support for the War appeared as robust here as in any other part of Britain and the Coalition Liberal candidates' decision to demand the maximum war reparations from Germany while praising the contributions made by local people to the War effort struck a chord with voters. What the results in North-east Wales also demonstrated was that any fears the Conservative and Liberal parties harboured that Labour might gain a substantial vote from disaffected radical Liberals was unfounded. The Labour party did perform well in the Principality where they registered their biggest success yet winning ten seats, but these were mainly restricted to industrial seats in the southern half of the country. In all nineteen Coalition Liberals were returned in Wales and the two Coalition successes in North-east Wales were typical of many Coalition Liberal victories throughout Britain. Many of the Coalition Liberals' best performances came in

rural seats, of which Denbighshire was one, and surprisingly in some mining seats, which included Wrexham.⁵⁶ As Turner explains:

Couponed Liberals were almost entirely excluded from urban middle class seats. In all other seats they outperformed their Labour and Asquithian opponents ...Their best performances were registered in mixed-class, urban/rural and rural areas... in mining seats Coalition Liberals, often former Lib-Labs in Durham and Wales, outperformed even the Labour party.⁵⁷

Indeed, considering it fielded 361 candidates, of which only 58 were elected the election, must have been a disappointment for the Labour party as it achieved virtually nine percent more of the vote than the Coalition Liberals but won nearly 100 seats fewer. However Labour's position was not nearly as bad as it was for Asquithian Liberals who contesting 276 constituencies won over twenty two per cent of the vote and had just 36 MPs elected. The overwhelming winners were the Coalition Conservatives who from 362 candidates had 332 MPs elected; over 90 per cent of their candidates were successful.

COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, 1919.

The first county council elections in six years were greeted by indifference and apathy in Denbighshire, but in Flintshire they resembled many of the pre-war contests. A week before the contests took place in Denbighshire there was a joint meeting of electors from the Liberal and Conservative parties to decide how the county council elections should be fought. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press* the meeting had been convened in a spirit of Coalition and it was decided that the elections should be held under an alliance between the Liberal and Conservative parties, the Coalition candidates declaring that they had no political allegiance.⁵⁸ In all there were eleven contests only three attracting inter-party rivalries – Labour candidates winning against the Conservatives at Chirk and at Esclusham while a Liberal broke ranks with his party at Stansty and Acton to defeat a

⁵⁶ Turner, *British Politics and the Great War*, pp. 406-407.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.408.

⁵⁸ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 1 March 1919.

Conservative by 51 votes. Otherwise all councillors returned professed to have no political allegiance.

In Flintshire some local Liberals were opposed to the Coalition and were unenthusiastic about continuing an agreement with the Conservatives, which they believed only existed for parliamentary elections.⁵⁹ As Jones' inter-war study of Liberalism in North-east Wales confirms:

The relationship between the Tories and Liberals in North-east Wales did not mirror the political marriage of the national parties. From the outset the Flintshire Liberals made their hostility towards the Conservative Party known. Many of its most influential figures, like Henry Gladstone and Thomas Waterhouse, were opposed to the Coalition.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, an attempt was made to reach a county council election agreement between the parties, but this fell through when a Constitutional Association meeting refused to sanction a Liberal plan that would have meant the loss of four Conservative held council seats:

The meeting was unanimously opposed to the proposal which had been put forward by the County Council whips of the Liberal Party for an arrangement for not contesting seats in the County Council Election which would have involved handing over four seats at present held by Unionists to Labour candidates.⁶¹

To make matters worse rumours spread amongst Conservatives that the Liberal party had a secret working arrangement with Labour which were given credence when the local press ran stories that the two parties had secured an election pact. The *County Herald*, a Liberal newspaper, reported 'The Liberal party has adopted the Labour party programme' [including] 'trade union rates of wages and free education for all grades.'⁶² Such a development was not surprising since many of the Flintshire Liberals had long considered

⁵⁹ Jones, *The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales*, p.64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁶¹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1 D/DM/307/1, Annual Meeting of the Constitutional Association, 1 February 1919.

⁶² *The County Herald*, 28 February 1919.

themselves to be progressives representing workers interests and able to support many of the Labour party aims. This made them unwilling to collaborate with the Conservatives whom they considered to be too reactionary.⁶³ As a result Conservatives took a hard line against the Liberal party deciding to field their own candidates in 18 contested county council seats in Flintshire. The result of such contests was that Labour won ten seats most of them in working-class industrial areas, the Liberals won four seats, the Conservatives three and Independents one. When these were added to the unopposed returns the new council consisted of fifteen Liberals, thirteen Conservatives, twelve Labour and two Independents. The results indicated that Labour was making progress in Flintshire, but while the Conservatives had six fewer candidates returned than in 1913 they still managed to hold nearly as many seats on the council as the Liberals. Certainly the most significant feature of these elections was that for the first time the Labour Party gained an electoral foothold in North-east Wales. Obviously, this had wider implications for the future of party politics in the region as the threat from Labour brought a new dimension to inter-party rivalries in the region. However, as the first test of political strength since the extension to the franchise and one which they felt was forced on it the Constitutional Association appeared to be happy with the results claiming that ‘with more time and workers we hope to do even better and to make the party a real fighting force in the county’. This statement contained a number of significant elements. Firstly it demonstrated how willing and eager the Conservatives were to join the political affray, despite the fact that there was a parliamentary election truce in place. Secondly it demonstrated how quickly the Conservative party had responded to the challenge of the county council elections and finally it showed how determined it was to re-establish an efficient party organisation in Flintshire. In spite of the apparent torpor in Denbighshire the Flintshire Constitutional Association was flying the Conservative flag in North-east Wales.

⁶³ Jones, *The Political Dynamics of North-East Wales*, p.65.

ADJUSTING TO A NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: LABOUR, WOMEN AND DEMOCRACY.

In the immediate aftermath of European conflict, when patriotism appeared more important to the British public than the country's industrial problems, there seemed little opportunity for the Labour Party to extend political influence. This apparently was confirmed when it only won 58 seats at the 1918 general election. Yet its failure to gain many seats did not reflect the party's true support in the country as over 21 per cent of the electorate voted Labour. Furthermore, Labour correctly anticipated that the circumstances surrounding the 1918 general election were particularly unfavourable to them. The party believed that once peace returned, and the problems of reconstruction were faced by the country, opportunities would arise for it.⁶⁴ This proved to be a correct assessment as between 1919 and 1922 the Labour Party made 13 by-election gains during a period marked by severe industrial unrest.

For Labour these by-election victories and the withdrawal of Sinn Fein from Westminster confirmed its position as the main opposition to Coalition Government. Furthermore, a disappointing performance nationally in 1918 was not evident in the Principality where it took 34 per cent of the vote and won ten seats. Nonetheless, their results in North-east Wales were poor; being heavily defeated by Coalition Liberals in the two constituencies it contested - Denbighshire and Wrexham. Even so Labour had won twelve seats in Flintshire at the 1919 county council elections and local Conservatives were convinced that Labour, with its apparent links to socialism, posed a serious threat to democracy. According to Councillor William Horton, chairman of the Colwyn Bay Constitutional Club:

We are now in the throes of political developments of vast importance and no good purpose can be served by hiding the gravity of the position or toning down the objects and schemes of those who are creating the trouble. Our Constitutional government is challenged by the extreme faction of the Labour Party.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924*, p.25.

⁶⁵ *North Wales Pioneer*, 9 October 1919.

Councillor Horton's comments reflected Conservative fears everywhere that Labour, if elected, would replace constitutional government with a communist regime similar to that in Russia. According to J. Whitaker (chairman of the labour committee of the National Unionist Association) 'the principles of the Labour party when mild were socialism and when extreme were bolshevism'.⁶⁶ With such fears permeating the party at all levels during the early 1920s moves were undertaken to entice working class supporters away from the Labour party. In particular an attempt was made to challenge Labour's position as an automatic beneficiary of Trades Unions levies, which helped fund its candidates and thus further its goals. At the 1920 National Union of Conservative Associations conference there were calls from the floor for the establishment of constituency labour committees to combat 'the socialists and extremists in the ranks of organised labour'.⁶⁷

To this end a conference of Flintshire Constitutional Association members, also attended by delegates from the Denbighshire and Wrexham Associations, was held in Rhyl on 16 October 1921 with the object of forming a Unionist labour committee for Flintshire. It was hoped that such an innovation would 'restore trade unionism to its original ideals and free it from the domination of the Socialistic Party, whose last thought was to bring about a state of revolution or bolshevism in this country'.⁶⁸ A determination was also expressed to free the workman from the obligation of contributing to the trade union levy – 'the Socialists no longer had the right to compel by force the feeding of the Socialistic exchequer with the levies and contributions from trade unionist funds'.⁶⁹ By offering workingmen a different political identity it was hoped to gain some influence over the mass ranks of the newly enfranchised working classes who worked in the steelworks, coal pits and on the land in North-east Wales. Moreover, with many more people now enfranchised and Labour showing the first signs of making inroads into the two traditional parties hegemony in the region the Conservative leadership

⁶⁶ *Flintshire Observer*, 22 October 1921.

⁶⁷ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p.120.

⁶⁸ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association Minute Book 2, Annual and Committee Meetings, 12 Feb. 1921-31 May 1930, D/DM/307/2, Unnamed newspaper cutting account of Association's Annual Meeting held on 22 October 1921.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

realised that they had to broaden the party's appeal if they were going to avoid being marginalised further.

By March 1922 a labour committee was appointed, and at a meeting held in Flint, Mr. G.E.M. Walker, organising secretary of the labour wing of the Unionist Party commented:

The movement was spreading and in North Wales the progress was rapid. Though they had only a short time ago started in Flintshire they had the officials of the North Wales Miners Federation taking very serious notice of them'.⁷⁰

At the annual meeting of the Flintshire Constitutional Association held in Shotton later the same month it was reported that the conference held in Rhyl had been a great success and that 'four branches of the labour wing of the Unionist Party had been established and were at work'.⁷¹

In May 1922 a labour wing of the Conservative party was formed in Wrexham. Mr Walker now attended meetings in the industrial districts of Brymbo, Rhos and Cefn, all within a few miles of Wrexham, where it was also decided to form labour committees.⁷² At the annual meeting of the Wrexham Constitutional Association on 18 May 1922 it was further agreed to elect eight workingmen from the labour wing of the Party to serve on the Executive Committee,⁷³ and on 25 May a set of rules for this new group were ratified.⁷⁴ The labour wing initially played a central role in the Association having members selected to sit on the Executive Committee annually, and supplying regular monthly reports on the committee's progress. It was still in existence during 1924 when it was asked to continue supplying reports to the monthly meeting of the Executive.⁷⁵ However, the labour committees generally failed to make any impact in North-east Wales. In Flintshire, despite the fanfare that greeted the formation of labour committees, there were still only four branches in existence six months later. After August 1922 no mention is made of labour

⁷⁰ *Flintshire Observer*, 2 March 1922.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16 March 1922.

⁷² *North Wales Guardian*, 12 May 1922.

⁷³ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Minute Book 1, Annual Meeting of the Wrexham Divisional Constitutional Association, 18 May 1922.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Meeting of the Finance Committee 25 May 1922.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Monthly Executive Meeting, 2 June 1924.

committees in the Association's Minute Book and it appears that the organisation simply petered out.⁷⁶ In Wrexham a similar story also emerges. No records exist that give membership numbers and the labour wing only featured intermittently in the party's deliberations after October 1922. No reference was made to this body during 1922 and despite the evidence that shows it still was in existence at the end of 1924 the implementation of new rules for the organisation were deferred indefinitely, suggesting that it too was losing impetus.

The apparent failure of labour committees reflected the difficulties that the party was having nationwide with the movement, which was only successful in a few places. Lancashire proved to be the most ardent supporter of Unionist labour committees collecting £5,425 for this movement between 1918 and 1922 while only £978 was raised for ordinary purposes.⁷⁷ By contrast Cheshire, one of the English counties adjoining Flintshire and Denbighshire did not have a single labour committee until 1925. In 1921 the Yorkshire Area Executive Committee was asked to include labour committee representatives, but refused to do so until it deemed that the movement had made progress in the county. On the other hand the Eastern Area fully supported the labour committees and according to Ramsden 'urged its local parties to promote the interests of working men and spent a great deal on propaganda for that purpose'.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, McCrillis argues that Conservative labour committees were largely unsuccessful as they failed to attract a large number of wage earners and existed in only a third of the constituencies in England and Wales, many of them with less than twenty members.⁷⁹ He suggests that this had less to do with any policy differences and had more to do with class division and administration difficulties. The Conservative party of the 1920s relied heavily on its upper and middle class membership and was often unwilling to welcome working class wage-earning members. Conversely, workingmen were less attracted to the political machinations of the local Conservative Association than they were to the

⁷⁶ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association, Minute Book 2, DM/302/2, Meeting held at Rhyl Town hall, 19 August 1922.

⁷⁷ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.253.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ McCrillis, *The Conservative Party and the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.110.

workingmen's clubs.⁸⁰ Even so, as McCrillis concludes labour committees 'were an important part of the Conservative response to the full enfranchisement of wage earners and the increased power of the working class after 1918...[as they] tried to attract wage earners by offering them a different political identity'.⁸¹ Certainly, the Conservative party in North-east Wales strove to make labour committees an integral part of their organisation. When one considers that the Wrexham and Flintshire constituencies had labour committees in existence three years before Cheshire, a Conservative stronghold, then it is a testament to Conservative party determination and diligence at a time when it was not even contesting parliamentary elections in the region. Indeed, even though there is little evidence to suggest that the movement had any lasting impact in the region, just by getting such committees formed at a time when the Conservative party had little appeal in the industrial working-class areas outside of Wrexham and when so few existed nationally was an achievement.

The development of Conservative women's organisations in North-east Wales proved to be more successful than the attempt to organise a mass labour movement. Initially, many Conservatives believed that women lacked the experience or the capacity to make sound political judgements. It was also feared that this political inexperience 'would cause them to succumb to socialistic evangelism', and concerns were expressed about the growth of such organisations as the Women's Institute, which were seen as socialistic and 'feminist in their outlook'.⁸² It was hardly surprising therefore that 'the enfranchisement of women under the Representation of People Act of 1918 created considerable trepidation in the ranks of the Conservative Party'.⁸³

Yet, a fear of independently-minded females voting Labour, spurred on the Conservative party into promoting itself as the bastion of feminine domesticity, the intention being to harness a mass movement of Conservative women who were adherents to the principle of home, husband and children, but were party members and workers. It was an appeal designed to develop

⁸⁰ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p. 111.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² D. Jarvis, 'The Shaping of Conservative Electoral Hegemony, 1918-39, in *Party, State and Society, Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, eds, J. Lawrence and M. Taylor (Aldershot: Solar Press, 1997) p 45.

⁸³ McCrillis, *The Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.46.

women's roles in politics, and in particular Conservative politics, but appease the significant number of male members who were opposed to women gaining equality with men in political matters. What emerged were the Women's Unionist Organisation and a network of branches that carried out an extensive range of political and social activities. It also attracted a large number of members who gave substantial assistance to the Conservative party.⁸⁴ As a result between 1918 and 1929 the Conservative Party created a mass organisation for women, the most important and successful group that helped create the Conservative hegemony between the wars – by the end of the 1920's there were approximately one million women members.⁸⁵

In North-east Wales the Conservative Associations also actively encouraged women to become party members. On 14 June 1918, the Wrexham Unionist Association decided to allocate a place for a woman's representative in the exclusively male organisation, and at a special meeting later in the month it was agreed that the Women's Unionist Association would provide three members to sit on the General Purposes committee.⁸⁶ In August 1919 five women were also co-opted on to the powerful Finance Committee and a woman was elected to stand on a sub-committee, which was appointed to 'confer with the President in the event of emergency'.⁸⁷ Finally, at the annual meeting of the Association in April 1921, eight women were asked to sit on the Executive Committee and the Women's Association was finally formally invited to amalgamate with the Men's Association, thus founding the Wrexham Parliamentary Constitutional Association, although an autonomous women's division was retained.⁸⁸ In practice this meant that there were two Conservative bodies in the constituency linked by an executive committee, which oversaw all work. This was not unusual as McCrillis notes:

⁸⁴ McCrillis, *The Conservative party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p 47.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁸⁶ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Special Meeting of East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 14 June 1918.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Meeting of East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 2 August 1919.

⁸⁸ NWL, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Special Meeting of East Denbighshire Unionist Association, Annual *Meeting* of Wrexham Divisional Constitutional Association, 18 May 1922.

More commonly women created separate divisional branches and sub-branches that paralleled the existing male division. Men and women then formed a joint divisional executive committee.⁸⁹

Through their representation on the Executive Committee women also started to play a leading role in the Association – taking part in the selection of parliamentary candidates, including negotiations with the local Liberal party over the choice of Sir Robert Thomas' successor as coalition candidate, and providing constituency representatives to the NWDNU. In April 1921 Mrs. Fitzhugh, president of the Women's Association, joined Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Edwin Hughes, Finance Committee member as representatives to this body. Nonetheless, men still dominated and took the leading positions in the Association with Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn remaining as President and Treasurer. In spite of this women now carried out a wide range of political activities including campaigning and registration work. Thus, as the period of Coalition Government drew to end in 1922 the barriers that had prohibited women from undertaking any form of political work prior to the War were slowly being removed.

As in Wrexham the Flintshire Constitutional Association proposed that their rules be changed so that all presidents and secretaries of the Women's Unionist Association could become members of the Executive Committee.⁹⁰ This was ratified at the annual meeting of the Association in February 1919, but a separate Women's Unionist and Conservative Association was retained. By January 1921 women had seven places on the Executive Committee. Moreover, in February 1921 the Hon. E. Mostyn proposed that a lady be appointed to fill the vacant position of secretary. This in itself is interesting – Mostyn's father was the Third Baron Mostyn, President of the Association, and thus he represented the landed elite those powerful inheritors of the male dominated world of land and wealth. Yet in proposing a female secretary, he was probably acknowledging, as other Conservatives already had, the benefit of female members, who proved diligent and committed workers, when given

⁸⁹ McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.52.

⁹⁰ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1 D/DM/307/1, Sub - committee meeting, 23 Nov 1918.

the opportunity, to the Conservative party. However, according to the Flintshire Constitutional Association Minutes for an Executive meeting held on 12 February 1921:

Mr. Owen and others from the Shotton area gave their views on the whole position. Mr. Owen did not favour the appointment of a woman secretary and considered her appointment would not be acceptable in his district.⁹¹

Mr. Owen's views were endorsed by Mr. Ingham, Treasurer of the Northwich Unionist Association, who commented that 'he did not favour the appointment of a lady secretary'.⁹² The proposal was subsequently lost proving that the association was not yet ready to accept women fully to senior posts and consequently all the major appointments in the organisation still went to men. Yet, encouraged by their new found status on the Executive Committee women started playing a more active role in the advancement of the Conservative cause and worked tirelessly in their canvassing and fundraising efforts and helped with the plans for a reorganisation scheme that was instituted during 1921. During the same year a new women's branch was formed in Prestatyn, and the Rhyl branch organised whist drives and dances with the intention of raising funds for the Association.⁹³ While sadly no information exists as to how successful these were in December 1921 women's branches in the western part of the constituency decided 'to have 1,000 copies of a circular letter printed with official heading for the purpose of calling meetings for the formation of new branches in the constituency, it being felt they would materially assist this important work'.⁹⁴ Despite their inability to become officers in the Association women were fast becoming an integral part of Conservative party politics as they developed a network of branches in the constituency to help further the Conservative cause. Mr. Pocklinghorne, the Association's new Secretary noted in his annual report for 1921 'on every hand the ladies set an example to the gentlemen and have

⁹¹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Meeting of The Executive, 12 Feb. 1921.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Minute Book 2, Executive Committee Meeting, 12 February 1921.

⁹³ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association, Minute Book 5, Annual and Committee Meetings, D/DM/307/5 Western Area District Committee, Agent's Report for 1921.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, District Committee Meeting 6 December 1921

been untiring in their work'.⁹⁵ The work that women undertook during this period helped set the foundations for the success the party enjoyed in the constituency at the 1924 general election.

What the evidence demonstrates is that by 1922 women Conservatives were starting to play an important and developing role in politics in North-east Wales. Not only were they continuing their useful work as fundraisers and canvassers, but they were also expanding their role by becoming directly involved in the running of Conservative Associations. The attitude of the Flintshire Constitutional Association was less positive towards women than the Wrexham Association, and in general the Conservative party in North-east Wales were slow to realise the potential of women. But they were not alone – fears of independently minded women who did not fit the Conservative profile raised doubts about their suitability in many quarters. In his study of the Conservative party in the West Midlands, for example, Jonathan Bates asserts that 'conflicts between men and women were not uncommon. Following expansion women made up the great bulk of the associations membership and did most of the work, but a small elite of men... retained effective control'.⁹⁶ Certainly men retained control of party organisation in North-east Wales, but while there was a general reluctance to relinquish power or elevate women to senior positions, in general relations remained harmonious between male and female Conservative members. Indeed, any fears that the associations harboured about female members soon dissipated when women started to prove their value to the party by outperforming men in their political activities and thereafter were welcomed into the Conservative organisation. Not only this, but in S.A Smart, the female Central Office Agent for North Wales, the Conservative Associations quickly realised that they had a tireless and determined organiser who helped keep the flame of Conservatism burning in Denbighshire while helping with the reorganisation plans the Flintshire Constitutional Association introduced in the post war period.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association, Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2 Secretary's Report for 1921.

⁹⁶ J.Bates, 'The Conservative party in the Constituencies 1918-1949', Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, Oxford University, 1994, p.5.

⁹⁷ FRO, Flintshire Conservative and Unionist Association, D/DM/307/2 Secretary's Report for 1921. When Praising the women for their efforts, Nr. Pocklinghorne also praised Miss S.A Smart who 'has thrown a great deal of hard work into the reorganisation scheme.'

PARTY ORGANISATION, 1918-1922.

According to McCrillis the onset of Coalition politics during the First World War affected 'all political parties including the Unionist party which lost much of its cohesiveness and drive'.⁹⁸ Party organisation suffered, membership dwindled, subscription levels fell as fundraising events ceased and many of the party activists who volunteered for military service never returned from the battlefields.⁹⁹ This weakness of organisation continued into the peace as the Conservative party struggled to adjust to the nature of Coalition politics. Bates' study of the party in the West Midlands argues that Conservative organisation during this period was 'all but destroyed by the war but the Coalition was a greater influence. Activists were alienated by its inherent compromises [and] without activists support no appeal for new members was possible'.¹⁰⁰

In North-east Wales, however, the Wrexham and Flintshire Conservative Associations continued to operate. While the extent of party activity was less than that conducted in the pre-war years it was only in Denbighshire that support for Coalition Government seriously adversely affected Conservative party organisation. Nonetheless, the situation was hardly helped by the continued failure of the NWDNU to meet on a regular basis. According to records this body only met once between 1918 and the end of 1922 and that was in early February 1922 when Lord Powis was elected as President, Lord Kenyon was elected chairman and Lord Mostyn, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, Hugh Peel, and P.T Davies- Cooke (Executive committee member of the Flintshire Association) were chosen as Vice- presidents. A brief report was given of activity in each constituency, in particular noting the high level of party work being conducted in Flintshire. Nonetheless, the report of activity in Denbighshire was over optimistic when it claimed that a 'number of meetings had been held and the work was generally progressive'.¹⁰¹ In reality work was limited to the Ruthin Women's Association's collection of funds - attempts to re-start a constituency association

⁹⁸ McCrillis, *The British Conservative party in the Age of Universal Suffrage*, p.10.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ J.Bates, *The Conservative Party in the Constituencies, 1918-1949*, unpublished D.Phil, Oxford University, 1994, p.3.

¹⁰¹ *North Wales Pioneer*, 9 February 1922.

failed as endeavours to draw together under a single body the work being done by individual Conservative groups in Denbighshire came to nothing.

After 1916 the West Denbighshire Conservative Association had folded, moth-balled for the duration of Coalition. Matters were further exacerbated when boundary changes were enforced under the Representation of the People Act and the Boroughs of Denbigh and Ruthin were amalgamated with West Denbighshire to form the new Denbighshire constituency. Even so, it was coalition politics that was blamed for the lack of Conservative activity in the new division. E.J Swayne, a member of the Denbigh Boroughs Conservative Association Executive Committee referred to the 'apathy which had of recent years pervaded the Unionist party due to the fact that the Boroughs had lost its direct representative in parliament and also the absence of party warfare due to their part in the Coalition'.¹⁰² However, Conservatism did not completely die in the constituency for between 1918 and 1922 the party flame was kept alight by a well organised network of Conservative clubs, especially those at Denbigh, Colwyn Bay and Ruthin. The most active of these clubs was the Conservative club at Colwyn Bay. The club held political debates during its annual meetings. Fears that a snap election could arise quite suddenly while the party was unprepared fuelled these debates, and with an eye on the future the club urged its membership to keep the electoral register up to date. William Horton, the club's chairman, declared at a club meeting in July 1920 that 'at the moment the Coalition Government was necessary to quell disorders at home and to secure peace. But...it was very desirable that the register should be kept up to date as the political prophets were of opinion that a general election might take place in the early spring'.¹⁰³

The Denbigh Constitutional club also held regular meetings throughout the period of Coalition Government. At the club's annual meeting in March 1920 the hope was expressed that political activities would be resumed and that members would remember that the aim of the club was political and not merely social.¹⁰⁴ However, little or no political work was undertaken and at a further meeting of the club held in January 1921 members were 'encouraged to do

¹⁰² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 29 January 1921.

¹⁰³ *North Wales Pioneer*, 8 July 1921

¹⁰⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 13 March 1920.

propaganda work and assert the principles of Unionsism'.¹⁰⁵ This again came to nothing as club members displayed no inclination to become involved in political work. But a final attempt was made in March 1921 to resurrect Conservative party organisation in Denbighshire. The *Denbighshire Free Press* reported that:

At a meeting held at the Constitutional Clubroom, Denbigh for the reconstruction of the Borough and District Association steps were taken with that object and the holding of suitable public meetings for propaganda purposes. Miss S.A. Smart, the Central Office Agent for North Wales addressed the members and was supported by Sam Thompson the West Denbighshire Secretary and organiser.¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately for Smart and Thompson the attempt once more proved futile as apathy overtook party members in the constituency and no further public meetings were held until the general election was called in October 1922. Then with the organisation still dormant hurried efforts were made to bring the organisation into working order.

Finally the Conservative party in Denbighshire was also kept alive by the activities of the Primrose League in Abergele and Colwyn Bay. Every other Habitation in North-east Wales closed in 1914 and failed to re-open after the end of hostilities in November 1918. Yet, both the Colwyn Bay and Abergele Habitations remained active during the First World War. In 1915 the Abergele Habitation achieved its highest membership figure of over 360 since its inception and still boasted a membership of 255 when it finally closed in 1920. As War broke the Colwyn Bay Habitation had 592 members and still had over 400 members in 1920. This suggested that there was still the appetite for Conservative party politics in the Denbighshire constituency, and in October 1919 the League held a function at Bryn Dinarth, the home of William Horton. The *North Wales Pioneer* reported that 'there was a large attendance' who listened to political speeches by Horton and Gwendolyn Brodrick, the Dame President, and enjoyed tea and the music of the Colwyn Bay Pavillion

¹⁰⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 29 January 1921.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 March 1921.

Orchestra.¹⁰⁷ Despite such functions and the attempts to rekindle political activity in Denbighshire the Conservative party's existence remained limited to irregular social functions, club meetings and Primrose League gatherings.

Enmity between Liberals and Conservatives in Flintshire fostered by the Liberal party's support for the Labour programme at the 1919 county council elections continued throughout the period of Coalition. In November 1919 a Liberal Association meeting discussed the 'embarrassment' felt by Liberals throughout the constituency with regards to their electoral agreement with the Conservatives and declared that 'the coalition form of government was most unsatisfactory'.¹⁰⁸ Unhappy with Coalition Government and an alliance with the Conservatives whom they felt they had nothing in common with, and led by Liberals with strong radical credentials, the local Liberal Association hankered after a united party which would cut all connections with the Conservative party. According to the Liberal Association's Secretary, Thomas Waterhouse, the party's 'whips were not doing anything to promote the bringing together of Mr Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith.'¹⁰⁹ In reality the two factions of the party were never going to reunite and in May 1920 the split between Coalition and Independent Liberals was finalised when amidst charge and counter charge the Coalition Liberals withdrew from the National Liberal Federation Conference at Leamington.¹¹⁰ Yet many in the Flintshire Liberal Association yearned for a return to a radical progressive agenda and although they continued to support their Coalition Liberal MP, Thomas Parry, they retained an antipathy towards the local Conservative party which they refused to work with.

On the other hand the Constitutional Association was more than willing to work with the Liberal Association and attempts were made to share expenses and revision work in the division courts with their Liberal counterparts.¹¹¹ These approaches were ignored and when accompanied by the Liberal party's county council election agreement with Labour concerns grew

¹⁰⁷ *North Wales Pioneer*, 9 October 1919.

¹⁰⁸ FRO, Liberal Association Minutes, 1919-1939, D/DM 350 Minutes of the Executive Committee 1 November 1919.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p 14.

¹¹¹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1. Executive Committee Meeting 24 April 1920; Executive Meeting 7 December 1920.

in the Constitutional Association as to the Liberal Party's intentions. Fearing a permanent split with their coalition partners as the Liberal Association apparently moved closer to the local Labour party the members of the Constitutional Association's Executive Committee decided to contact Thomas Parry and ascertain his position towards Coalition Government.¹¹² From April 1920 the Association made regular contact, including face-to-face meetings, to seek confirmation that he still supported the Coalition Government. As late as March 1922 Parry confirmed that he was a staunch supporter of Lloyd George and the policy of the Government and agreed to make such a declaration to the Association's annual meeting.¹¹³ This went some way to allaying Conservative fears about co-operating with the Liberal party at future general elections.¹¹⁴ Such was the goodwill expressed on both sides that the Constitutional Association even attempted to secure support from Parry after the Coalition Government had collapsed at the end of October 1922.

The antipathy that existed between the Constitutional and Liberal Associations in Flintshire had long-term benefits for the Conservative party as it encouraged them 'to make greater provision for their own future'.¹¹⁵ After the War the Association's finances were slow to recover, undoubtedly affected by the parliamentary electoral agreements between the Liberals and Conservatives and the apparent lack of partisan politics in the division, despite the contested seats at the county council elections. In June 1919 a special appeal for subscriptions was launched and in April 1920 the Treasurer announced that over £176 had been collected. Nevertheless, just six months later he reported to the Executive committee that unless regular subscriptions were forthcoming it would be impossible for the Association to continue.¹¹⁶ This was reaffirmed in January 1921 when the Secretary's Report for 1920 commented on the damaging effect Coalition Government was having on the Association's finances adding that:

¹¹² FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1. Executive Committee Meeting 24 April 1920; Executive Meeting 7 December 1920.

¹¹³ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Annual Meeting of the Association 11 March 1922.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Jones, *The Political Dynamics of North-East Wales* p.97.

¹¹⁶ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9 October 1920.

When approaching several gentlemen who are supposed to be staunch constitutionalists for subscriptions I have been met with the following question - What is your party's policy, when you have got a policy to place before us we shall be pleased to subscribe to your funds? So my Lords, ladies and gentlemen you will see how difficult it is for me as secretary to get people to subscribe.¹¹⁷

When the poor state of finances was matched by a similar decay in the party machine, the Secretary noting in 1919 that constituency organisations in Mold, Holywell and Flint were all very apathetic, a committee was appointed in January 1921 to discuss the future of the Association. In April 1921 it reported back and made a number of recommendations that when acted upon finally secured the future of the Association. Firstly, the services of a full – time agent were dispensed with. Secondly, it was decided to form two divisions within the Association, - the Eastern and Western divisions – each with a sub-committee and chairman. Each sub-committee was made responsible for a number of local parish associations in their division. The Eastern division initially consisted of parish associations at Hawarden, Hope, Mold, Northop, and Flint and the Western of parish associations at Prestatyn, Rhuddlan, Holywell and Caerwys.¹¹⁸ Each division also appointed a part-time agent whose role was now clearly defined. The agent was to pay personal visits to each parish association and form new ones where possible, organise meetings, collect subscriptions and attend to registration work. He or she was also to keep a diary and report fortnightly to the Divisional chairman who in turn was expected to report to the constituency Association's Executive Committee. Such was the success of the new organisation scheme that the Secretary's Report for 1921 noted:

The new divisional scheme adopted has been fully justified. Today we have a real live organisation. The county is being well organised ...local committees have been formed in many parts of the county... Our hope is to establish in

¹¹⁷ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 1, D/DM/307/1, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 9.October 1920.Secretary's Report to Executive Committee Meeting, 7 December 1920.

¹¹⁸ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Meeting of the Executive, 21 May 1921.

every parish a working local committee. Although we have really only been working for six months out of the twelve we have seen good results... The future is bright and hopeful.¹¹⁹

In contrast to the antipathy between the two parties in Flintshire, Liberals and Conservatives maintained cordial relations in the Wrexham division. These had been formed and fostered during the 1918 general election when leaders from both local parties had appeared on Sir Robert Thomas' campaign platform to ensure a united front. Furthermore, the Wrexham Liberal Association was led by Edward Hughes, a close ally of and sympathetic to Lloyd George's aims, who was thus far more accommodating with the local Conservatives. At the same time both parties retained a common interest, unlike the progressive Liberals in Flintshire, in defeating and keeping out Labour in the constituency. This extended to agreements over the choice of parliamentary candidates. During 1921 the Coalition Liberal MP, Sir Robert Thomas, announced that he would not be seeking re-election in the constituency. The Wrexham Constitutional Association suggested several names from their own ranks as a possible Coalition candidate and a deputation, which included Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon, was instructed to liaise with local Liberal leaders.¹²⁰ Consequently, a joint meeting was held with Liberal Association delegates on 15 November 1921.¹²¹ After lengthy discussions between the two parties it was decided to ask Evan R. Davies a Liberal to address the meeting. The lure of Davies was strong for both parties. Davies had a long association with Lloyd George, having assisted him in his election bids in Caernarfon Boroughs, becoming one of his closest advisers. After the War Lloyd George asked him to become his political secretary, the position he held while seeking selection in Wrexham. To Edward Hughes, Davies' appeal was obvious, but to the local Conservative leadership to have someone in close contact with the Prime Minister also appeared to be of enormous benefit, especially as it was believed that Lloyd George and the

¹¹⁹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Meeting of the Executive, See Secretary's Report for 1921.

¹²⁰ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, 1-3 Minute Books of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 1918-1926, Finance Committee Meeting, 13 October 1921.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, A joint Meeting of the Wrexham Constitutional Association and the Wrexham Liberal Association, 15 November 1921.

Coalition Government represented the best defence against the Labour party and socialism.¹²² After addressing the meeting Davies was duly unanimously selected by both parties as parliamentary candidate.

However, such support for the Coalition Liberals had a negative impact on the Conservative party's campaigning in the division. Between 1918 and 1921 little political activity took place as the Association also attempted to address its financial difficulties. With a deficit of £57 at the bank reported in April 1921 remedial measures were approved. This included an appeal for subscriptions, with Sir Watkin-Williams Wynn writing to the chairmen of each polling district asking for a list of names of people likely to subscribe. In addition the Secretary was instructed to arrange for social events to take place in the polling districts, the proceeds from which were to go to the central fund.¹²³ Nevertheless, by May 1922 the Association was still heavily in debt, the appeal for subscriptions failing to attract sufficient funds, and even more drastic cost cutting exercises were implemented. The Association's investments were sold off, the Secretary's salary was reduced to £25 and social functions, always very popular in the Wrexham area, continued in an attempt to bring in more money.¹²⁴ By the end of 1922 the deficit was reduced to a manageable level of £19.

The party also used the immediate post-war period to reorganise its ranks. A new structure was established which involved devolving power, similar to the process adopted in Flintshire, as section chairmen were chosen to preside over four new divisions – simply known as Sections A, B, C and D. Each new section contained local branch associations from four geographical areas: A Section consisted of seven local branches south of Wrexham, Section B seven branches to the west of the town, Section C six branches north and east of Wrexham and section D included the borough of Wrexham and Stansty. From each of these four divisions a number of representatives were chosen to form an Association Executive Committee, which also included Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn (Chairman and Treasurer) and Lord Kenyon (Vice-President)

¹²² NLW, 1-3 Minute Books of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 1918-1926. Special Meeting of the Wrexham Constitutional Association, 30 October 1922.

¹²³ NLW, 1-3 Minute Books of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 1918-1926. Annual Meeting of the Association, 18 April 1921. Special Meeting of the Finance Committee, 13 October 1921.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Annual Meeting of the Association 18 May 1922.

where all major decisions were taken. What emerged was a new more democratic organisation, which devolved power from the centre of the organisation, but ultimate control was still retained Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon.

The evidence suggests that the Coalition alliance with the Liberals had beneficial effects in some areas but damaging consequences in others. In Denbighshire the support for Coalition Government and the loss of its Boroughs MP caused by the redistribution of seats in 1918 only bred apathy – attempts to revive Conservative organisation in the division failing to get off the ground. In Wrexham the period of Coalition allowed the local Conservative Association to regroup, address its financial difficulties and reorganise its Association. Nonetheless, it too suffered from apathy as little party activity was undertaken between 1918 and 1921. By contrast the antipathy that was felt by local Liberals towards Conservatives in Flintshire helped galvanise the Constitutional Association as it completely overhauled its organisation and addressed its financial shortcomings. By the time the general election arrived in October 1922 it was tending to registration work, collecting subscriptions and holding political meetings.

The apathy experienced in certain parts of North-east Wales, mirrored the experience of Conservative Associations in other parts of the country. As a result of war and the period of Coalition which resulted, uncertainty as to the party's future was created amongst activists. This had a knock-on effect on the collection of subscriptions. As Ramsden points out 'the mood of party activists did not make possible great advances in fund raising'.¹²⁵ Yet more than ever resources were needed to pay for the increased costs incurred by associations as result of the extended franchise. In particular agents, needed office space with its attendant utility costs, clerical equipment and transport to visit all parts of the constituency. Ramsden asserts that 'administrative costs amounted to about four fifths of the local parties outgoings'.¹²⁶ This probably explains why in Flintshire Lord Mostyn, still the major contributor to the Constitutional Association's funds, agreed to dispense with a full time agent, costing in excess of £200, and replace him with two part- time agents at £50 per annum

¹²⁵ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.244.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

each.¹²⁷ In addition extra finance was needed to pay for propaganda, which replaced registration work in importance now that so many people were enfranchised. Notwithstanding these new costs Bates asserts that ‘with normal activities suspended, many associations were able to cut expenditure to an absolute minimum and so despite falling subscriptions build up substantial reserves’.¹²⁸ By contrast, in North-east Wales with the Flintshire and Wrexham Associations already in debt prior to the War, and funds required to implement new schemes and re-organisation this proved impossible. In their case the draconian measures taken were merely to ensure survival.

PARTY ORGANISATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF COALITION, 1918-1922.

When it came to the Coalition government and Lloyd George’s leadership the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales generally remained supportive throughout the period 1918-1922. In 1918 most in the Conservative party accepted that an alliance with Lloyd George was indispensable. As Green asserts his popularity was seen as a vital component in ‘combating Labour’s appeal to a mass electorate’.¹²⁹ Even the attempt to fuse the Conservative and Liberal parties during 1919 and 1920 brought acceptance from the Conservative leadership; Bonar Law agreeing after much persuading to submerge the Conservatives in an anti-socialist centrist party with Lloyd George.¹³⁰ Less certain was support from Conservative grass roots for such a move. When the National Union of Conservative Associations met at Birmingham in June 1920 a delegate from Shrewsbury called for ‘a more rigorous assertion of Unionist principles within the Coalition’.¹³¹ However, criticism against the Coalition amongst the associations gathered was at this stage muted – the powerful pro-Coalition associations from Lancashire and

¹²⁷ This figure was based on the salary of J.M Leah, agent to the Wrexham Constitutional Association whose salary in 1918 was £250 p.a. There are no figures for Flintshire, but it was unlikely to be very different.

¹²⁸ Bates, ‘The Conservative Party in the Constituencies’, p.12.

¹²⁹ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, p. 119.

¹³⁰ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p13.

¹³¹ Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p242.

Birmingham swamping any more negative comments – and in North-east Wales the idea of fusion brought no comment at all.¹³²

In Denbighshire this was perhaps unsurprising given the state of decay of party organisation, but in Wrexham and Flintshire it may simply have been that the Conservatives were quite happy for fusion to go ahead without commenting on the subject. In Wrexham, it is possible that such trust had been placed in Lloyd George's leadership and the constituency's Liberal candidate, as was witnessed in Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's and Lord Kenyon's support prior to and during the 1918 general election campaign, that the Conservative leadership were happy for a long term arrangement with Coalition Liberals to take place. As it later transpired at a selection meeting for the 1922 general election campaign Conservative members voted against the leadership and refused to endorse a Liberal as suggested, but in 1920 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's power was omnipotent and remained so in November 1921 when Evan R. Davies, Liberal, was unanimously given the support of the Conservative Association when selected to fight the Wrexham constituency. Even at this stage, when anti-coalitionist sentiments were growing elsewhere Wrexham appeared solidly pro-coalition and thus it is not too much of a leap of the imagination to suggest that the local leadership may have approved of inter-party fusion. On the other hand, it would seem unlikely that Conservatives in Flintshire would support fusion given the antipathy that existed between them and local Liberals. Yet, the Constitutional Association fully supported Thomas Parry their local Coalition Liberal MP and saw him as a bulwark against the more progressive tendencies of the local Liberal Association. The Constitutional Association may well have supported a fusion of Conservative and Liberal parties especially if this meant an exodus of pro-Labour activists in the local Liberal Association and a consensus based on anti-socialist policies.

Elsewhere in the country there was unease amongst grass roots Conservatives and aversion to Coalition Government grew and festered as fears surfaced that the government was failing to provide a bulwark against socialism – its wasteful expenditure on social reform that made excessive

¹³² Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p242.

demands on the tax payer indicative of its own socialistic tendencies. As a result movements like the Anti-Waste League started to gain support amongst Conservatives with many party members even joining its ranks.¹³³ With anti-waste measures proving extremely popular amongst the Conservative Constituency associations, their rank and file the middle class taxpayers who resented such Government waste, pressure was brought to bear on Coalition Tory MPs to embrace the anti-Coalition and retrenchment sentiments expressed by the Anti-Waste lobby.

The accommodation of anti-waste sentiments by the Conservative Constituency associations had serious consequences for the Government. As the revolt of the middle class taxpayers gathered momentum concerns over the spread of socialism fuelled Tory discontent and recriminations caused by events in Ireland spread constituency unrest.¹³⁴ William Bridgeman, the MP for Oswestry, experiencing hostility from his own Constituency Association, led by the Third Baron Harlech, warned party leaders in February 1922 of the unrest in the constituencies. When the Coalition Government finally fell as a result of the Carlton Club revolt in October 1922 Bridgeman noted, ‘one thing is for certain about the crisis is that it certainly was not the result of a Carlton Club plot, but came up from below with great force from the constituencies’.¹³⁵

By contrast such constituency rebellion had little effect on the North-east Wales Conservatives. The Anti-Waste League made little impact – a county councillor standing on an Anti-Waste programme won Broncoed in Flintshire at the county council election in 1922 – otherwise the movement was largely ignored. It was not that the Constituency associations were insensitive to or ignorant of national political developments – attempts to establish labour committees proved that – but without Conservative MPs to support they could not directly influence events at Westminster, and therefore there was little point in agitating for economy.

The lack of candidates in the region also goes some way to explaining why the local Conservative Associations in North-east Wales failed to respond

¹³³ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, pp. 120-121.

¹³⁴ Bates, ‘The Conservative Party in the Constituencies’, pp.25-26.

¹³⁵ P. Williamson, ed, *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics, The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904-1935* (London: The Historian Press, 1988) p. 162.

to major political events during the last months of Coalition Government in 1922. In particular the election scare in January, the Honours Scandal in June, which seemed to confirm what many Conservatives believed that Lloyd George was a morally bankrupt leader, and the Chanak Crisis in the Autumn all failed to trigger much comment from the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales. Only one major issue drew any attention from the associations in the region, and that was the situation in Ireland and even this was reserved for questions to a prospective parliamentary candidate in Wrexham.

As the signing of an Anglo-Irish treaty neared in the Autumn of 1921, Evan R. Davies, the new Coalition Liberal parliamentary candidate for the Wrexham division, reassured the Constitutional Association that he was in total agreement with the Conservative party's leadership and Coalition Government's policy on Ireland. This included assurances about the limits of concessions to be given in any negotiations and a promise that Ulster would not be coerced. Many Conservatives regarded an Anglo-Irish treaty as a betrayal of the Union, the Southern Irish Unionists and surrender to terrorism.¹³⁶ Yet Evan R. Davies words appeased the Wrexham Constitutional Association, helped ensure continued support for the coalition in the constituency, and his own selection as a coalition candidate.

With the signing of the Irish Treaty on 6 December 1921 there appeared to be an opportunity for the Coalition Government to call an election to exploit the treaty's successful conclusion. During December rumours were rife that this was going to happen, but Sir George Younger, party Chairman, warned Austen Chamberlain that if the government decided to call an election the majority of Conservatives would not support it. Younger was careful at this stage not to suggest that the Coalition should end, but a letter sent by him to constituency chairmen on 9 January 1922, outlining government's plans drew an angry response as MPs, party chairmen, and agents all claimed that an election would take the Conservative party's independence away.¹³⁷ Younger's initiative drew a response from the NWDNU at its meeting on 9 February 1922. Alfred Hood, former candidate in East Denbighshire and member of the

¹³⁶ Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* p.115.

¹³⁷ Ramsden, *the Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.159.

Wrexham Constitutional Association Finance Committee, commented that he did not consider Conservative party independence as a factor in any future general election, and that the work of the coalition should continue, so that trade in the country could improve:

He considered the whole situation in the country serious and apart from political tactics he could not see why a general election should take place in the near future. The coalition government had got two years to run. A general election would disturb the possibility of some slight improvement in trade and not tend to reduce taxation.¹³⁸

His words matched the sentiments held by his constituency Association President and Vice-President, Sir Watkin Williams–Wynn and Lord Kenyon, who believed that coalition should continue, especially given the threat from Labour in the constituency. Yet they were at odds with the aims of Sir George Younger and most Conservatives, especially grass roots activists, who wished, despite any comments to the contrary, to reassert party independence, and thus avoid an election under the umbrella of coalition.

Apart from this there was little comment from North-east Wales on the burning issues of the day. Without candidates to campaign for or support the meetings that were held by the Conservative Associations concentrated more on reorganisation, the election of officers, the integration of women and workingmen, and struggling finances. This was understandable as with no candidate it made sense to concentrate on internal affairs. Furthermore the party leaders in North-east Wales were favourable towards and still clung to coalition, and in particular Lloyd George, as a means of combating socialism. In particular the Conservative leadership in Wrexham believed that a withdrawal of support for the Liberals would split the anti-socialist vote and let Labour in.

There were also sound strategic reasons for continuing support of Lloyd George. Whenever the Conservatives had employed an anti-Lloyd George stance at pre-war elections, they had, with the exception of Denbigh Boroughs, been soundly beaten. Lloyd George was and remained a powerful political ally in North Wales and while his grip was slipping nationally he still retained much

¹³⁸ *North Wales Pioneer*, 9 February 1922.

support in his political heartlands. Realising that Lloyd George had presided over a government that reimbursed the Welsh Church, given significant concessions on Protection and was key to gaining support from his political allies (for example Thomas Parry in Flintshire and Edward Hughes leader of the Wrexham Liberals) in the war against socialism it made sense to cling to his lapels.

Finally, Conservative leaders such as Lord Mostyn and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn had significant coal mining interests in North Wales. When the government refused to take mines into public ownership as recommended by the Sankey Commission in August 1920 these leading Tory landowners in Wales were able to hang on to their lucrative mining interests. Thus they did well out of Lloyd George's Coalition Government and were unlikely to see the Prime Minister as anything else but a bulwark against the socialistic tendencies of Labour who had promised to nationalise the mines. It is unlikely therefore that they would be over critical of Lloyd George and probably explains why they made no comment on controversial issues that engulfed him such as the Honours Scandal. Even after the Chanak Crisis developed and Britain stood on the brink of war once more local Conservatives still took the Austen Chamberlain line that support for Coalition Government was needed to combat socialism.

In conclusion, the Constituency associations supported Coalition Government and probably would have been contented if it had extended its lifetime. The one factor that superseded all else and bound the Conservatives to the Liberal party was their distaste for Labour and its connections to socialism which threatened the livelihoods of several leading landowners in North-east Wales. In spite of what was happening nationally the Wrexham Association still saw their partnership with the Coalition Liberals as paramount in marginalizing the Labour party and avoiding the spread of socialism in the constituency. Even in Flintshire where relations were poor between the two Coalition parties the Constitutional Association repeatedly sought confirmation from their MP that he supported Coalition Government and thus acted as a buttress against the socialistic tendencies of the Liberal Association. This apparent socialistic tendency once more influenced Liberals in Flintshire to seek accommodation with the Labour party at the 1922 county council elections.

COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, 1922.

The 1922 County Council elections were the last contested under the rule of Coalition Government. As with the 1919 elections the Liberals in Flintshire were diametrically opposed to any form of an alliance with the Conservatives. At a Flintshire Constitutional Association Executive Committee meeting held in January 1922 the secretary reported 'Mr Gomer- Owen, County Liberal Agent stated that there was no working arrangement by which the Liberal Association would cooperate with the Unionists at local elections and that the Coalition compact only operated with regard to parliamentary matters'.¹³⁹ Once more this triggered fears of a pact between the Liberals and the Labour party, which was subsequently confirmed at a meeting held between the two parties in Flint shortly before the elections. A letter sent to the Mold and Buckley Labour council from the secretary of the Buckley Liberal Association verified the election arrangement between the two parties:

As you are aware an agreement has been made between Liberal and Labour leaders in this county to this effect that where Liberals hold the seats at present you have pledged yourselves to assist them and on the other hand where Labour hold the seats Liberals have pledged themselves to support you.¹⁴⁰

Such comments drew an angry response from the Conservatives who now instead of seeking an election agreement with the Liberals decided to concentrate their efforts on winning more seats on the county council. At a meeting of the Constitutional Association's Executive Committee it was agreed to 'concentrate efforts on the capture of seats on the County Council...and that no bargain should be made with the other side'.¹⁴¹

Political programmes were once more set aside as the enmity between the Liberal and Labour parties and Conservatives overrode everything else. The letter sent by the Buckley Liberal Association to the local Labour party reflected the Liberal party's ambitions in Flintshire: 'let us stand shoulder to shoulder our unity is our strength. Help us to keep the flag flying and together

¹³⁹ FRO, D/DM/307/2, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2, Executive Committee Meeting, 7 January 1922.

¹⁴⁰ *Flintshire Observer*, 23 February 1922.

¹⁴¹ FRO, D/DM/307/2, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2, Executive Committee Meeting 30 April 1921.

we could inflict a crushing defeat upon the Conservative forces from which they will never recover'.¹⁴² Responding to such comments the Constitutional Association, accused their opponents of behaving dishonourably and 'that where possible every Labour man be opposed'.¹⁴³ The Liberal/Labour party pact affected 16 seats, but the Conservatives performed well keeping the same number of councillors returned at the 1919 elections. They only suffered two losses to the Liberals, made three gains off Labour and won the new wards of Shotton (Hawarden) and Prestatyn. Labour had eight councillors returned but lost seats to an Independent at Golftyn and to the Liberals at Hawarden, Rhyl West and Bagillt West where there was a three way party contest. Indeed, the Liberals performed well given the national political climate and the general falling popularity of the government as seventeen of their candidates were returned.

What the Flintshire county council elections proved was that the Conservatives could still win in diverse areas and that they were able to limit the impact of the Liberal/ Labour pact. Not only did they hold on to their seats in such rural Flintshire Maelor strongholds as Bangor-is-y-Coed, Hanmer and Overton but they also won seats in the working class industrial areas close to the Dee estuary at Ewloe, Shotton, Sealand and Queensferry. They also won seats in the prosperous urban areas of Prestatyn and Rhyl East. Even though the results did not match the heady pre-war days when the Conservative Party controlled the council it was still an outstanding success in the era of three way party politics. Furthermore, the county council elections had helped galvanise the Conservatives and put the party back on a campaign footing which in turn spurred them into making improvements in organisation. Thus the attempts by the Liberals and the Labour party to destabilise and marginalize the Conservative party in Flintshire only succeeded in energising it demonstrating that it remained a significant force in the county.

In total contrast the county council elections in Denbighshire were a tepid affair where once again the Coalition election agreement between Conservatives and Liberals dominated the proceedings. Conservatives stood as

¹⁴² *Flintshire Observer*, 23 February 1922.

¹⁴³ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 2,D/DM/307/2 Adjourned Executive Committee Meeting 23 January 1922.

Coalition Unionists, all the retiring county council members, barring one, sought re-election and only eight contests took place to which no party was ascribed the victor or vanquished. In the largest urban conurbation in the county, Wrexham, not a single contest took place and the *Denbighshire Free Press* gloomily reported that ‘party politics did not appear to be a factor and on the whole the contests passed off peacefully’.¹⁴⁴

The 1922 county council elections reflected the different ways the local political parties in North-east Wales responded to Coalition Government and each other. In Flintshire, while the Constitution Association supported the Coalition Government the Liberal Association largely did not and large cracks appeared in the local alliance almost immediately the War had ended and the council elections only served to exacerbate the strained relationship between the local Conservative and Liberal parties. The situation was hardly helped by the county council election pact between Liberals and Labour, which led to so much animosity between Liberal and Conservative Associations. By contrast the elections in Denbighshire reflected the torpor the Denbigh division Conservative Association had fallen into. Here support for Coalition Government bred apathy and indifference amongst Conservatives who showed no inclination, especially at local elections, to be involved in partisan politics.

CONCLUSION.

Nationally the period of Coalition Government marked a difficult time for the Conservative party. Initially seen as an indispensable bulwark against socialism and as a necessary alliance to complete the difficult task of reconstruction, resentment against the Coalition Government soon started to pervade Conservative ranks. Appalled by the high levels of taxation and disaffected by the government’s apparent failure to prevent the spread of socialism the resentment became a full-scale rebellion against the Coalition led by the Conservative Constituency Associations. This rebellion resulted in the defeat of the Coalition Conservative leadership at the Carlton club in October 1922 and the end of seven years of political alliances. By contrast in North-east Wales the Conservative Associations remained largely supportive of the

¹⁴⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 March 1922.

coalition throughout its lifetime. This support, however, created its own difficulties for the Conservative party in the region. Unlike most regions in Britain the local parties did not even have the benefit of a Conservative coalition candidate to support or nurture and the Liberal party maintained the upper hand in negotiations that took place between the two parties, as was witnessed by the selection of Evan R. Davies as Coalition Liberal candidate in Wrexham during 1922. It was hardly surprising therefore when, with the reason for their existence, the selection and support of candidates, was removed from them that Conservative organisation started to decline in the region. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the post-war period marked a collapse of the Conservative party in North-east Wales. Although the party lay dormant in Denbighshire it was not dead as the activities of the Primrose League and the Constitutional Clubs proved; indeed it quickly revived itself when an election was called in October 1922. In Wrexham the party enjoyed good relations with the local Liberal party, but it still took advantage of the situation to reorganise itself and integrate and extend its female membership. In Flintshire the Conservative party actually benefited from the period of coalition and the hostility shown it by the local Liberal Association. Unhindered by Coalition agreements which hampered Conservative Associations elsewhere, the party overhauled its divisional structure and made plans for its future. The bitter opposition displayed by Liberals and Labour party members towards them only galvanised the Conservative forces in the county. As result when the Coalition Government fell the Conservative party Association was ready for an election. Nevertheless, Aubel has commented:

The electoral boundary changes of 1917-18, together with the extension of the franchise, largely confirmed the seemingly permanent relegation of Welsh Conservatism into a minority political cause during the inter-war years.¹⁴⁵

This was only partly true in North-east Wales. In Denbighshire there were organisational problems, but even here there was a determination to keep

¹⁴⁵ F. Aubel, 'The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935' in *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*, eds, M. Francis and I. Zweininiger-Bargielowska (Cardiff: University of Wales Press) p. 99.

Conservative politics alive. In Wrexham and especially in Flintshire the party was revitalising itself after along period of inactivity brought about by War and was laying plans for its long-term future. As ever what the period between 1918 and 1922 proved, despite differing fortunes in various parts of the region, was that the Conservative party remained a resolute and embedded force and given the right set of circumstances could still flourish.

CHAPTER 6.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN NORTH EAST WALES, 1922-1924.

INTRODUCTION.

In October 1922 the Conservative party led by Bonar Law emerged from seven years of political coalitions to form a government in its own right for the first time since 1905. The wisdom of its decision to end its participation in coalition was subsequently confirmed by the general election that established its status as the dominant party in British politics. The Conservatives won 344 seats with their nearest challenger the Labour party gaining 142. For both factions of the Liberal party the election was a disaster, with Asquith's Liberals winning 62 seats and Lloyd George's faction securing just 53 seats from the 144 constituencies it contested. The Conservative majority over all other parties was 73.¹ The decisive election victory appeared to give Bonar Law and his party an opportunity to govern unfettered for a full term of five years. However, as early as March 1923 the government was rocked by several by-election defeats, including Mitcham where Griffith-Boscawen, the Minister of Health, was defeated and in May 1923 Bonar Law was forced to resign when ill health once more overtook him. With Austen Chamberlain still estranged from the cabinet two contenders were left to vie for the premiership – Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary and acting Prime Minister and Stanley Baldwin, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. With Bonar Law refusing to offer advice, the decision to choose a new Prime Minister became a complicated one, but the King finally chose Baldwin – fearing that appointing Curzon, a member of the House of Lords, would lead to damaging constitutional and political complications.²

There were a number of concerns that immediately faced Baldwin. With unemployment rising, it was feared that the Labour party would make a 'permanent and decisive advance among working class voters' unless the government adopted a new constructive economic policy.³ Moreover, criticism

¹ All national election statistics for the period 1922-1924 have been taken from C.Cook, *The Age of Alignment* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

² M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924*, pp. 258-267.

³ P.Williamson, and E. Baldwin, eds, *the Baldwin Papers, A Conservative Statesman, 1908-1947*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.111.

was mounting from Conservative backbenchers and the press about the way the government was running the country.⁴ Consequently Baldwin decided to go to the country adopting a Tariff Reform programme in a bid to cement the government's position and widen its appeal.

The December 1923 election proved a disaster for the Conservative party. By electing to go to the country on Tariff Reform Baldwin helped reunite the two Liberal party factions. The large Conservative majority gained in 1922 was wiped out as the party won 258 seats and lost 88 MPs. Labour strengthened its position by claiming 191 constituencies and the reunification of the Liberal party was marked by the return of 158 MPs. With no party achieving an overall majority, a hung parliament resulted. To squander such a large Conservative majority within a year of taking power raised concerns about Baldwin's leadership skills. William Bridgeman, Home Secretary, was amazed with Baldwin's decision to go to the country on Tariff Reform while Lord Curzon called the decision 'idiotic' and Philip Snowden (Chancellor of the Exchequer in Labour's first two governments) viewed the Conservative election disaster as 'suicide during a fit of temporary insanity'.⁵ Since then historians have entered into the fray including Cook, Morgan and Pugh who believe that Baldwin's ill fated decision to call an early general election was based on a precept that Protection would restore party unity, separate Austen Chamberlain from Lloyd George and return coalitionist Conservatives to the fold.⁶ This is a belief reinforced by Nick Smart who asserts that in ultimately achieving party unity through the adoption of Tariff Reform Baldwin proved himself a skilled tactician. Such a notion is dismissed as 'highly implausible' and 'without foundation in contemporary evidence' by Robert Self.⁷ He further asserts that Baldwin's decision to call an election was ultimately based on the 'spectre of a fourth winter of unemployment and its implications both

⁴ P. Williamson, and E. Baldwin, eds, *The Baldwin Papers*, p.112.

⁵ Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics*, p71. R. Self, 'Conservative Reunion and the General Election of 1923: A Reassessment, *Twentieth Century British History*, volume 2, (1992).

⁶ See Cook, *The Age of Alignment* p113, K.O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, p.362, and M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics*, p230.

⁷ R. Self, 'Conservative Reunion and the General Election of 1923: A Reassessment, *Twentieth Century British History*, volume 2, (1992). N. Smart, 'Debate: Baldwin's Blunder: The General Election of 1923', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 7, (1996), p. 139. R. Self, 'Baldwin's Blunder: A Rejoinder to Smart on 1923', *Twentieth Century British History*, Volume 7, (1996) pp. 140-155.

electorally, and in the broader context of Conservative rhetoric since 1922 which impelled Baldwin to adopt tariff reform'.⁸ It is hard to disagree with Self's assessment – surely if Baldwin was such a skilled politician he would have been aware of the ability of Tariff Reform to unite Liberals in opposition and that a possible outcome might have been a Labour administration, a result, Tory activists surely wanted to avoid at all costs. Indeed, there is evidence from Wrexham to suggest that Conservative unity was not uppermost in the party's leaders minds. Here, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn was willing to risk party unity and even jettison support for Tariff Reform to join with Liberals in selecting a mutually acceptable candidate to prevent Labour from being re-elected.

Nevertheless, the election result did have long term benefits for the Conservative party. All thoughts of a new Conservative and Liberal coalition were banished when on 18 December 1923 Liberal leaders announced that they intended to vote against the Conservative government thus precipitating a Labour government.⁹ To this end on 17 January 1924 over 130 Liberal MPs voted for a Labour amendment to the Address, precipitating the first Labour Government.¹⁰ The Liberals' decision to vote the government out of office and install Labour, however, was the flash point for facilitating a full reunion of the Chamberlainite faction with the Conservative party and shattering their dreams of a new coalition. Furthermore, while many questioned his judgement the Conservative Protectionists saw Baldwin as a hero who had fought their cause in vain while his decision to submit Tariff Reform to the people earned him a public reputation as a forthright and honest leader. Thus, despite the debacle of the election result, Stanley Baldwin survived, perhaps rather fortuitously, his position strengthened, as he led, for the time being, a united Conservative party.

Fortunately for the Conservative party it did not have too long to wait in opposition. During 1924 unemployment continued to rise undermining Labour's position as the party of the working class. In August 1924 the government's decision to negotiate treaties with Bolshevik Russia, including

⁸ Self, 'Conservative Reunion and the General Election of 1923: A Reassessment.

⁹ For the reasoning behind the Liberals decision to support the Labour party see Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, pp180-196.

¹⁰ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p. 195.

the possibility of a future loan to the Communist state, was roundly condemned by Liberals and Conservatives, and in October 1924 their position worsened when the Campbell case surfaced – an accusation that the government had from political motives withdrawn a prosecution against the Communist editor of the *Worker's Weekly*.¹¹ This presented Baldwin with the opportunity of removing the Labour government with a motion of censure, but it was a Liberal amendment that forced a Commons vote and brought the government down. Instead of seeking a compromise solution Ramsay Macdonald insisted on dissolution.¹² The Campbell Affair handed the Conservative party invaluable propaganda and fulfilled their ambition in tainting Labour as a party of socialist extremists while enabling them to blame the Liberals for removing the government it had helped install. They were further helped by the publication of the Zinoviev letter in the *Daily Mail* on 25 October 1924 which claimed that the Comintern had instructed the British Communist party to infiltrate the Labour party and armed forces.¹³ The letter turned out to be a forgery, but the damage was done and Baldwin was able to exploit the subsequent 'Red Scare'. Consequently, the 1924 general election witnessed a landslide victory for the Conservatives as they won 412 seats with 46.8 per cent of the vote which represented an overall majority of 203. Labour won 151 seats recording a net loss of 40 constituencies, while the Liberals won a mere 40 seats on just 17.8 per cent of the vote. Victory at the 1924 general election finally marked the end of a difficult, at times perilous, period for the Conservative party - a period that saw the party rejected by the people at three consecutive general elections, one in 1906 and two in 1910, then submerged in Coalition Governments from 1915 that often witnessed more disharmony than unity.

The period 1922 –1924 demonstrated the Conservative party's ability to survive coalition and emerge as the party of government, a position it hardly relinquished for the remainder of the century. By contrast the 1924 general election marked the final eclipse of the Liberal party as a major political

¹¹ R.Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, (London: Fontana, 1985) p.225. See also T. Lindsay and M.Harrington, *The Conservative Party, 1918-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1974) p65.

¹² Cowling, *The Impact of Labour*, pp.379-381.

¹³ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p204. The Comintern was an organisation founded by Lenin in 1919 with the aim of securing control over the world's socialist movements.

power, its paltry return from the 339 candidates it fielded final evidence that it was no longer a major force in British politics. Even so, the Liberal party remained a credible force in North-east Wales and as such attracted support from the Conservatives in Wrexham at the 1924 general election. Here the Liberal party was deemed a moderate anti-socialist group that was best positioned to keep out Labour and pursue the best interests of the Conservatives. Elsewhere in the region a different type of anti-socialist strategy was deployed successfully by the Conservatives – that of tainting Liberals as Labour party confederates. This was especially true in Flintshire where at the 1924 general election they were able to discredit the Liberal party as an accomplice to socialism and won what was deemed a safe Liberal seat. Even in solidly Liberal Denbighshire in 1924 the Conservatives were able to tarnish the Liberals as socialist puppets, a manoeuvre helped by the anti-Communist sentiment whipped up both by the national and local press.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that the Conservatives in North-east Wales spent all of their time, concentrating on an anti-socialist programme. While they utilised much of the anti-socialist strategy deployed nationally by the Conservative party, an approach that helped galvanise it in the days after Bonar Law's departure when other initiatives were failing it, they also did much to secure the party's future in the region.¹⁴ Between 1922 and 1924 the party seized the opportunity to develop its organisation, particularly in Denbighshire where it had collapsed. The period also saw major extension in political democracy, as the party opened its doors to new members, continued to enhance the role of women and overhauled its leadership. Thus, with an improvement in election results the party ended the period strengthened both as a political and democratic force. This final chapter will therefore consider the effects that the end of a Coalition Government had on the Conservative party in North-east Wales, and compare its fortunes to that of the party nationally during a turbulent period, which initially started well with its overwhelming victory in October 1922, deteriorated badly after the 1923 general election and ended with glorious victory in 1924 that cemented its position for the future. It will explore how the party expounded its anti-

¹⁴. J.Charmley, *A History of Conservative Party Politics, 1900- 1996*, (London: Macmillan, 1996) p69.

socialist strategy, how it exploited the difficulties that were afflicting the Liberal party in Flintshire, how it re-established itself in Denbighshire and how and why it deemed it necessary to co-operate with the Liberals in Wrexham.

THE 1922 GENERAL ELECTION.

According to Michael Kinnear the election of 1922 ‘was characterised by a systematic effort by the leaders of all three anti-socialist parties to present as few policies as possible’.¹⁵ Bonar Law’s election address stressed the need for tranquillity and serenity at home and abroad, embodied in his pledges for a lasting peace in the East, the ratification of the Irish treaty, a reduction in unemployment, a development of trade with the Empire and a solution to the serious problems facing British agriculture. There was little of substance in the address, but Law promised ‘that every candidate, in every constituency, will, as I do, make retrenchment an essential part of his programme’.¹⁶ Law also made a pledge ‘that this parliament will not make any fundamental change in the fiscal system of this country’.¹⁷ As a result a year later when considering his political position Baldwin was virtually forced to go to the country when he admitted that he was considering adopting protection policies for the party.

In North-east Wales the fall of the Coalition Government in October 1922 and the decision to go to the country, presented the North-east Wales Conservatives with an opportunity to assert their political independence. However, the Conservative Constituency Associations were slow to assert their autonomy. In Denbighshire there simply was no party organisation in place when Coalition Government collapsed and hurried arrangements had to be made to organise meetings before any decision was made as to what course of action was best to take. The situation in Flintshire was also unclear – despite the tricky relations between the two parties the Coalition Government had been fully supported, and a good working relationship had developed with Thomas Parry, the Lloyd George Liberal MP, and thus when it came to opposing Labour the Conservatives’ were unsure what their best option was.

¹⁵ M. Kinnear, *The Fall of Lloyd George, The Political Crises of 1922* (London: Macmillan, 1973) p. 138.

¹⁶ F.W.S.Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966* (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1970) pp.10-11. See the Conservative Manifesto (Mr. Bonar Law’s Address)

¹⁷ Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, p. 219.

In Wrexham Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon were unwilling to relinquish electoral ties with the Liberals largely because of the threat Labour posed in a three way election contest; as Sir Watkin commented he and ‘Lord Kenyon were inclined to question the wisdom of bringing out a separate candidate in view of the Socialist menace’.¹⁸ They were not alone in their views, in Scotland the Eastern Division of the Scottish Unionist party decided not to oppose sitting Lloyd George MPs in return for an agreement by which Liberals promised not to oppose Conservatives. In all Scottish Unionists were heavily in favour of continuing the Coalition and as a result only in such isolated constituencies as Perth and Glasgow Cathcart did Conservatives and Lloyd George Liberals oppose each other.¹⁹ Less formal were arrangements in England and Wales where any arrangements between Coalition Liberals and Conservatives were agreed at constituency level.²⁰ For example, in London Lloyd George Liberals at Camberwell North-west, Hackney Central and Southwark South-east received Conservative support when they promised to support Bonar Law’s new government. On the other hand Sir Hamar Greenwood in Sunderland faced two Conservative opponents in the double member constituency despite attempts to draw Conservative support.²¹

Similar attempts to forge election pacts were made in North-east Wales and given the comments of the party leadership in the constituency it was no real surprise in Wrexham, that Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon attempted to persuade its Association’s members to strike an election deal with the Liberal Association. Yet at a meeting on 30 October 1922 of the Conservative Association an amendment was carried against support for the candidature of Evan Davies, the Liberal candidate, by 52 votes to 2. The delegates’ speeches to the meeting and the overwhelming weight of opinion returned from the polling districts swayed the vote resoundingly in favour of choosing a candidate of their own, despite the views of their Association’s leaders. As a result, Major R.C. Roberts, a town councillor and former agent

¹⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 3 November 1922.

¹⁹ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

to Ormsby-Gore, was chosen as Conservative candidate for the division.²² The decision had less to do with any animosity towards local Liberals here but more to do with the fact that many Conservatives in the division had by October 1922 finally become disillusioned with Coalition Government. To R.W. Egerton, a member of the Constitutional Association, 'a Conservative government was the only one they could trust, and because they wanted a revival of trade and industry and the relief and ultimate end of unemployment'.²³ To R.C. Roberts, if future conflict was to be avoided, as had nearly happened at Chanak, then a Conservative administration was needed, and not another coalition to ensure peace and prosperity.²⁴ Consequently, a letter setting out the Conservative position and the fact they no longer wished to cooperate in the division with the Liberal party was sent to the Liberal candidate Evan Davies 'as a matter of courtesy'.²⁵ From the outcome of the selection meeting and the subsequent comments made about the Coalition Government it was clear that the bulk of the Conservative party in Wrexham believed that the time had come to split with the Coalition Liberals, assert their independence and attempt to prove that Conservative policies were the best way of combating Labour in the division.

By contrast in Flintshire relations between the Liberal and Conservative Associations had been poor throughout the period of Coalition. The Constitutional Association, however, had supported Lloyd George's government and taken solace from the fact that Thomas Parry, the Coalition Liberal MP, had pledged himself to support the coalition and had subsequently visited the Constitutional Association to make such declarations, despite the antipathy shown towards the Conservatives by the Liberal Association. Furthermore, with Labour bringing forward the Reverend Gwynfryn Jones, a popular and well-respected member of the county council, as candidate fear of splitting the anti-socialist vote made the party hesitant in ending its electoral alliance with the Liberals. Therefore, it made a great deal of sense to check on

²² National Library of Wales, (NLW) Wrexham Conservative Party Records: Minute Book of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association. Special meeting of Association held 30 Oct. 1922.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 10 November, 1922.

²⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 3 November 1922.

the position of Parry before deciding to select a Conservative candidate. As a result an attempt was made to contact him and see if he was willing to support Bonar Law's government.²⁶ Parry was thus duly sent a telegram on 24 October 1922 and it was only when he failed to reply by 28 October that the Conservatives decided to take action of their own. As Lord Mostyn explained:

Colonel Parry had had every opportunity of making his intentions known with regards to whether he was prepared to support Mr. Bonar Law and his government or not. Lord Mostyn now felt that Colonel Parry's attitude of silence left no alternative but to contest the seat in Flintshire.²⁷

As a result on 31 October 1922 Austin Jones, a barrister, who previously contested the Caernarfon Boroughs constituency in December 1910, was adopted as Conservative candidate for Flintshire.²⁸

In Denbighshire the Conservative party encountered a different set of problems. When the Coalition Government fell in October 1922 there was still no Conservative organisation in place to support a parliamentary candidate. The Conservatives moved quickly to address this situation, and when Independent Liberals in the division brought forward their own nominee they spotted the opportunity that a split Liberal vote could give them.²⁹ At a meeting held at Ruthin on 30 October 1922 Gwendolyn Brodrick, of the Coed Coch estate, one of three female Conservative candidates chosen to contest seats in Wales for the first time, was selected for the division.³⁰ Brodrick was a well-connected Conservative. She was the daughter of Colonel H.R Hughes of the Kimmel estate near Abergele who owned over 8,000 acres of land and was a member of the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association. In 1896 after the death of her first husband, William Edward Lloyd Wynne of the Coed Coch estate near Abergele she married Laurence A. Brodrick. Brodrick was the second son of the Eighth Viscount Middleton whose first son inherited the title and went on to become Secretary of State for War between 1900 and 1903. Laurence Brodrick had been

²⁶ *Flintshire Observer*, 19 October 1922.

²⁷ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 2, 12 February 1921-31 May 1930, D/DM/307/2. Special Meeting of the Flintshire Unionist Association, 28 October 1922.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

³⁰ *North Wales Times*, 2 November 1922.

an MP and later became a Vice-President of the West Denbighshire Association. Even so the choice of a woman to contest the division appeared a bold move – one perhaps that could connect the Conservatives to the large number of female voters while maintaining their hard-core vote in the constituency. At the same time Conservatives rallied quickly around her selection and as a fluent public speaker and widow of Laurence Brodrick's her stock was high amongst the party faithful. The *North Wales Times* commented that the 'split in the Liberal ranks and her personal popularity will be... of some advantage to her in her candidature'.³¹ Her selection was perhaps rushed and had more to do with the problem of finding someone to contest a constituency that was still seen as unwinnable by many Tories, but it remained an enlightened choice.³² Indeed, the selection of female candidates remained something of an anathema to the Conservative party. This was despite the fact that the 1921 National Union conference passed a resolution saying that Conservative Associations should not lag behind those of the Liberal and Labour party associations and should put forward women candidates. Yet, Conservative constituency associations were slow to appoint women. For example in 1922 only five were selected nationally and this had hardly improved by 1931 when only 13 female candidates were selected. Certainly, there was prejudice against women candidates amongst male dominated Conservative constituency associations at the time, and while the Conservatives were not alone - in 1922 only ten female Labour candidates were selected and a mere 16 from the Liberal party - over the years the Conservatives have lagged behind other political parties.³³ In 1992 only 63 female Conservative candidates were selected - at the same time the Liberal and Labour parties appointed more than twice this number.³⁴

The selection of Brodrick in Denbighshire in 1922 thus appeared to put the constituency's Constitutional Association at the forefront of those enlightened associations who were willing to further the cause of women in politics. Moreover, for the first time since War broke out the Conservative party appeared ready to fight parliamentary elections again in North-east Wales. The

³¹ *North Wales Times*, 2 November 1922.

³² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 November 1922.

³³ Lovenduski, Norris and Burness, 'The Party and Women', p627, See also Ball, 'Local Conservatism and Party Organisation', p 270.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p626.

political landscape had changed much since 1910 when last they had fought parliamentary elections in the region and it was clear that the party was sailing in to unchartered waters as they prepared to contest elections under the extended franchise, with both the Liberal and Labour parties as opposition in two constituencies and with a woman representing the Conservative cause in the third. Even so the First World War had seen the end of the Liberal and Labour electoral alliance which had done so much damage to the Conservative party and the Nonconformist issues of Disestablishment and education, which had brought a radicalised Liberal party so much success, especially in its rural Welsh speaking heartlands, were now things of the past.

THE 1922 GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

During the 1922 general election campaign the Conservative candidates in North-east Wales faced a number of difficulties, not least of which was the reluctance by some Tories to condemn their previous Coalition partners, and Lloyd George in particular. In Wrexham, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn could only offer lukewarm support for the Conservative candidate R. C. Roberts, as he feared that a three-cornered contest would split the anti-Labour vote.³⁵ It was here, perhaps, that the first evidence could be seen that Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn – who had maintained tight control of the party machine since 1886 – views were at odds with party members. Defeated over the choice of candidates in the division he still remained convinced that support for Evan Davies, the Liberal candidate, was ‘the best course to adopt for the country and for themselves’.³⁶ This could not have endeared himself to party workers and those campaigning for R.C. Roberts or those who had overwhelmingly voted against Davies’ candidature. As the campaign progressed he tempered his comments in order to show support for Roberts, but his speeches were still laced with a reverence for Lloyd George:

The country was tired of the late administration and it wanted change. He was not going to turn his back on the man who helped the country in time of trouble but let them give Mr. Lloyd George a little breathing time, a little rest. What he

³⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

³⁶ *Wrexham Leader*, 10 November 1922.

would say to Lloyd George was: all honour to you. You have brought us to a certain pitch. Do not take it amiss if we ask you to stand aside a bit and let another – your own trusted lieutenant at one time – take your place and see if he cannot put some of the finishing touches to the foundation you have laid so well.³⁷

While such comments were possibly designed to keep the door open for a future election agreement with the Lloyd George Liberals they could hardly have gone unnoticed by the electorate or particularly helped Roberts' cause. Furthermore, here as in Wrexham the decision to field Labour candidates introduced a new dimension to the campaign for the Conservatives that of three way contests and how to attack both the Liberal and Labour programmes while promoting Conservatives policies as broad based and populist.

Roberts attempted to address this problem by attacking the record of Coalition Government and by pledging to improve working class conditions by reducing taxation. He adhered to Bonar Law's manifesto pledges by promising that a Tory government would reduce expenditure unlike the previous government, which he asserted had spent tax payers money in 'wicked and wilful extravagance – ministry after ministry had been created and kept in existence long after their period of usefulness was gone'.³⁸ A Conservative government pledged to stabilise industry and increase prosperity would, he said, address such extravagance:

The main necessity now was to reduce taxation and give industry a chance so that steady employment could follow. It was no use giving a man a high wage if he could not purchase things with it: what he needed was a steady wage and the cost of living reduced. They would then have a contented race and Britain would return to its old position and they would have prosperity and peace within its walls.³⁹

Such speeches were clearly designed to maintain support from traditional Tory voters, the highly taxed middle classes, but were also intended to placate

³⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *North Wales Guardian*, 10 November 1922.

working class voters. Nevertheless, the early attempts by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn to forge an electoral alliance with the Liberals left the party vulnerable to attacks from their political opponents. *The Wrexham Leader* claimed that the Conservative party's 'political strategic aims were impossible to decipher'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, his decision to attack Labour's capital levy proposals (a graduated levy on fortunes earned during the War exceeding £5,000) in exactly the same manner as Evan Davies, the Liberal candidate, only appeared to confirm the assertion of the Labour candidate, Robert Richards, that 'little divided the Conservatives and Liberals'.⁴¹

Austin Jones, the Conservative candidate, also faced an uphill task in Flintshire where Labour was contesting the division for the first time. According to the *County Herald* the Labour party was of 'considerable strength in Flintshire' and thus posed a formidable challenge to both the Liberal and Conservative parties.⁴² The campaign, however, centred on the long standing antipathy that existed between the local Liberal and Conservative Associations which had been festering since the Liberal party's decision to support an electoral alliance with Labour at the 1919 and 1922 county council elections. Local Liberals considered themselves to be progressives who had more in common with Labour than local Conservatives. Many were also supporters of Asquith and were unhappy with Thomas Parry, who as their MP was a staunch supporter of Lloyd George and the Coalition Government. Even so, Liberals united behind the candidate most likely to win the constituency and Parry was selected to fight the division.⁴³ By uniting behind Parry the Flintshire Liberals avoided a similar fate to candidates in 23 other constituencies, ten in Scotland and thirteen in England and Wales, including Denbighshire, where Lloyd George and Independent/Asquith Liberals stood against each other.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, such ill will amongst Liberals in the division allowed Conservatives to make charges that the Liberal party was divided and that many of their supporters in the constituency were actively supporting Labour. Colonel Mainwaring of the Flintshire

⁴⁰ *Wrexham Leader*, 3 November 1922.

⁴¹ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales', p.78.

⁴² *County Herald*, 3 November 1922.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1922.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 6 November 1922.

Constitutional Association believed Parry had sold himself to socialism by representing the Liberal party in the constituency: 'in choosing between the allegiance of the Conservatives and loyalists of Flintshire he madly cast his vote with the rag-tag and bobtail of the Liberal party many of who were canvassing actively and doing their utmost for the Labour challenge'.⁴⁵ Austin Jones pursued this line, but also attempted to exploit the apparent divisions between their MP and the Liberal Association as well as attack Parry for being part of a Coalition Government that the Conservatives had turned out of office.⁴⁶ Despite the fact that the Conservative Association had pledged support for Parry during the period of coalition he was now portrayed as the representative of an ineffective government that had been responsible for the 'mismanagement of home and foreign affairs' for the previous four years.⁴⁷ At a meeting held in Rhyl on 4 November 1922 Jones declared:

The Coalition was a very bad thing and would prove a still greater mistake if it was allowed to continue. The electors of Flintshire had no opportunity of voting for a Liberal because there was no real Liberal candidate before the constituency. Colonel Parry was repudiated by many of the Liberal party and votes cast for him would simply amount to assisting in the return of another coalition government.⁴⁸

In Denbighshire Gwendolyn Brodrick faced a different type of campaign to those in Flintshire and Wrexham as she faced no Labour opposition. Therefore, her task was to discredit the Liberal party, and in particular the late Coalition Government while promoting Conservative policies. As a result she claimed that during the Coalition Government's time in power the country had 'been rushed from one crisis to another.... what everyone asked was to be given a sense of security and then be allowed to settle down to their own individual work and interests with a sympathetic government at their head to lend them a helping hand where most needed'.⁴⁹ Help for poor farmers and the unemployed in an agricultural constituency like

⁴⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 16 November 1922.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 November 1922.

⁴⁷ *Flintshire Observer*, 9 November 1922.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

Denbighshire, Brodrick asserted, would come from a Conservative government pledged to give relief on agricultural rating and arrange favourable credit schemes for farmers.⁵⁰ Her comments were in accordance with Sir Robert Sanders, the Minister of Agriculture, who promised an inquiry into agricultural rating and the expansion of credit facilities to farmers in an attempt to address the deepening depression that had hit agriculture during the inter-war years.⁵¹ Brodrick's message was not without appeal to the landowners and farmers of Denbighshire. According to the *Denbighshire Free Press* many tenanted farmers were now themselves landowners in the county and were apparently more likely to vote Tory.⁵² The newspaper also claimed that Brodrick was campaigning well in the constituency, and receiving rousing receptions in many towns and villages.⁵³ Conservative leaders were also confident that Brodrick would poll well and remained hopeful that Llew Williams, the Independent Liberal, who had pledged to 'recapture the seat for free Liberalism', would win enough votes to weaken the position of J.C. Davies, the Lloyd George Liberal.⁵⁴ However, there was some dissent amongst Conservatives about the choice of a female candidate which threatened to derail their campaign. An anonymous letter published in the *Denbighshire Free Press* emphasised the disquiet some were apparently feeling about her candidature:

Mrs Brodrick - against whom I have nothing to say - is an entire stranger to the vast majority of the electorate, some of whom object to a Tory lady candidate. As things are the chances of the constituency returning a Tory, which were never brighter have been thrown away.⁵⁵

The author of the letter, merely called 'A Voter', did not just criticise Brodrick's candidature but also drew attention to other factors that would, the writer believed, win the election for J.C. Davies. These included the Liberal party's better state of organisation and Denbighshire's attachment to Lloyd

⁵⁰ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 10 November, 1922.

⁵² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 November 1922.

⁵³ *North Wales Weekly News*, 2 November 1922.

⁵⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 11 November 1922.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 November 1922.

George, which apparently showed no sign of diminishing. The letter finished by warning Conservative friends to ditch female candidates and spend time educating voters in Conservative policies, prophetically saying ‘the coming parliament will last but a short time. Let my Conservative friends take this lesson to heart and commence in earnest and at once to mend their ways’.⁵⁶

Even so the Denbighshire election result demonstrated how much more receptive the voters were to the Conservative message since the last time the party had fought the constituency in January 1910. The fact that the Conservatives had fielded a woman did not appear to diminish their poll, as Brodrick’s share of the vote nearly matched that achieved by Austin Jones in Flintshire and was well ahead of what Major R. C Roberts polled in Wrexham. J.C. Davies, the Lloyd George Liberal, topped the poll with a majority of nearly 4,000, Brodrick finished second with just over 9,000 votes, the party’s highest poll since 1895, with thirty eight per cent of the vote. It was true that there were two Liberal party factions contesting the constituency and that the potential existed for a substantial split in the Liberal vote, but Llew Williams’ impact on the constituency was minimal. Taking a position of ‘hostility to the coalition government, its policy and administration and its betrayal of Liberal principles’ Williams failed to muster two thousand votes and gained just eight per cent of the poll.⁵⁷ What the poll indicated was how the radical issues that were so important to Welsh Liberalism before the War were now less relevant - the battle for Disestablishment had been won, the sell off of land now made landlordism less powerful and the Coalition Government led by Lloyd George had spilt Liberalism in Wales and thus the potency of radicalism.⁵⁸ The failure of Llew Williams, the Independent Liberal, epitomised this decline. For the Conservatives the result marked a step forward for the party which had failed to contest West Denbighshire in December 1910, and had polled less than 33 per cent of the vote in the same constituency at the January 1910 general

⁵⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 November 1922.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 October 1922.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp 286-297.

election.⁵⁹ The Liberals still had a healthy majority, but the Conservatives now posed a serious and substantial threat in the division.

The result in Flintshire also demonstrated the advances the Conservative party were making in the region. Attempts to expose splits in the local Liberal party while condemning their association with Labour met with some success as the Conservative party gained over 15,000 votes, which represented nearly 40 per cent of the poll. Given that the Conservatives were less than 1800 votes behind the Liberals in a large electorate with a high turnout of 80 per cent, and that Labour finished bottom of the poll with just over 6,000 votes, the Conservatives felt vindicated by the manner of the campaign they fought. The *Flintshire Observer* commented that ‘Austin Jones provided a staunch and eloquent champion of Conservatism, and the fact that he polled 15,080 votes is significant of the strength of the party in the constituency’.⁶⁰

The only Conservative disappointment came in Wrexham where Major R.C. Roberts, candidate, finished bottom of the poll in a tight three-cornered contest, obtaining just over 10,500 votes, as Labour’s Robert Richards won the seat, with nearly 12,000 votes and Evan Davies the Lloyd George Liberal came second with nearly 11,000 votes. With Davies campaigning on the same issues as Roberts, and over 21,000 people voting against Labour, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn’s fears were borne out - the anti Labour vote was split. Even so, by attaining 31.6 per cent of the vote in an election which saw the winner only achieve 35.8 per cent, was in some ways a satisfactory performance for the Conservatives and yet again proved that that the Conservatives were gaining substantial support in North-east Wales.

⁵⁹ The last time the Conservatives had fought the constituency was in 1910 when it was the old West Denbighshire division. In essence it was still the same constituency but since the changes of 1918 the boroughs of Ruthin and Denbigh had been added.

⁶⁰ *Flintshire Observer*, 23 November 1922.

Table 6.1.
General Election United Kingdom 1922

	<u>Total Votes</u>	<u>% Share</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>MPs Returned</u>
Conservative	5, 502,298	38.5	482	344
Liberal (Ind)	2, 668,143	18.9	333	62
Lloyd G. Lib	1, 412,772	9.4	144	52
Labour	4, 237,349	29.7	414	142
Others	<u>571,480</u>	<u>3.5</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>14</u>
	14,392,330	100.0	1441	615

Taken from: C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*.

Table 6.2
General Election, Wales 1922.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats Won</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Vote</u>
Labour	18	363877	40.7
Nat Lib (Coalition)	9	239035	26.7
Conservative	6	190919	21.4
Liberal	2	67870	17.6
Independent Labour	1	11929	1.3
Others	0	20327	2.2

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 6.3
General Election 1922, North-east Wales.

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>	
Denbighshire	J.C. Davies	Lib	12,972	53.9	
	A.G. Brodrick	Con	9, 138	37.9	
	Ll. Williams	Ind Lib	<u>1,974</u>	<u>8.2</u>	<u>+3834</u>
Flintshire	T.H. Parry	Lib	16, 854	44.2	
	A. Jones	Con	15, 080	39.6	
	D.G. Jones	Lab	<u>6, 163</u>	<u>16.2</u>	<u>+1774</u>
Wrexham	R. Richards	Lab	11, 940	35.8	
	E.R. Davies	Lib	10, 842	32.6	
	R. Roberts	Con	<u>10, 508</u>	<u>31.6</u>	<u>+1098</u>

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Even though the Conservative party failed to capture a single seat in North-east Wales, there was a belief among Conservative party leaders that by

asserting their independence they had preformed well.⁶¹ While comparisons are difficult as the last time the Conservatives had fought a seat in the region was at the Flint Boroughs by election in 1913, where they obtained over 47 per cent of the poll, the Conservative vote appeared to be holding up well. At the January 1910 general election, where they fought all five seats under the old franchise in the region they achieved an average of 38.2 per cent of the vote. This might have dropped slightly to 36.7 per cent in the three seats they fought in the region under the extended franchise in 1922, but this was actually a very good result. If one excludes the 1918 general election where Coalition Liberals fought seats with Conservative support, and in extraordinary circumstances, the average Liberal vote in the region in 1922 dropped by 18 per cent compared to January 1910. At the same time Labour's incursion into North-east Wales in 1922, where they were victorious in Wrexham, saw them average over 19 per cent of the vote in the two constituencies they contested and thus their vote damaged the Liberal party a lot more than the Conservatives (see table 6.3). It can, therefore be seen that the Conservative party was maintaining its core vote in North-east Wales and despite their failure, yet again, to have a single candidate elected, there was still substantial support to build on, which must have allayed any fears that local Conservatives had about how they would fare in the new era of the extended franchise. Furthermore, although the Conservatives finished bottom of the poll in a tight three-cornered contest in Wrexham it still outperformed, in percentage terms, their counterparts in Wales as a whole. Out of 95,744 people who voted in all three constituencies, 35,060 voted Conservative, just 5,277 votes or five per cent less than the Lloyd George Liberals, and their 36.7 percentage vote was over fifteen per cent more than the party achieved in Wales as a whole (see table 6.2 and 6.3).

Even so, with just 21.4 per cent of the vote in Wales, the Conservative party won six seats, all of them in South-east Wales including three in Cardiff, thus highlighting the anomalies of the 'first past the post' electoral system. Just as in North-east Wales, the election in Wales was marked by a set back in Liberal fortunes. Across, the Principality the decline was more extensive and

⁶¹ *Flintshire Observer*, 23 November 1922 and *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 November 1922.

permanent as the advance of Labour and its influence over the working classes, formed during the Great War, propelled it towards political domination in Wales.⁶² It won 41 per cent of the vote, compared to 31 per cent in 1918, and took every mining seat in South Wales. In all Labour won 18 seats, with two in North Wales. Apart from the success in Wrexham Labour also gained Anglesey. As elsewhere the election was a disaster for the two Liberal party factions in Wales. Nine Lloyd George Liberals were returned, three of them in North Wales, but only two Asquithian Liberals were successful. The collapse of the once great Liberal party was emphasised by the fact that they could only muster thirty-four percent of the vote. This would have been unthinkable in the heady days of radical Liberalism, which dominated Welsh politics between 1885 and 1918.

In a final analysis of why the Conservative vote held up so well in North-east Wales in the twelve years since the party had last fought a general election in the region there are perhaps a number of factors to consider. Given the fact that Labour was progressing quickly in the region and that the Liberal party were still maintaining a strong showing, despite its divisions and poor performances elsewhere, it perhaps could have been expected that the Conservatives would be reduced to marginal third force. Yet the Conservatives were and had always been well entrenched in the region – even in the days of Coalition Government when apathy appeared to afflict their party machine, party workers and local organisations continued to spread the Conservative word in the region. Furthermore, Labour had yet to penetrate with any degree of success the more agricultural and diverse counties of Denbighshire and Flintshire. In Denbighshire a poor performance in 1918 resulted in Labour not fielding a candidate in 1922 while their candidate Gwynfryn Jones, admittedly fighting the seat for the first time, won just 16 per cent of the vote in Flintshire. Thus any disillusionment with the Coalition Government in these two constituencies would favour the Conservatives. Furthermore, by 1922 many tenant farmers who had voted Liberal prior to the Great War were now landowners and were perhaps more inclined to vote Tory – Gwendolyn Brodrick in particular in Denbighshire spent much of her time emphasising

⁶² Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, pp.283-285.

that the Conservatives were pledged to help agriculture. At the same time R.C Roberts' promise that a Conservative government would cut taxation probably went down well with working class voters in Wrexham as the Conservatives came very close to superseding the Liberals as the second party in the constituency. Thus a combination of a strong message allied to the disillusionment many felt with Coalition Government seemed to have swelled the Conservative party's vote even though it failed to take a seat. Whatever the reasons were the general election results in 1922 demonstrated, once more, the Conservative party's continued ability to survive and attract support in North-east Wales.

THE THREAT OF LABOUR AND THE BUILD UP TO THE 1923 GENERAL ELECTION.

It was clear from the 1922 general election results that the country was tired of Coalition Government and that the Conservatives had benefited most by adopting an anti-Coalition strategy. Nationally, the Conservative party's parliamentary success, however, masked undercurrents that perhaps tarnished their performance. It had, if one includes the Independent Conservatives elected at the 1918 general election, fewer MPs returned to Westminster. Furthermore, with just 38.5 per cent of the vote and 344 MPs returned the party appeared to have won more seats than it deserved. In 1923 and 1929 on approximately the same percentage the party won 80 fewer seats. The Conservatives also won 95 seats on minority votes and in a further nineteen straight contests their majority was less than a thousand.⁶³ At the same time the election marked something of a triumph for the Labour party as it achieved nearly thirty per cent of the vote and gained 86 seats. Most of these gains came in industrial and underprivileged urban areas as Labour won seats in English and Scottish mining districts, previously Independent Liberal strongholds, and defeated Coalition Liberals in South Wales.⁶⁴ As Cook notes 'the net outcome of 1922 for the Labour party was its growth from a relatively ineffective and insecurely based force to the position of a vigorously and determined

⁶³ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, pp. 24-26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.19-21.

opposition, securely based in several major industrial regions'.⁶⁵ Indeed, despite victory a sense of uncertainty pervaded the government during 1923. This became even more prominent after Bonar Law stepped down as Prime Minister due to ill health.

The threat that the Labour party posed to the Conservative Government intensified in the period immediately after the general election. By October 1922, 1.4 million people were out of work and during 1923 the rate of unemployment did not drop.⁶⁶ The Government's failure to address the problem only helped to reinforce Labour's claim that only they could reduce the high unemployment figures. According to Robert Self:

What alarmed high politicians after 1921 was not the possibility that Labour really could solve unemployment but rather the fear that if it said it could often enough the newly extended electorate might come to believe it. Labour's exploitation of the issue and its persistent denigration of Baldwin's failure on employment thus represented a major threat to Conservative credibility.⁶⁷

Labour's increasing influence in British politics also affected Conservative thinking in North-east Wales. Even though it had not fielded a candidate in Denbighshire in 1922 and its candidate Gwynfryn Jones finished bottom of the poll in Flintshire, virtually 9, 000 votes behind Austen Jones, who finished second, its victory in Wrexham demonstrated its potential and how far it had progressed in the region since 1918. Consequently, Conservative leaders in the constituency sought a pragmatic solution to prevent Labour from winning again. Despite their strong showing at the 1922 general election they still saw the Liberal party, which had dominated pre-war elections in East Denbighshire as the main hope to prevent Labour from winning again and subsequently attempted to cement an electoral pact with the Liberals in the division. Little of this was made public, indeed there appeared to be a distinct lack of activity by the Conservative party after 1922, and in early November 1923 the *North Wales Guardian's* 'Looker On' column

⁶⁵ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p.23.

⁶⁶ R. Self, 'Conservative Revision and the General Election of 1923, A Reassessment, *20th Century British History*, Volume 3 (1992) p253.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p256.

complained that with a general election imminent ‘the Denbigh parties are beginning to put their house in order, but I do not hear of any activity in the Wrexham division’.⁶⁸ Yet, eager to prevent a repetition of a split in the anti-Labour vote at the 1922 general election behind the scenes Edward Hughes, Chairman of the Wrexham Liberal Association, and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn were negotiating an agreement by which an anti-socialist candidate could represent the division. After an initial approach made by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon, Edward Hughes decided to consult Evan Davies the defeated Liberal in 1922, to see ‘if he thought an election alliance with the Conservatives was a viable proposition’.⁶⁹ Davies had decided to stand down as his party’s candidate, but had recent experience of campaigning in the division and thus could gauge public opinion and the mood of the party workers:

I quite realise the importance of avoiding a three-cornered fight, but fail to see how Liberals and Conservatives can work together or support the same candidate seeing that issue has been joined on a fundamental question of policy. I should be greatly surprised if the Tory headquarters would agree to allow Liberals and Labour to have a straight fight in the Wrexham district. If, however, Lord Kenyon and Sir Watkin hold that view and can carry their supporters I do not think there will be much difficulty in wresting the seat from Labour.⁷⁰

The issue that Davies was, of course, referring to was Tariff Reform, the policy initiative upon which most Liberals and Conservatives were fundamentally divided. The Prime Minister, Baldwin, believed that Tariff Reform offered the Conservative government many opportunities, not least of which was a policy that would reduce unemployment and undermine Labour by proposing a constructive alternative to its nationalisation and taxation policies.

⁶⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 9 November 1923.

⁶⁹ DRO, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/1517, Letter from Edward Hughes to Evan R. Davies.

⁷⁰ DRO, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/1517, Letter from Evan R. Davies to Edward Hughes, dated 14 November 1923.

Yet, to most Liberals Free Trade remained a vital component of any government's fiscal policy, and such a move by the Conservative party only threatened to disrupt any anti-socialist pacts, similar to that proposed in Wrexham, while providing the disparate factions of the Liberal party with a cause to unite on. At the same time most Conservative party activists still favoured, in spite of the long, divisive and bitter arguments over the policy, the implementation of Tariff Reform.⁷¹ Tariff Reform had always drawn strong support amongst Conservatives in North-east Wales. However, in Wrexham Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn was still willing to sacrifice the candidature of a Conservative, accepting that as the 'division had always been Liberal up to the 1922 election and that the Liberal candidate had a majority over the Conservative candidate, it was for the Conservative party to stand down'.⁷² As a result Edward Hughes proceeded to make enquiries about the selection of a candidate who could possibly unite both parties. In a letter to Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn he suggested C.P Williams, a local businessman, who had several industrial interests and whom he believed was 'sane and moderate in his views'.⁷³ The problem for the local Conservative leaders was that they were unlikely to carry their own party with them having been almost unanimously defeated on the issue of joint candidates at the 1922 general election selection meeting. Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn reply to Hughes indicated his problems, but highlighted his desire to overcome the differences between the two parties:

Dear Mr Hughes,

I am most obliged for your letter. I quite agree with your views, they coincide exactly with mine. I am of the opinion that unless some definite proposition was made by Conservative or Liberal candidate as to future policy the majority of [the] party would vote for contesting the seat come what may while the result I feel sure would be as per as late – giving the seat to the socialists... Something must be done; matters cannot be left to drift indefinitely.

⁷¹ Williamson and Baldwin, eds, *The Baldwin Papers*, p.29.

⁷² DRO, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/1517, Letter from Edward Hughes to T.Badgery, dated 30 November 1923.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Letter from Edward Hughes to Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, dated 16 November 1923.

I hardly know what to suggest. The whole matter is fraught with such consequences for better or worse, but the socialist menace in my view is the most serious of all. I wish in constituencies like ours both parties could be induced to take a broader course of play for safety.⁷⁴

The correspondence with Hughes betrayed an air of desperation. Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn obviously felt that he saw the wider picture and was thus willing to consider an electoral alliance with the Liberals even if it meant compromising the Conservative party position on Tariff Reform. Such a sacrifice was justified if it led to defeating Labour in the constituency, even if it meant alienating the rank and file and splitting the local party, and the concerns he expressed were borne out by the results of selection meetings held by both parties. C.P Williams was beaten narrowly by H. A. Morgan, a lecturer in economics and staunch supporter of Free Trade, at the Liberal party's selection meeting, and on 20 November the Conservative Association selected, by an overwhelming majority, Edmund Bushby, a Liverpool cotton merchant and advocate of Protection policies who lived in the Wrexham constituency.⁷⁵ With both candidates ardent supporters of their party's fiscal policy a return to the ballot box over such a divisive issue as Tariff Reform made it impossible for a local electoral alliance to be negotiated.

The situation in Wrexham mirrored what was happening in other parts of the country. Local anti-socialist pacts planned during 1923 were abandoned in many areas as the Liberal party edged towards re-unification - opposition to Tariff Reform and support for Free Trade an issue that virtually all Liberals agreed on. Sir George Younger, Conservative party chairman, concluded that plans he had made for anti-socialist pacts to avoid three-cornered contests in Scotland were in tatters as his party's fiscal policy militated against inter-party electoral agreements with the Liberals. However, electoral pacts were still arranged in some areas, despite Liberal opposition to Tariff Reform. In Scotland electoral agreements were reached with the Liberals in Dunfermline,

⁷⁴ DRO, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/1517, Letter from Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn to Edward Hughes, dated 19 November 1923.

⁷⁵ *North Wales Guardian*, 23 November 1923.

Major R.C. Roberts who had fought the 1922 general election for the Conservative party in Wrexham stood down because he was 'unable to undertake the strain of again championing the cause'.

Stirling, Kirkcaldy and in the Glasgow divisions of Tradeston and Govan.⁷⁶ In England anti-socialist alliances were agreed in the industrial areas of Bristol, Newcastle, and Wolverhampton and in parts of the Potteries. In many mining regions pacts were also arranged – in Durham only one three-cornered contest took place in eleven county constituencies at the 1923 general election and in Mansfield where the Liberals enjoyed Conservative support in 1922 the arrangement was continued in 1923. In South Wales the Liberal candidate in Aberavon, Ramsay Macdonald's seat, withdrew in favour of a Conservative and in Rhondda East a Conservative candidate enjoyed Liberal support while in Rhondda West both parties endorsed the Liberal candidate.⁷⁷

Although an attempt was made to negotiate an electoral pact in Wrexham in the other two constituencies in North-east Wales an accommodation with the Liberals was not considered. Denbighshire was amongst many constituencies where Liberals and Labour collaborated as local agreements were reached which ensured that either a Liberal or Labour candidate was given a free run at the general election. Denbighshire was similar to Huntingdonshire, Finchley and Hemel Hemstead where lack of funding prevented Labour from contesting the constituency.⁷⁸ Here the Labour party chairman urged voters to support Ellis Davies a replacement for J.C Davies, who wanted to return to his career as Director of Education, as Liberal candidate. Davies was a radical Liberal and was thus able to attract Labour support, and was an experienced campaigner having represented Caernarfon Eifion between 1906 and 1918.

As the campaign began the Conservative Association also decided to change their parliamentary candidate. Initially, Gwendolyn Brodrick's gained the full support of the Association's leadership. At an Association's Executive Committee meeting held on 14 November 1923 a resolution was supported by the leadership and subsequently carried proposing Brodrick as Conservative candidate for the division of Denbighshire. Brodrick duly accepted the candidature. However, at a full Constitutional Association meeting held in Denbigh on 21 November 1923 Gwendolyn Brodrick announced she was

⁷⁶ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p.132.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp132-133.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p135.

standing aside in favour of male candidate to defuse any animosity, which she felt had surfaced at the previous election, by Conservatives opposed to a female candidate.⁷⁹ What prompted such a change of heart in such a short space of time is unclear – not a single member of the Executive Committee had expressed any reservations or displayed any prejudice about Brodrick’s candidature and had given her their full backing. It appears that the decision was Brodrick’s alone. It is more than possible that prior to the meeting party members had got drift of the fact that Brodrick was about to stand again, and agreeing with such reservations about female Tory candidates as expressed in the *Denbighshire Free Press* by ‘A Voter’ at the previous election were about to vote against her candidature. This may have persuaded Brodrick and leading local Conservatives that a split was likely if she stood, that votes could be lost and thus a male candidate was required. In the end David Rhys, Conservative candidate for East Denbighshire in January 1910, was nominated and subsequently unanimously elected to fight the constituency. As if to ensure harmony Brodrick offered David Rhys her full support and said ‘there may be no shadow of doubt as to her whole-hearted support and no excuse for any remarks that there was any feeling or division on the subject’.⁸⁰

Only in Flintshire was the candidate selection process straightforward for the Conservatives. Here in May 1923 Austin Jones resigned as candidate citing the pressure of work as his reason for wishing to stand down. On his recommendation Goodman Roberts a young barrister from Mold, who had not stood for parliament before, was, at a meeting of the Constitutional Association held on 19 May 1923, unanimously selected as candidate for the division. As in Denbighshire Labour decided not to contest the election, its failure to obtain a large share of the vote in 1922 acting as a deterrent, but despite the local election pacts between the Liberals and the Labour party in 1919 and 1922 there were no pledges of support for Thomas Parry, the Lloyd George Liberal MP from Labour. This probably reflected the fact that during the 1922 county council elections the local Liberal and Labour parties were able to find common ground over their opposition to Coalition Government,

⁷⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 24 November 1923.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1923.

but Parry, who was now endorsed by the local Liberal party, had been a coalition MP and was therefore unlikely to attract support from Labour.

Thus, as the election approached the Conservative party in North-east Wales had three candidates in the field. However, Conservative prospects did not appear good – in Wrexham the party leadership was fearful that the anti-socialist vote would be spilt again, in Denbighshire the threat came from a Liberal pledged Labour support, and in Flintshire the Conservatives were fielding an inexperienced candidate to face a Liberal who had been in parliament for ten years. However, the political situation remained volatile in North-east Wales. Despite their stunning victory in Wrexham in 1922 Labour's position was still far from clear in the region. They remained vulnerable to a combined anti-socialist candidate in Wrexham and they had failed to gain significant ground in Denbighshire and Flintshire where the Conservative party remained a substantial second force. At the same time while the Liberal Party was now nationally united there were still deep-rooted feelings of discontent in the Liberal party in Flintshire about the continued selection of Thomas Parry, a candidate many felt was foisted on them in 1913 and who as a coalitionist had annoyed more progressive members in the Liberal Association. In Denbighshire the Liberal candidate Ellis Davies came from the old radical wing of the party. In particular he took an anti-landlord stance, accusing landowners of profiteering from high rentals.⁸¹ In a county that now had many more landowners it was uncertain how this would affect his campaign, given that the electorate had overwhelmingly rejected an independent radical Liberal at the previous election. Furthermore his pledged support from the Labour party was a possible handicap to him - the constituency had overwhelmingly rejected Labour at the 1918 general election (so much so that they failed to field a candidate in 1922), and their appeared little to be gained by supporting Labour in rural divisions, such as Denbighshire, where as yet they had made little impact.

Only in Wrexham did the Liberals appear to have made a suitable selection. H.A Morgan was an ardent free trader – apparently a good selection for an election fought on fiscal policy. But the Liberals had 'parachuted him

⁸¹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 1 December 1923.

in'. He hailed from Brighton, his lecturing work was undertaken in the south and he had little in common with Wrexham. There were therefore encouraging signs for the Conservatives in North-east Wales. The party in terms of votes had performed well at the 1922 general election and was hoping to build on this strong showing. The problem remained, however, was how to sell Baldwin's decision to go to the country and how to promote a fiscal policy in a region which had constantly rejected it at elections prior to the Great War.

THE 1923 GENERAL ELECTION.

The Conservative party's 1923 election manifesto centred on its advocacy of Tariff Reform. The imposition of duties on imports, it argued would raise money to relieve unemployment, give special assistance to industries suffering under unfair competition and help negotiate a reduction in foreign tariffs, thus helping stimulate Britain's export trade.⁸² The manifesto also promised to give 'a substantial preference to the Empire', to help expand trade and increase the co-operation with the Colonies.⁸³ It further pledged to assist agriculture by paying a bounty of £1 an acre on all holdings of arable land exceeding one acre and promised to restructure old age and ill-health insurance schemes as well as unemployment benefit. Finally, it stated 'it is not our intention, in any circumstances to impose any duties on wheat, flour, oats, meat, (including bacon and ham), cheese, butter or eggs'.⁸⁴ This was expected to negate any dear food cries that the Liberals would employ.

Baldwin's decision to go to the country on Tariff Reform caused many Conservative candidates severe embarrassment. At the general election just a year earlier thirteen Unionist Free Traders had been returned in Lancashire and Cheshire while a further nine were elected, including Lords Hugh and Robert Cecil, in other parts of the country. In Lancashire Lord Derby, Secretary of State for War and President of the county's Conservatives used his influence to limit the opposition to Baldwin's Tariff Reform programme by urging candidates to regard the 'government's proposals as an emergency measure to

⁸² Craig, *British General Election Manifestos 1918-1966*, 1923 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

meet an abnormal situation'.⁸⁵ However, Lancashire was the home of cotton manufacturing and many Unionists here believed that protective tariffs would only increase the price of cotton coming into the country for manufacturing. As a result, and despite Lord Derby's comments, a mini-rebellion of six Conservative candidates, who were adopted by their Associations as Unionist Free Traders, took place.⁸⁶ They were also joined by a small number of Conservative candidates in different parts of the country as over twenty Free Trade Conservative candidates appeared.⁸⁷

A lack of direction from Baldwin on Tariff Reform also placed Conservative candidates everywhere in a difficult situation. On 9 November 1923 *The Times* commented 'almost the last advice given to the Prime Minister by Mr. Bonar Law was to expand a general policy without going into more detail than could possibly be avoided and present indications are that Mr. Baldwin intends to follow the advice given by the former chief'.⁸⁸ Accordingly, Baldwin failed to give any detail on how tariffs were to be applied. As a result the Conservative campaign 'degenerated into a series of local promises'.⁸⁹ For example, in Hull North-west the Conservative candidate advocated a tax on fish caught by foreign ships, despite Conservative denials that there would be food taxes. At the same time in Luton, home to hat making, the Conservatives advocated Protection to combat the influx of cheap imports.⁹⁰

A similar situation arose in North-east Wales where in Flintshire Tariff Reform was promoted as a policy that would protect the Shotton Steelworks from cheap imports of steel and unemployment. Similarly in Wrexham Edmund Bushby advocated Tariff Reform policies to help boost production in local industries including the Wrexham Leatherworks and the Brymbo Steelworks while in Denbighshire the policy was promoted as an ameliorative to local agricultural unemployment. Nonetheless, in North-east Wales all three Conservative candidates enthusiastically embraced the Tariff Reform programme and Baldwin's decision to call an election.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 15 November 1923.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p138.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 9 November 1923.

⁸⁹ Cook, *The Age of Alignment* p143.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Such an endorsement appeared to handicap Goodman Roberts' campaign in Flintshire. Here the expansion of the steel and textile industries between 1911 and 1931 helped offset the decline that was taking place in agriculture, which made Tariff Reform difficult to sell.⁹¹ Even so, Roberts' campaign was given a boost when a letter from Henry Summers, Chairman of Shotton steelworks, appeared in the *Flintshire Observer*, arguing the case for protection for the steel industry:

I am of the opinion that a protective duty on imported steel would be beneficial to the steel industry...Our trade is almost wholly an export one. If we have a measure of security we will keep our works up to date and endeavour to reduce our costs to the minimum, so that whatever comes along we shall be able to deal with it.⁹²

The newspaper called the letter a 'bombshell for Flintshire Liberals', pointing out that the founder of the works had been John Summers, a former Liberal MP, and an advocate of Free Trade. It concluded that the 'association of the Summers family with Liberalism and Free Trade is only too well known and the announcement has been received with great interest on the part of their employees'.⁹³ Roberts made as much of the propaganda coup handed him. At a meeting in Rhyl he commented on Summers' letter by pointing out 'the ruin to a great Flintshire industry, which must result from Free Trade', and asserted that with Tariff Reform 'the Conservative party... had a policy which meant a better chance for British industry, greater production, more employment and lower cost of living'.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, by advocating Tariff Reform policies Roberts ran the risk of Liberals resurrecting the dear food cries that underpinned their pre-war elections campaigns. This is exactly the line Thomas Parry, his opponent, took when he claimed that 'they had been thrown into another election because Mr. Baldwin had failed to find any solution to the unemployment problem. This was a very grave issue. Divested of all its wrappings it simply came to this:

⁹¹ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales, 1918-1935', p.22

⁹² *Flintshire Observer*, 6 December 1923.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

your food will cost more'.⁹⁵ Such was the confidence generated in the local Liberal party by Baldwin's decision to fight the election on Tariff Reform that the *County Herald* commented 'Flintshire is noted for its steadfast and unwavering adherence to Liberal and Free Trade principles... in a straight fight it appears to us that Colonel Parry's return is fairly certain'.⁹⁶

In Wrexham Edmund Bushby also had problems selling Tariff Reform to the voters. In this constituency the largest employer was still coal mining, but unlike South Wales which was adversely affected by the collapse of coal export markets between 1923 and 1924 Wrexham was cushioned from the worst excesses of depression, as nearly all the area's coal serviced local industry. As Frank Holloway points out 'until 1931 output and employment in the Wrexham coal industry remained at a high level, largely unaffected by the factors which had caused the collapse of the industry in the South.'⁹⁷ Undaunted by this Bushby advocated Protection for other industries in the constituency, receiving the backing of directors of the Wrexham Leatherworks and Brymbo Steelworks who sent letters of support for his candidature claiming that protection policies would increase employment and output in these trades.⁹⁸ In spite of these claims industry remained buoyant in the area and during the campaign Bushby was forced to admit that unemployment had not seriously affected the area and had not undermined output in local industry. This allowed H.A Morgan to dismiss Tariff Reform policies as unnecessary, claiming that 'there was nothing that needed remedying so urgently at the present time'.⁹⁹ Moreover, with Liberals and Conservatives squabbling over Free Trade and Tariff Reform, Robert Richards, the Labour MP, exploited their differences by dismissing the argument as one of over 60 or 70 years old, adding that this was not what Labour wanted to debate:

The Labour party were up against the present industrial system as a whole. That system stood condemned on every ground – even on the economic ground, and particularly on the moral ground, while Protection stood condemned by the

⁹⁵ *County Herald*, 30 November 1923.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ F.Holloway, 'The Interwar Depression in the Wrexham Coalfield', pp.64-65. See also Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales', 1918-1935, p.24.

⁹⁸ *North Wales Guardian*, 7 December 1923.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

history of the early part of the last century. Free Trade stood condemned until they had a better social order. The Labour party were out to cope with the present degrading poverty above everything. It wanted to put men at the top and things at the bottom. They wanted to get hold of the mines and railways and the ships, not to make the fortune of the few, but for the service of the community as a whole'.¹⁰⁰

This must have caused trepidation amongst Conservative leaders in the division, in particular Sir Watkin Williams–Wynn, who had advocated the adoption of a joint Liberal/Conservative candidate to help combat the very things the Labour candidate in the constituency was pledging to support.

In Denbighshire, the main industry remained agriculture and here Tariff Reform had met with stubborn resistance at every election the Conservatives contested prior to the Great War.¹⁰¹ In a straight fight with the Liberals, David Rhys, the Conservative candidate faced the challenge that others before him had failed on - how to promote Tariff Reform as a beneficial agricultural policy. At campaign meetings Rhys attempted to explain the benefits of the Conservative manifesto pledge which promised that taxes on imported goods would provide a subsidy for arable land providing that certain criteria were met.¹⁰² Yet his assurances that this would reduce unemployment in farming and stimulate the cultivation of more land drew an angry response from local farmers who heckled his meetings.¹⁰³ At a meeting at Denbigh on 28 November, local farmers claimed that the subsidy was not sufficient, and that not enough revenue would be collected from tariffs to supply farming. As a result, they postulated, Tariff Reform policies could never work in agriculture.¹⁰⁴ Such opposition also drew a response from Ellis Davies who claimed that the Conservatives could not be trusted as the party of agriculture as their policy was unworkable. 'Farming was depressed because in 100 years rents were doubled and because ever since the war rents had been increased in some cases by 40 per cent', he added.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ *North Wales Guardian*, 30 November 1923.

¹⁰¹ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales', p.85.

¹⁰² *Denbighshire Free Press*, 1 December 1923.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Such sentiments were still popular with many voters in Denbighshire. Indeed as the campaign progressed it was becomingly increasingly clear that their opponents were derailing the Conservatives as they trotted out old arguments successfully deployed before to defeat the Tariff Reform argument. In Wrexham Bushby was unable to make any headway as he was virtually forced to admit that under Free Trade Wrexham was hardly suffering while Labour was able to discredit both sides of the Tariff debate as irrelevant. In Flintshire Thomas Parry united the Liberal party behind him by claiming that Tariffs would increase basic foodstuffs and in Denbighshire David Rhys managed to alienate the very people who might be persuaded to switch political sides by advocating Protectionist policies – those landowners and farmers whom Gwendolyn Brodrick had tried to connect with in 1922. As a result the elections went emphatically the Liberals' way in Denbighshire and Flintshire - the Conservatives losing any impetus the 1922 election had given them, as they were comfortably defeated - while Labour won Wrexham with an increased majority,

In Denbighshire Ellis Davies' majority reached nearly 4,000, the Liberal share of the vote increasing by six per cent compared to 1922. Worryingly for the Conservative party Rhys polled a thousand fewer votes than Brodrick in 1922. From the Liberal perspective the election was also a huge success in Flintshire as voters ignored the revelations in the Summers letter and rejected the Conservative arguments over Tariff Reform. United once more in the constituency the Liberal party's candidate, Thomas Parry, won the seat with a comfortable majority of 4,673, polling nearly 20,000 votes. The Conservative share of the vote went up to 43.2 per cent, but in a straight battle with the Liberals Roberts failed to win as many votes as Austin Jones had in 1922. (see table 6.6). The swing to the Liberals was exactly nine per cent. The *County Herald* noted that 'from a Liberal point of view the question of Protection being brought before the electors has been an undoubted blessing. Not very long ago the Liberals were divided into two camps with deplorable results at the last election...the attack on Free Trade has drawn the party together perhaps more closely than ever'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ *County Herald*, 23 November 1923.

In Wrexham industry appeared to be surviving well in the area without the need for Tariff Reform. This only further helped to undermine Bushby's position who finished bottom of the poll as the share of the Conservative vote dropped by four per cent compared to 1922. He obtained 1,400 votes fewer than Major R.C Roberts at the previous election, but the poll was again headed by Robert Richards, who increased the Labour majority by nearly 800 votes on a swing to him from the other parties of over three per cent. The Liberal party also increased their share of the vote as their number of votes increased by nearly 200.

Table 6.4

General Election 1923.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% share</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>MPs returned</u>
Conservative	5, 514, 541	38.0	536	258
Liberal	4, 301, 481	29.7	457	158
Labour	4, 439, 780	30.7	427	191
Others	<u>291, 893</u>	<u>1.6</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>8</u>
Totals	14, 547, 695	100.0	1, 446	615

Taken from: C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*.

Table 6.5

General Election, Wales, 1923.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats Won</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Vote</u>
Labour	19	355172	41.9
Liberal	11	299875	35.4
Conservative	4	178113	21.0
Independent Liberal	1	12936	1.5
Others	1	570	

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 6.6

General Election 1923, North-east Wales

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>
Denbighshire	Ellis Davies	Lib	12, 164	59.8
	David Rhys	Con	<u>8, 186</u> +3978	40.2
Flintshire	Thomas Parry	Lib	19, 609	56.8
	G. Roberts	Con	<u>14, 926</u> +4683	43.2
Wrexham	R. Richards	Lab	12, 918	39.0
	H.A. Morgan	Lib	11, 037	33.4
	E. Bushby	Con	<u>9, 131</u> +1881	27.6

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

For the Conservative party in North-east Wales the election was a disappointment given their strong showing in 1922 and represented a setback. In Denbighshire and Flintshire their share of the vote went up slightly as the constituencies returned to two-cornered contests, but the Liberal vote increased significantly while the actual number of people who voted Conservative dropped. In Wrexham where there was a three-way contest the Conservative party's share of the vote and the numbers who voted for it ebbed away to the other two parties (see Table 6.6). Again what the results indicated was that in percentage terms the Conservative party in the region outperformed their counterparts in Wales as a whole by gaining 36.6 percent of the votes cast in the three constituencies compared to the meagre 21 per cent the party claimed across all constituencies in the Principality.

Indeed, in Wales as a whole the results were also disappointing. The Conservative party lost Cardiff South to Labour and Cardiff East to the Liberals, a mercantile shipping seat believed to have been lost because of the party's advocacy of Tariff Reform.¹⁰⁷ However, Central Cardiff was retained, as were the seats of Monmouth, Llandaff, and Barry and by the narrow margin of 324 votes Newport. The domination of Labour was confirmed when it won 19 seats, but Liberal reunification in the Principality only resulted in the same number of seats as in 1922 (see Table 6.5).

What the elections in North-east Wales also reflected accurately was the national situation - the Conservative party was incapable of winning a general election on Tariff Reform in any type of constituency. Rural Denbighshire rejected Tariff Reform as a palliative to agricultural depression, in the industrial constituency of Wrexham Protection was seen as an irrelevance and in the more demographically diverse Flintshire not even letters of support for protective tariffs from the largest employer in the constituency had been enough to persuade people to vote Conservative. This situation was repeated nationally as the Conservative party lost 108 seats and gained a mere 20, sixteen of them from the Liberals. Labour gained 41 seats from the Conservatives, only two were rural all the rest being industrial or semi-industrial constituencies. The Liberal party's revival was marked by the gain

¹⁰⁷ Morgan, *Wales 1880-1980*, p.192.

of 80 and the loss of 38 seats, 67 gains being made at the expense of the Conservatives, of which 44 were in county divisions, confirming the rejection of Tariff Reform as an agricultural policy. Liberal victories also occurred in 23 boroughs, most of them middle class seats where the business vote was important, appearing to confirm the rejection of Tariff Reform by some of the Conservative party's most committed supporters.¹⁰⁸ Although the country decisively rejected Tariff Reform it was less clear what they had endorsed, as the Conservatives' received a setback, and not a collapse as they had in 1906, and still remained the largest group in the new parliament, but with no overall majority. The problem that now faced the party was whether they could form a government given their antipathy to Labour and their animosity towards a reunited Liberal party which had amongst its leaders the most hated politician of them all for most Conservatives - Lloyd George.

TAKING THE ATTACK TO LABOUR, 1924

On 17 January 1924 the Liberal party decided to support a Labour amendment to the Address thus defeating the Conservative government and precipitating the first Labour government under Ramsay Macdonald.¹⁰⁹ The election had reunited the Liberal party, which had used the dear food cry to its best advantage; many Conservatives citing this issue as having influenced women to vote Liberal.¹¹⁰ Yet the Conservative party had cause to remain optimistic. It was still by far the largest party in parliament as over 60 seats and one million votes separated it from its nearest rival. Furthermore, with just 191 MPs the Labour government's position remained weak dependent as it was on Liberal support to keep it in power. As Ramsden points out 'the new government's weak position made it likely that the next election would not be long delayed'.¹¹¹ If this was the case then the day of the Conservative party returning to power was possibly not far off; especially if Tariff Reform was dropped. Many of the 108 seats the Conservatives lost at the 1923 general election had been lost on small majorities, and if those who abstained or voted Liberal because of the party's Protectionist Policies could be tempted back

¹⁰⁸ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p.159.

¹⁰⁹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.181.

¹¹⁰ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p.178.

¹¹¹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.181

then much lost ground would be regained.¹¹² Thus, the long-term prospects were not as grim as the election results initially indicated.

With a minority Labour government in power there were also opportunities for the Conservative party in North-east Wales. This was especially true if it could show that an extreme socialist government had been foisted on the country and that their policies would harmful for local people. As a result Conservative Constituency Associations intensified their anti-Labour rhetoric. The position they took on Labour was in accordance with the wider Conservative plan to position the party as the patriotic defender of the British constitution and the only practicable anti-socialist force.¹¹³ It also involved characterising the Liberal party as mere socialist puppets having voted Baldwin's government out of office and helping replace it with a Labour administration. This it was hoped would win the party votes from all sections of society.¹¹⁴ In Flintshire, Goodman Roberts, re-elected as Conservative candidate in February 1924, acknowledged whom he thought was to blame for installing a Labour administration:

The first collective vote of the Liberals was to turn out of office the biggest party in the House of Commons and to put into power a party representing only 192 members out of 615. This was called by the Liberals democracy. He did not think he was using too strong a term by calling it jiggery pokery.¹¹⁵

This was a theme pursued by the Denbighshire Conservative Association, but given the demographic nature of the constituency it was important to equate any attacks on the Liberals and Labour with rural concerns. At a meeting at Ruthin in May 1924, J. Farnsworth, the newly appointed Conservative agent for Denbighshire argued:

It was the Liberal party who had placed the Labour Party in power and the chief aim of the Labour party was the nationalisation of everything including the farmer's land. The latter would affect the Welshman more than anything else. If

¹¹² Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.181.

¹¹³ Smith, *The Taming of Democracy*, p.81.

¹¹⁴ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin Conservative Leadership and National Values*, pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 10 April 1924.

nationalisation came about he would not have a say in the planting of crops. He would have to apply to an army of state officials.¹¹⁶

His comments were made in response to Labour's 1923 manifesto which promised to promote co-operative methods in farming production and distribution, and were aimed at galvanising support for the Conservatives from the large farming community in the constituency, which now, it was assumed, with more landowners in it was likely to lean towards the Tories.¹¹⁷ As a result the choice of parliamentary candidate for the division was an important one. At an Executive Committee meeting held in Denbigh on 30 July 1924 Gwendolyn Brodrick was unanimously elected to fight the constituency once more. Her selection came less than twelve months after the Conservative Association had chosen a male candidate as it was believed, primarily it appears by Brodrick herself, that a female candidate would adversely affect the Conservative poll. This time, however, unlike the delegates meeting in October 1923 Brodrick's candidature was rubber stamped by those who attended a general meeting of the Conservative Association held the same day as the Executive Committee meeting. Her selection was based on her strong performance at the 1922 general election, it being accepted that she had performed better than David Rhys in 1923. She was also selected despite the availability of several other male candidates including Central Office nominees, and despite demurring comments again from Brodrick who again offered to stand aside. According to R. Williams-Wynn, Chairman of the Association:

They had heard a good deal during the last election of the disability of sex. At the last election the Conservative party had a good fight with a male candidate in the field, and after the result of the election he believed that the opinion of a good many people had changed a good deal. After the election it had veered around again to the female sex.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 31 May 1924.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 August 1924.

It was unlikely that all in the local party truly believed that attitudes had changed in such a short space of time, but they were clearly aware that the party had fared well with Brodrick as candidate in 1922. The Association was now convinced that Brodrick remained a better choice – Rhys who hailed from Cardiganshire and was a barrister was ultimately seen as less suitable for the division. Brodrick’s candidature gave the Conservative Association an opportunity to select a local candidate who as a landowner and farmer had strong claims to represent the agricultural community.¹¹⁹

In December 1923, the Wrexham Conservative Association re-selected Edmund Bushby as their parliamentary candidate.¹²⁰ Consequently Bushby spent much of the next nine months campaigning in the constituency, but when Ramsey MacDonald announced the dissolution of parliament on 9 October 1924 the situation changed rapidly. At a Conservative Association meeting held in Wrexham on 13 October 1924 Bushby was initially adopted to contest the constituency, but unbeknown to him an attempt was already underway again to secure an anti-socialist candidate for the division.¹²¹ On the weekend of 11-12 October 1924, Mr. Arthur Evans of Vrondeg Hall Bronwylfa, a member of the Wrexham Liberal Association, fearing that the anti-Labour vote would again be split, approached the chairmen of both the local Liberal and Conservative parties in a bid to instigate a round table conference that would ‘avoid a three-cornered fight’.¹²² As a result on 14 October 1924 a conference was held at a hotel in Wrexham between delegates from both parties. The proceedings were held in private with no statement given to the press, but both sides agreed that Bushby should stand down to allow the Liberal candidate, C.P. Williams, a ‘free run’ in the constituency.¹²³

Nevertheless, the decision to withdraw Bushby in Wrexham caused consternation in Conservative ranks. Many local Conservatives were of the opinion that the decision was made too late as the election campaign had already started. The *North Wales Guardian* thought the decision was a strange one given that the Conservatives had made such strides in improving their

¹¹⁹ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 October 1924.

¹²⁰ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Minute Book of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Unionist Association, 1918-1926, Constitutional Meeting, 19 December 1923.

¹²¹ *Wrexham Leader*, 17 October 1924.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

organisation, and that Bushby had spent the previous nine months working in the constituency.¹²⁴ Letters appeared in the press questioning why it was the Conservative candidate who had stood down when Williams, the Liberal candidate, was a late selection. For example, on 17 October 1924 The Wrexham Leader published a letter from ‘Conservative Rhos’:

If any one had to stand down should it not be the party who have brought a man it at the last minute? Mr Bushby has worked the district and carried the respect of all parties and would have been returned at the top of the poll...Now our party leaders drop this bomb amongst us. We never had a better chance and voicing the feeling of Rhos and district I want to know why Mr. Bushby did not call a meeting of the various secretaries and get the feeling of the voters themselves.¹²⁵

The official reason given by Lord Kenyon was that ‘pressure from Central Office had been strongly exerted in the direction of avoiding three-cornered contests’, and that with the Liberals having better claims on the constituency as a result of their election victories in the East Denbighshire constituency prior to the Great War it was up to Bushby to stand down.¹²⁶ However, the Conservative rank and file in Wrexham were not easily placated by his assurances and several women’s branches withdrew from the party as a protest against the decision, not reforming until Bushby was reinstated as candidate in July 1925.¹²⁷ Lord Kenyon’s assertions also appeared at odds with the facts. The NWDNU allowed individual Conservative Associations to make their own decisions on electoral pacts with the Liberals - the NWDNU meeting that made this decision was chaired by Lord Kenyon and took place the day before the Wrexham conference at which Edmund Bushby was asked to stand down.¹²⁸ Lord Kenyon would have known about any central office pressure to avoid three-cornered contests and surely would have informed all Associations in North Wales if this had been the case.

¹²⁴ *North Wales Guardian*, 24 October 1924.

¹²⁵ *Wrexham Leader*, 17 October 1924.

¹²⁶ *North Wales Guardian*, 17 October 1924.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Flintshire Observer*, 16 October 1924.

In fact it appears that if there was any pressure to avoid three-cornered contests it came from the Liberal party. Ramsden has commented that ‘in the 1924 general election, Unionist candidates...were already in the field in most places and this gave them a useful advantage over Liberals [and] it was important to have got in first for this would place the onus on the Liberals for causing three-cornered contests.’¹²⁹ Consequently, it was generally the Liberal party that asked for anti- socialist pacts to be made. This was borne out in Wrexham where Bushby was campaigning for some time before the Liberal party appointed a candidate and where the first move to form an electoral pact was made by a Liberal – even though their election performances in the division were stronger than the Conservative party’s.

The decision to field a joint anti-socialist candidate in Wrexham reflected hurried agreements reached by Liberal and Conservative Associations across the country as those pacts that were arranged were made on an ad-hoc basis.¹³⁰ Many of the pacts were forced onto the Liberal party because of lack of funds as they abandoned 136 seats, 96 of them in constituencies which had previously seen three-cornered contests. The only pacts that covered large areas and constituencies were those made in Glasgow, Paisley, the West of Scotland and one that covered many parts of South Wales.¹³¹ Here the ‘local arrangement was that if one of the anti-socialist parties was already in the field, the other party failed to produce a rival challenge’.¹³² As a result there were no three-cornered contests in Monmouthshire, only one in Glamorgan and outside of Cardiff just one at Swansea West. In North Wales with the NWDNU allowing individual associations to make their own decisions on electoral pacts there were only two three-cornered contests in the region - the one at Flintshire and the other in Merionethshire. In both constituencies radical Liberals had influence or held the sway and were unlikely to do any deals with the Conservatives; the antipathy in Flintshire between the Conservatives and factions within the Liberal Association party was by now well documented. Thus, with Labour entering the fray again in Flintshire a three way party battle commenced. This

¹²⁹ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p.201.

¹³⁰ *Wrexham Leader*, 17 October 1924.

¹³¹ Cook, *Age of Alignment*, pp. 288-289.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.289.

was something the Conservative and Liberal leaders in Wrexham were desperate to avoid. Here, Conservative leaders were willing to sacrifice the candidature of Edmund Bushby and even their rank and file members in a determined bid to oust Labour in the constituency. Without Tariff Reform to hamstring their bargaining position, Liberals and Conservatives were thus able to come together to defeat the common foe. It was only in Denbighshire where a straight Liberal and Conservative contest took place as campaigning returned to familiar ground – the battle for the agricultural vote.

THE 1924 GENERAL ELECTION.

Having jettisoned general tariffs the Conservative 1924 general election manifesto attacked the government for forcing an election on the country by seeking dissolution over the Campbell Affair - an issue, it asserted, that hardly amounted to a matter of principle.¹³³ The Labour Government's treaties with Russia were condemned, the Conservative party arguing that the Communists would not repay any of the debt handed them, and the government was attacked for failing to reduce unemployment. The manifesto also promised to use the Safeguarding of Industries Act to protect certain industries from foreign competition and pledged support for Britain's ailing agriculture sector including relief on agricultural rates, and the extension of credit for efficient farming co-operatives. Finally, the manifesto promised a programme of social amelioration including a major extension of National Insurance provision.¹³⁴

With C.P Williams, the Liberal/ Anti-socialist candidate contesting Wrexham the Conservative party only fought the two county divisions of Denbighshire and Flintshire. In Flintshire Goodman Roberts persisted with advocating protection for certain types of industry. This was prompted by the continued support he received from the Summers' family, owners of the Shotton steelworks, for his candidature. During the campaign Geoffrey Summers, a Steelworks director, appeared at meetings with Roberts in order 'to try to convince the electors that the Conservative party was the best for the

¹³³ Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966*, '1924 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto'.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

district'.¹³⁵ According to Summers 1,000 men were now unemployed at Shotton. This he asserted had been caused by foreign dumping that undercut the price of British steel, the only solution to which was the application of a small Tariff.¹³⁶ What Summers was campaigning for was special recognition for the steel industry, and not the application of extensive general tariffs. In 1921 the Coalition Government had protected vulnerable British industries under the Safeguarding of Industries Act but the Labour government had repealed part of the Act in 1924. However, as their manifesto promised, the Conservative party was pledged to reapply the Act for certain industries in order to 'safeguard the employment and standard of living of our people'.¹³⁷ Summers was thus pleading the case for steel in any plans a future Conservative government had for the protection of British industry. Consequently Roberts' support for him was in accord with Conservative party policy and in a bid to gain votes he attacked the Labour Government for increasing unemployment while accusing the Liberal party of helping exacerbate the problem as it had supported the Labour government's decision to repeal the Safeguarding of Industries Act:

His Liberal opponent was pledged up to the hilt to resist the safeguarding of any industry at all. His party was directly concerned with the removal of the restrictions against foreign competition. There was in Liberalism today no further hope for the steel trade beyond the cheerful assurance that matters must be allowed to right themselves on their own accord.¹³⁸

Roberts' words contained a powerful message, as the Steelworks was the largest employer in the county. The intention was to discredit Thomas Parry, Flintshire's Liberal MP, as someone who had helped increase unemployment while neglecting the constituency's workforce by supporting the Labour government's policies. Then by advocating protection for the steel industry he hoped to gain vital working class support. He also attacked Parry by suggesting that in voting against duty reductions on Empire grown sugar and

¹³⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 23 October 1924.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Craig, *British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1966*, '1924 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto'.

¹³⁸ *Flintshire Observer*, 23 October 1924.

cocoa in the House of Commons, and by doing so with 34 other Liberals he had not only helped keep Labour in power, but had caused the price of basic foodstuffs to go up. Roberts, thus astutely positioned Parry as one who had helped keep an inept government in power, whose policies would have a disastrous effect on the constituency's workers while tainting him as a Labour party adjutant.

In Denbighshire the Conservatives made similar accusations against the constituency's Liberal MP, Ellis Davies. At a meeting held in Denbigh on 14 October 1924 to support Gwendolyn Brodrick's candidature, G.F. Harper, Vice Chairman of the Denbighshire Conservative Association, accused Davies of helping keep Labour in power by supporting most of their policies.¹³⁹ Such accusations received support from an unexpected quarter when Pryce Williams of the Colwyn Bay Liberal Association said 'he was not satisfied as to what were Mr. Davies' political views... [he] leans too much towards the Socialist party'.¹⁴⁰ Ellis Davies angrily refuted the charges claiming that at the Liberal selection meeting 'all present were satisfied with his views and his services'.¹⁴¹ Pryce Williams' claims were given credence when it was later revealed that Ellis Davies had an arrangement with the Reverend J. Howard, leader of the Denbighshire Labour party, 'whereby it was agreed on the ground that he and the socialists held similar views on nine tenths of the existing political issues that no socialist candidate should be brought against him'.¹⁴² Such revelations were pounced upon by local Conservative newspapers which ran articles about the arguments and divisions in the local Liberal party, while pointing out Ellis Davies' apparent link to socialism.¹⁴³

Boosted by the divisions in the Liberal party Gwendolyn Brodrick attacked the Labour government's plan for agriculture. To a meeting of farmers at Conwy she re-asserted the Conservative belief that Labour was about to nationalise farming:

¹³⁹*Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 October 1924. See also *North Wales Weekly News*, 30 October 1924.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 18 October 1924.

¹⁴¹*North Wales Weekly News*, 23 October 1924.

¹⁴²*Denbigh Free Press*, 8 November 1924.

¹⁴³ See for example *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 October 1924

Do you farmers realise what the nationalisation of the land would mean to you. It would mean that not only the large estates but your smaller holdings would be under the direct supervision of committee appointed, not locally, but from a central office. Farmers will be turned into servants, and a son cannot succeed his father without permission.¹⁴⁴

Conservative landowners, of whom Brodrick was one, were keen to promote themselves as protectors of the status quo on the land, and of a mutually beneficial relationship between landlord and tenant.¹⁴⁵ Before the Great War this notion was discredited by radical Liberals who portrayed Conservative landowners as tyrants who impoverished their tenants by instituting high rents. Yet such attempts to portray the Labour party as a destructive force that would end a farmers right of passing his family's farm on to the next generation now had a special resonance in constituencies like Denbighshire. Many tenant farmers owned their own land and Brodrick was keen to perpetuate a mutual link of support between the Conservative party and farmers in opposition to any proposals Labour had to nationalise agriculture. Speaking at Denbigh during the last week of campaigning she said:

Mr Baldwin has put another plank in his programme to the effect that he wishes to call a conference of people representing agricultural interests from all the different districts in the country. All knew what the agricultural community had suffered through past legislation... It seems to me a most level headed and sensible proposal, because at this conference men from the various districts can explain what their difficulties are and what means would be the best to help them carry on the arduous task of procuring food for the country.¹⁴⁶

Brodrick thus presented Baldwin's pledges as all-embracing constructive alternatives to Labour's seemingly divisive socialistic agricultural policies. At the same time by suggesting that Labour would seize land from all local

¹⁴⁴ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 October 1924.

¹⁴⁵ M.Cragoe, *An Anglican Aristocracy, 1832-1895*, p.171.

¹⁴⁶ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 25 October 1924.

landowners it was anticipated that the party would gain the trust of farmers and subsequently their votes.¹⁴⁷

An entirely different situation to that in Denbighshire and Flintshire greeted the Wrexham electors. With the decision taken by Edmund Bushby to stand down C. P. Williams represented the anti-Labour cause in the division. As such he fought an election campaign designed to appeal to both the parties he was representing - he concentrated his attacks on the Russian Treaty, the Campbell case and Labour's nationalisation plans, but avoided discussion on the more contentious issues such as Conservative support for the Safeguarding of Industries Act.¹⁴⁸ With little reason to campaign so intensively the Conservative Association decided to help other party Associations in North Wales as well as supporting C.P. Williams locally. This gave Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn cause for concern, which, as President, he expressed in a letter to the Constitutional Association's Executive Committee:

The chairman read a letter from Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn dated 25 October in which it was stated that there was danger that Unionists may not poll seeing that Mr. Bushby had withdrawn in favour of the Liberal candidate and special efforts should be made to induce Unionists to record their vote. Reference was also made to the absence of the secretary who had been sent by the central office to Merioneth with the sanction of the chairman.¹⁴⁹

In response the Executive expressed their disappointment in Sir Watkin's comments and denied that members had not worked hard to support C.P. Williams, claiming that the secretary's services were better utilised elsewhere supporting Conservative candidates.¹⁵⁰ A.D McAlpine, the Chairman, also informed the meeting that he had sent a letter to Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn saying his comments were unwarranted. A vote of confidence was unanimously passed approving of the Executive Committee's actions, and a deputation was appointed to meet Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn to voice the Association's disappointment should he not respond favourably to McAlpine's

¹⁴⁷ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 18 October 1924.

¹⁴⁸ See for example, *North Wales Guardian*, 24 October 1924.

¹⁴⁹ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Minute Book of the East Denbighshire Unionist Association, Monthly Meeting of the Executive Committee, 3 November 1924.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

letter. However, confrontation was avoided when Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn privately responded in such a manner that persuaded the Chairman not to take any further action.¹⁵¹ It is unclear as to what Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn said that placated McAlpine as it was not reported, but the inference is clear conflict within the party was to be avoided at all costs. Perhaps this was because the party had already appeared divided over C.P Williams' selection and because Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn wanted to avoid internal acrimony during an election campaign, the sole purpose of which was to see an anti-socialist candidate elected. The disagreement, however, perhaps indicated that all was not well within the Conservative party organisation.

The result, however, vindicated the decision to withdraw Bushby's candidature. C.P Williams gained the seat with a comfortable majority of nearly 4,000, achieving 56 per cent of the vote, as more than 19,000 people voted for him. Despite defeat Robert Richards increased the number of Labour votes by over 2,000 compared to 1923 demonstrating that in a three-cornered contest Richards would have undoubtedly won the seat, thus further vindicating the decision to run an anti-socialist candidate. Even though no comments from the Conservatives were reported in the local press, Lord Kenyon and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn must have been delighted with the result and during his acceptance speech C.P Williams commented that 'he had to thank the Conservative party in Wrexham which had worked as hard as the Liberals'.¹⁵² This laid to rest any accusations Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's had that his own party had failed to support Williams properly. In a final demonstration of unity the *North Wales Guardian*, reporting on the election night revelries in the Liberal club, said 'in the course of several enthusiastic speeches ...high compliments were paid to Mr. Bushby and the Conservative Association for the patriotism and national sacrifice made by the withdrawal of Mr. Bushby'.¹⁵³

In Denbighshire it was no surprise when the Liberals retained the seat as the county had been a Liberal stronghold since 1892, but the Conservatives came within 1,400 votes of taking the constituency, slashing the Liberal

¹⁵¹ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Minute Book of the East Denbighshire Unionist Association, Monthly Meeting of the Executive Committee .

¹⁵² *North Wales Guardian*, 31 October 1924.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

majority by 2,500 votes. The swing to the Conservative party was nearly seven per cent, as it gained 47 per cent of the poll with Brodrick gaining over 11,000 votes, more than 3,000 up on the 1923 election. Ellis Davies claimed that the large majority obtained in 1923 had ‘lulled many Liberals into a false sense of security and had bred apathy amongst the Liberal party Association, which had failed to campaign or canvass in the constituency until ten days before the election’.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Conservatives also claimed that ‘the increase in the Unionist vote [was] due to the heavy transference of Liberal votes in consequence of the action of Mr. Ellis Davies coquetting with the Socialists’.¹⁵⁵ Given the prevailing condition of an election conducted in the shadow of a Soviet scare, expertly exploited by the Conservative party this was probably true, but there were other reasons for the strong Conservative performance. The *Denbighshire Free Press* attributed Brodrick’s increased vote to her ‘powerful advocacy of the claims of her party’ and commented that at the same time the ‘splendid organisation work put in before the election’ had transformed the Conservative prospects in the division.¹⁵⁶ This was certainly true as between March 1923 and the election of 1924 the Conservative party in the division went from having no organisation at all to having one that covered the whole constituency, and reaped the benefits accordingly. The result reflected this improvement, one party worker commenting that ‘we have kept the flag of Conservatism flying in West Denbigh and if we only continue to work hard, I am sure that in the near future we shall carry it to victory’.¹⁵⁷ The improved result also demonstrated the wisdom of fighting an election on a policy that promised something positive for all farmers in the division – an all-embracing agricultural programme as compared to a divisive policy in Tariff Reform that had alienated so many voters at the previous election. Although they were ultimately defeated the *Denbighshire Free Press* reported that ‘the leaders of the Conservative party were jubilant with regard to the result despite the fact that their candidate was not returned.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *North Wales Weekly News*, 6 November 1924.

¹⁵⁵ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 8 November 1924.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1924.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

If the Conservatives were delighted with Gwendolyn Brodrick's result in Denbighshire then it was nowhere near the euphoria exhibited by them in Flintshire as they gained a notable and surprising victory.¹⁵⁹ When the result was announced it exceeded Conservative expectations. Goodman Roberts won the constituency gaining more than 19,000 votes, and a majority of nearly 5,000 over Thomas Parry whose share of the vote fell by over 20 per cent when compared to the 1923 election. Gwynfryn Jones' Labour vote was nearly 2,000 more than it was in 1922, and represented 19 per cent of those who voted.

The Liberal party claimed that they had lost the seat because Roberts had influenced the result by making false claims about Parry's voting record in the House of Commons. More likely was the fact that Parry was unable to campaign properly because of ill health and was represented by his sister at most campaign meetings. Liberals were initially keen to stress that this did not hamper their campaign but later admitted that without his presence the Liberal party was unable to defend his voting record in the House of Commons.¹⁶⁰ It was also claimed that many Liberals had taken it for granted that they would retain the seat and therefore had not campaigned properly.¹⁶¹

What Roberts' campaign did was successfully challenge Thomas Parry's candidature, by arguing that he was an accomplice to a discredited Labour party.¹⁶² The Conservatives were also able, with Parry unfit to campaign properly, to dominate the campaign with their political agenda. By having Geoffrey Summers campaigning with him Roberts was also able to add substance to his claim that Protection policies were needed for the steel trade in order to prevent unemployment levels rising at the Shotton steelworks. Finally, the election result revealed the relative states of the Liberal and Conservative party organisations in the constituency. Since 1913 the local Liberal Association had suffered from divisions within its ranks. These had started when many Liberals refused to endorse Thomas Parry as a candidate at the 1913 Flint Boroughs by-election and were further exacerbated when

¹⁵⁹ See *Flintshire Observer*, 6 November 1924, for articles on Conservative celebrations after election victory.

¹⁶⁰ *County Herald*, 24 October 1924.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² See for example *Flintshire Observer*, 23 October 1924.

divisions occurred between Asquith and Lloyd George supporters after 1918. As a result there was no unity of purpose in campaigning at general elections and even during the 1923 general election when the two factions were united there were still some who were unsure about Parry's candidacy.¹⁶³ This fostered an atmosphere of apathy resulting in a number of Liberals failing to poll for Parry in 1924.¹⁶⁴

By contrast during the same period the Conservative party rebuilt its organisation so that it now covered the whole constituency, with particular attention being paid to developing fund raising and increasing membership. Most importantly, the Conservative Women's Association played a vital role in canvassing and fundraising. When commenting on the remarkable result the *Flintshire Observer* said: 'local branches of women workers were formed with considerable success and the activity and enthusiasm they displayed long before the election loomed on the horizon were true portents of an approaching political landslide'.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, one of the strongest elements in the Flintshire Constitutional Association's organisation was its women's membership. Initially formed as a Tariff Reform organisation in the period leading up to the Great War by December 1923 the Flintshire Women's Unionist and Conservative Association had over twenty branches with in excess of 1, 600 members. One of its functions during 1924 was to distribute the anti-socialist newspapers '*Danger Ahead*' and '*The Patriot*'. So successful was the distribution, which targeted rural as well as more populated areas that the Women's Association asked for more propaganda literature to distribute. When this was allied to the fundraising and canvassing the Association undertook which included organising social events to raise money as well as arranging meetings with speakers, the Women's movement demonstrated how important a cog they were in the local Conservative machine.

¹⁶³ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales', p.88.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Flintshire Observer*, 6 November 1924.

Table 6.7. General Election 1924.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Total Votes</u>	<u>% share</u>	<u>MPs returned</u>
Conservative	7, 854, 523	46.8	412
Liberal	2, 931, 380	17.8	40
Labour	5, 489, 087	33.3	151
Communist	55, 346	0.3	1
Constitutionalist	185, 075	1.2	7*
Others	<u>124, 868</u>	<u>0.6</u>	<u>4</u>
	16, 640, 279	100.0	615

* This figure includes 3 Conservatives (including Winston Churchill) and 4 Liberals.
Taken from: C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*.

Table 6.8.

General Election Wales 1924.

<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats won</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Vote</u>
Labour	16	321118	40.6
Liberal	11	245805	31.1
Conservative	9	224014	28.3

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

Table 6.9

General Election 1924, North-east Wales

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>%</u>
Denbighshire	Ellis Davies	Lib	12, 671	53.0
	A.G. Brodrick	Con	11, 250	47.0
			+1421	
Flintshire	E.G. Roberts	Con	19, 054	46.4
	T.H. Parry	Lib	14, 169	34.5
	D.G. Jones	Lab	7, 821	19.1
			+4885	
Wrexham	C.P. Williams	Lib/Anti Socialist	19, 154	55.6
	R. Richards	Lab	15, 291	44.4
			+3863	

Taken from: B. Jones, *Welsh Elections, 1885-1997*.

The 1924 election marked a significant change for Conservative electoral fortunes in North-east Wales. The success in Flintshire was the first for the party in the county in over 80 years and demonstrated that it could win a socially diverse constituency. Its performance in Denbighshire proved that it could attract a large number of votes in agricultural communities where Welsh was still the first language, and in a constituency which was still regarded as a Liberal stronghold. Even in Wrexham Conservative leaders achieved their goal

of keeping Labour out (see Table 6.9). What the Conservative success in the region also reflected was the improved party performance in the Principality as a whole where its share of the vote went up by over seven per cent compared to the 1923 general election (see Table 6.8). As well as gaining Flintshire in the North it won four other county divisions: Brecon and Radnor, Pembrokeshire, Monmouthshire and Llandaff and Barry. It also won three Cardiff seats and held Newport. What the results also proved was how successfully the Conservatives deployed the anti-socialist message and discredited the Liberal party in the Principality - Labour lost three seats in Wales and while it remained the largest party its progress had been checked. The Liberals retained the same number of seats as in 1923, there was one Independent Liberal who lost his seat, but over 50, 000 fewer people voted for them and their percentage share of the vote dropped by over four per cent. Although the Conservative party remained in third place in Wales its victory in nine seats and an increase of nearly 46,000 votes compared to 1923, as it picked up many disaffected Liberal votes, was a triumph for the party.

Nationally, the election was also a huge success for the Conservative party, vindicating its decision to fight the election largely on an indictment of Labour's performance in power and the ineptitude of the Liberal party in supporting it. Its 412 victories included 162 gains, 105 of them from the Liberals, as it once more became the major party of rural Britain sweeping aside the Liberal party in county divisions while gaining 55 seats from Labour. Overall, Labour lost 64 seats, although the result confirmed its status as the party of Opposition and its share of the vote went up by nearly three percent as over one million more people voted Labour than in 1923.¹⁶⁶ (see Table 6.7). Indeed, the overall Labour losses masked a number of gains, all in industrial areas, including Edinburgh East which Labour had not contested before and Paisley where Asquith was defeated in a straight fight by over 2, 000 votes. Ironically, it was in the West of Scotland that an election pact had been made, chiefly to safeguard Asquith's position. Elsewhere election pacts appeared to have been successful. Of the 55 Conservative gains from Labour 40 occurred in straight fights, and only 15 in three-cornered contests. Of the 40 seats the

¹⁶⁶Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p 311

Liberals won, including nine gains from Labour, eight were as the result of electoral pacts, and only 15 were won without help from the Conservatives or the Labour party thus emphasising the perilous position of the Liberal party after the election.

Indeed, what the results confirmed, given the numbers that had voted for the other two main parties, was the total eclipse of the Liberal party. It polled less than three million votes and its share of the vote was virtually halved compared to 1923 as it took a mere 17.8 per cent of all those who voted. It lost 123 seats and only 35 of the 158 seats it was defending survived the election, eighteen of these outside England. It failed to take a single seat from the Conservatives and even though it gained nine from Labour, these were mostly the result of electoral pacts. In the new parliament the Conservatives had a large majority of 209 over all other parties, and the election marked the end for the Liberal party as serious contender for political power. Cook comments:

The dimensions of the Liberal disaster have a twofold significance. They marked the effective end of the Liberal party as an alternative government to the Conservatives. More subtly they marked a vital stage in the alignment of British politics and the evolution of a national Labour party.¹⁶⁷

PARTY ORGANISATION 1922-1924.

A large part of the Conservative party's success in North-east Wales in 1924 could be attributed to the reorganisation plans instituted by each Conservative Association between 1922 and 1924. In particular, the Denbighshire Conservative Association, which had been virtually inoperative since the outbreak of the First World War, was revived as a working organisation. During the early months of 1923 a group of leading Conservatives in Denbighshire, including local landowners Colonel R. Williams – Wynn, Colonel Wynne-Edwards and Colonel John Mellor as well as William Horton and Gwendolyn Brodrick met privately to discuss the future of the Conservative party in the county division of Denbigh.¹⁶⁸ Notices were sent out to known Conservative party subscribers in the constituency and

¹⁶⁷ Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p 317.

¹⁶⁸ *Denbighshire Free Press*, 24 February 1923.

65 men and women responded signifying their intention to support a new Conservative organisation if started.¹⁶⁹ Subsequently, in March 1923 Conservative party supporters met at Rhyl and formed the Denbigh Parliamentary Division Conservative Association.¹⁷⁰

Draft rules were drawn up by Colonel Wynne-Edwards and read to those assembled. An election of officers saw a number of people appointed who had held office in the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association. Colonel R. Williams-Wynn, former chairman of the Management Committee, was elected President, and William Horton chairman of the Colwyn Bay Conservative Club was elected Vice-Chairman while ten new district chairmen were appointed, six of whom had held office previously.¹⁷¹ Thus all the major towns and districts in the constituency were covered and the new district chairmen were charged with advancing organisation in their districts by forming committees, raising funds and attracting new members. Once the new chairmen had been appointed representatives were then chosen from each district in the constituency, in relation to their size, to form an Executive Committee. For example six were chosen from Colwyn Bay and four from Denbigh, the two largest towns in the division, but only one from the villages of Cerrigydrudion, Llandegla, Llangernyw, and Llansilin. These were joined on the Committee by Colonel R. Williams Wynn and Colonel Wynne-Edwards. On 26 April 1923 the Executive passed the new rules and a Finance Committee consisting of the ten district chairmen as well as Colonel R. Williams-Wynn, Colonel Wynne-Edwards and Gwendolyn Brodrick was formed. Of those who held the most senior positions in the new Association, over half came from the ranks of local landowners and thus as it had been with the West Denbighshire Association power remained with the landed establishment.¹⁷²

In October 1923 the Executive Committee decided that the women's organisation be kept separate for financial purposes and should collect their own money, and at a meeting in November of the same year it was also agreed

¹⁶⁹ DRO, Denbigh Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, DD/DM/80/1, Annual General Meeting of Association, held 1 March 1923.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, Meeting of the Executive Committee 26 April 1923.

that the Women's Association should subscribe to the central Association.¹⁷³ A year later the Women's Association made its first payment of £25. Finally, in March 1924 an agent was appointed to further election prospects and registration work. At the same time a Welsh speaking Sub-agent was appointed to assist the agent and to help address one of the Conservative party's biggest failings in Wales – the inability to address Welsh speaking communities in their native tongue.¹⁷⁴

One of the Association's first duties was to make itself financially viable. After the Finance Committee was formed in April 1923 it immediately launched an appeal for funds. Such was the success of the appeal that by March 1924 the Association had been promised over £396, of which £281 had been paid, leaving a credit at the bank after expenses of £359- 12s- 11d.¹⁷⁵ This enabled the Association to offer the princely sum of £350 per annum to the newly appointed Agent as well as offering him the facility of a new motorbike to visit the districts. Yet, the lack of an Agent between March 1923 and March 1924 meant that some of the districts remained poorly organised. As a result at a rules meeting held in December 1924 it was decided to further re-organise the constituency Association. The constituency was now split into two divisions - the Northern and Southern Areas. A new central Executive Committee was formed, comprising of twelve members, which would maintain control over both areas. However, both areas were to form its own committee and appoint its own Chairman and Treasurer. Each committee was responsible for the organisation and finance of its own area and were to appoint a part-time secretary who would ensure that the district committees remained in direct contact with their relevant area committee.¹⁷⁶

Consequently, by the end of 1924, Denbighshire Conservatives had successfully reformed their constituency Association and put it on a sound financial footing. In under two years Conservative party organisation had been totally transformed and now a robust de-centralised, more democratic system, although essentially still in the hands of the landed elite, existed in the

¹⁷³ DRO, Denbigh Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 1, DD/DM/80/1, Executive Committee Meetings, 13 October and 14 November 1923.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Annual General Meeting of Association, held 9 April 1924.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Executive Committee Meeting held 12 March 1924.

¹⁷⁶ DRO, Denbigh Conservative Association Papers, Minute Book 2, D/DM/80/2, Meeting of the Rules Committee, 15 December 1924.

division. This would have seemed almost impossible in the period between 1918 and 1922 when organisation fell into decay and ruin, and attempts to revitalise Conservative Association failed. That the party succeeded in re-establishing a flourishing organisation which covered the whole division was due to the persistent hard work of party loyalists, who embraced change and were determined to see the Conservatives survive in the constituency.

The Denbighshire Association's organisation was based on the successful model developed by the Flintshire Conservatives. After the election loss in 1922 the Flintshire Constitutional Association met to discuss the party's position and future in the constituency.¹⁷⁷ The Executive then discussed a new scheme, introduced by Mr. Ashfield Chairman of the Western Division Committee, which it was hoped would maximise Conservative support in the constituency. At a subsequent meeting on 3 March 1923 the plans were finalised. It was decided to split the existing Eastern and Western divisions into three new divisions, each with a part time Agent: the Central Division whose headquarters would be at Mold, the Eastern Division with headquarters at Shotton and the Western Division with headquarters at Rhyl. This now meant that the Eastern Area Committee controlled 15 parliamentary polling districts and 17 county council divisions with an electorate of 20,796 and the Western Area Committee was now responsible for 16 parliamentary polling districts, 17 county council divisions and an electorate of 16,198. The new Central Area Committee only looked after six parliamentary polling divisions and nine county council divisions, with an electorate of 8, 658, but it included the industrial working class towns of Flint and Mold.¹⁷⁸ At the same time Flintshire Maelor was now formally included in the new structure, with an area committee that controlled three parliamentary polling districts, three county council divisions and an electorate of 2, 254.¹⁷⁹ A Unionist Association had existed in the detached part of Flintshire since 1907, but the organisation had been left to its own devices with little contact between itself and the central Constitutional Association. Now under Hugh Peel's leadership, the

¹⁷⁷ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Annual Meeting of the Flintshire Constitutional Association, 10 February 1923

¹⁷⁸ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association Minute Book 2, D/DM/307/2, Meeting of Eastern and Western Areas Committees, 3 March 1923.

¹⁷⁹ FRO, Flintshire Constitutional Association, Minute Book 5, D/DM/307/5, Western Area District Committee Minutes, Agent's Report March 1923.

Conservative organisation in Flintshire Maelor enjoyed a close relationship with the central body and was expected to contribute and participate in the Constitutional Association's fundraising and other activities.¹⁸⁰ With all four divisional committees reporting to the Association's Executive Committee the organisation now fully covered the constituency and had an army of party workers regularly organising fundraising activities and collecting and canvassing for party subscriptions. This exceptional organisation provided excellent support for Goodman Roberts' success in 1924 at a time when Liberal party organisation was in disarray and lacking leadership.

Between 1922 and 1924 the Wrexham Constitutional Association underwent a number of changes that finally saw the end of the Williams-Wynn family's control over Conservative politics in the area. Since the East Denbighshire Unionist Association was founded in 1886 the seventh Baronet Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, had been President and Treasurer, a position he continued to hold when the Wrexham Association was formed in 1918. Nevertheless, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's omnipotent control started to slip after the War when the franchise was extended and women and workingmen were incorporated on to the Executive Committee. At the same time a new divisional structure was formed and regular balance sheets, previously not a constant feature of Sir Watkins tenure as Treasurer, were now presented.

The first indication that the Williams-Wynn family's control was diminishing came at the end of 1922, when a motion, not proposed, but supported by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, to adopt a joint Liberal/Conservative candidate at the general election was overwhelmingly lost. Nonetheless, in November 1923 he was re-elected President and Treasurer at the Association's Annual General Meeting. It was only when Edmund Bushby finished bottom of the poll at the 1923 general election – falling nearly 2,000 votes short of the second place candidate and nearly 4,000 below the Labour winner – that criticisms of party organisation surfaced. In accepting Sir Watkin Williams Wynn's thanks for standing, Bushby, who was re-elected as candidate, moved that to improve the party's electoral chances 'a special Executive Committee

¹⁸⁰ See for example, FRO, Bryn y Pys MSS, D/BP/1018, Flintshire (Maelor) Constitutional Association Meeting, Overton, 7 November 1922.

be called together at once to overhaul the organisation'.¹⁸¹ By calling for such a measure it is more than possible that Bushby felt that he lacked the leaders support, having heard about the attempts to force a Coalition candidate on Conservatives in 1923, and that the party needed to campaign more aggressively while rallying around its candidate. Certainly there was very little Conservative activity in the constituency between October 1922 and the 1923 general election, despite the restructuring of the organisation that had taken place between 1918 and 1922. Whatever the reason, Bushby's motion was carried and a special meeting of the Executive was called for 7 January 1924 – the very fact that this motion was even carried suggests that Sir Watkin Williams Wynn's almost omnipotent power was being eroded.

At the meeting it was decided that Mr Newman, a committee member, be appointed to assist Mr Leah, Secretary, in drawing up new draft rules and a review of organisation.¹⁸² The results were submitted to another Executive meeting held, on 30 January 1924 which subsequently passed the new rules.¹⁸³ This in itself was not unusual the passing of new Conservative Association rules occurred many times in North-east Wales and were often initiated and presided over by the incumbent local aristocratic President or Chairman. However, at the Annual General Meeting on 13 March 1924 a vote amongst party members resulted in a big shake-up of organisation. Sir Watkin Williams Wynn retained his position as President, as did Lord Kenyon as a Vice-President, but a new Chairman, Mr A.D. McAlpine was elected, who also now became Chairman of the Executive Committee. Two new Vice-Chairmen were elected, one of whom was a woman, Mrs Fenwick, and a new Treasurer was appointed, G.A Mowat, who replaced Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. Only three members of the old Executive were retained as 12 new members were elected, and Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lord Kenyon lost their places on the Committee. Lord Kenyon was retained as the Association's representative on the Central Council of the National Union but otherwise it was clear that power was being eased away from these two politically influential Conservative landowners. As a result of these changes Sir Watkin no longer

¹⁸¹ NLW, Wrexham Conservative Party Records, Minute Book of the East Denbighshire Unionist Association, Association Meeting 19 December 1924.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Special Meeting of the Executive, 7 January 1924.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Meeting of the Executive 30 January 1924.

attended Executive Committee meetings and was no longer involved with the day-to-day running of the Association, and only appeared as President at the Annual General Meetings – thus fulfilling the limited role that many Presidents of local Conservative party Associations now played. According to Ball, the position of President in a local Conservative Association was:

Normally an honorary position, held by a sympathetic local aristocrat...Presidents lent their prestige to fundraising appeals and often hosted fetes in the grounds of their estates, but otherwise had only ceremonial functions, the most important of which was to take the chair at the Annual General Meeting.¹⁸⁴

It is difficult to assess whether power was wrested from Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, as there is no clear evidence amongst the available sources of any major schism between party leader and the rank and file at this time – although the disagreement over campaigning later in 1924 suggests some sort of split had manifested itself in the party. Furthermore, it is quite likely that Sir Watkin's failure to fully endorse Major R. C. Roberts in 1922 and Edmund Bushby in 1923 rankled with many who had so overwhelmingly supported their selection while his retention of the offices of President, Chairman and Treasurer after the First World War may well have seemed intolerable during the new democratic age.

Whatever the situation was between Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and the party, after the 1924 annual general meeting the Association moved quickly to address inadequacies within the organisation. The new structure that was adopted in April 1921 consisting of four sub-divisions, each containing several polling district associations, was retained. Now, however, regular monthly Executive meetings were held at which the sub-division Chairmen reported on the activity held in their areas. The duty of raising new and collecting existing subscriptions was placed on the chairmen of the various districts within each sub-division. At the first monthly Executive meeting held in May 1924, the subscriptions paid in from each district were read out. However, fourteen districts failed to report and J. Leah was instructed to write to each of the Chairmen and Secretaries

¹⁸⁴ Ball 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation', p268.

reminding them to furnish the Association with a report at the next meeting.¹⁸⁵ Only seven districts failed to subsequently report at the next meeting and after this it was a rarity for any district not to report.¹⁸⁶

The July Executive meeting saw the Association intensify plans to extend the Conservative party appeal – meetings were arranged for Wrexham on 6 October and Rhos on 7 October 1924, where the principle speaker was to be Sir Joynson Hicks, Unionist MP and former editor of the *Spectator*. Plans for open-air meetings to be held at Broughton, Cefn, Cross St, Ponkey and Johnstown were also finalised. Furthermore, at the September meeting it was announced that L.S. Amery MP, who wrote the 1922, 1923, and 1924 Conservative party manifestos and was a leading party ideologist would address a meeting at Wrexham Town Hall on 20 October 1924. In comparison to the previous six years when few political rallies or events occurred, 1924 witnessed regular Conservative Association meetings, an Autumn campaign at which leading Conservatives spoke and the distribution of propaganda material. As a result the Association successfully transformed itself into a highly organised body with an elected Executive that reported monthly and held regular campaign meetings.

By the end of 1924 all three constituency Associations had well organised party machines in operation. Although the structure varied slightly from constituency to constituency, the basic Conservative organisation in all three North-east Wales divisions now centred on devolving power to local branches and sub-committees. The branches and sub committees were responsible for local party activities including canvassing and fundraising and reported back to an Executive Committee on the state of affairs in each district they controlled. This allowed the Conservative party to understand properly for the first time where its strengths and weaknesses lay. It also enabled the party to target resources and advance the Conservative cause in areas where it had not been fully represented before.

One of the effects of the new divisional structure employed by the Conservative Associations in North-east Wales was that organisation became more democratic. Nowhere was this witnessed more strikingly than in Wrexham

¹⁸⁵ NLW, Minute Book of the East Denbighshire Unionist Association, Executive Committee Meeting 5 May 1924.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Monthly Meeting of the Executive, 2 June 1924.

where the erosion of autocratic landlord power was epitomised by Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's decline as political leader of the Constitutional Association. Furthermore, in Denbighshire the creation of a new Association in 1923 witnessed the introduction of new rules and regulations that included the annual election of officers, and not merely the traditional rubber-stamping of the largest landowner's privilege to lead the local party. Even though Lord Mostyn retained his place as President and member of the Executive Committee, and thus overall control of the Flintshire Constitutional Association until his death in July 1929, thereafter a new scheme was introduced which saw the rotation of the Presidency on an annual basis.

It did not mean that landowners completely lost their influence in North-east Wales, but their control either declined or became dependent on the Associations re-selection process. This democratisation process was similar to that taking place across the country as local Conservative party Associations restructured and improved their organisations. Constituency Associations and Executive Committees, as in North-east Wales, opened their doors to women and working class members, rotation of officers became commonplace and in some cases Executive Committee meetings took place on Saturdays and evenings so that wage earners could attend. According to Ramsden:

Increased membership... necessitated changes to make the local parties more democratic; subscribers expected representation in return for their money. Abingdon's association became 'more democratic and representative in 1919' and Waterloo adopted 'a better system of representation in 1928... In 1923 the Kincardine and west Aberdeenshire Association adopted a minimum subscription of a shilling and a new set of rules... The rotation of officers was particularly important in the advent of democracy... From 1923 members at Banbury could serve on the Executive for only three years... from 1920 the chairman at Epsom was to hold office for only two years.¹⁸⁷

This all meant that Conservative Associations became less exclusive and that landowning domination was finally broken.¹⁸⁸ In North-east Wales it also

¹⁸⁷ Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p149.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250. Ramsden does point out that 'county families and local landowners dominated supreme in some county constituencies'

meant that Conservative party Associations became more professional organisations where canvassing and fundraising became routine events and not the haphazard arrangements that afflicted the pre-war Associations. In addition it meant that the party obtained many more willing and trusted workers, who joined the swelling ranks of Conservative supporters in the region.

CONCLUSION.

The 1924 general election marked an important stepping-stone for the Conservative party's long-term future in the region. The Liberal party's grip was finally broken in Flintshire and although the Conservatives lost the constituency again in 1929 they emerged as victors again in 1935 and held it until after the Second World War. While it would take a lot longer for success in Denbighshire – until 1959 – the Conservatives had come very close to toppling the Liberals in 1924 proving that after many years of futile campaigning it was now a potent force in the division. In Wrexham even though the Conservative party had merely acted in a supporting role at the 1924 general election its help in assuring that an anti- socialist candidate was elected was duly acknowledged by the Liberals. While the Conservatives would never come close to taking the constituency, it remains to this day a Labour party bastion, the Conservative party have survived and still campaign vigorously on policies and issues exhibiting the same sort of survival techniques so adroitly employed by activists in Wrexham between 1922 and 1924. Furthermore, what the Conservative party did effectively between 1922 and 1924 in North-east Wales was restructure their organisation to enhance efficiency, maximise fund raising, and increase membership to provide the party with a mass of party volunteers at election time. So much was the advance made by the party that in terms of membership, structure and management it became the most successful party in North-east Wales.¹⁸⁹ At the very least, by winning Flintshire, reducing the Liberal strength in Denbighshire and influencing the result in Wrexham the Conservatives had successfully re-established their political authority in the region. This would not have seemed possible when the party was both demoralised and driven to the edge of

¹⁸⁹ Jones, 'The Political Dynamics of North-east Wales', p.91.

extinction by the overwhelming success of the Liberals at the 1906 general election.

CONCLUSION.

Writing in *Tories and the People* Martin Pugh comments ‘like the poor, the Conservatives are always with us. While their opponents divide and coalesce, expand and contract in provoking and exciting ways they appear to remain the constant element in the British political system’.¹ This constant element has also been the most successful force in British politics, claiming power on its own or with a Coalition partner for 85 of the last 120 years. It has also remained a constant element in Welsh politics, but here the history of the party has been one of abject failure. The same 120 years which witnessed so much success for the Conservative party nationally, has been marked by disappointment in Wales as it has failed even once to win the majority of votes or seats in the Principality. For example, in 1900, when a Conservative landslide victory marked a return of 402 MPs to Westminster only six Tories won seats in Wales.² In 1924 when Stanley Baldwin’s Conservative party won 415 seats only nine Tories were returned and when in 1957 Harold Macmillan formed a new Conservative Government only six Tory MPs were elected in Wales while 365 were returned in Britain as a whole. Indeed, the party has only once come close to threatening the domination of its political opponents when in 1983 it won 14 seats from just 31 per cent of the vote. This result occurred in 1983 when Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Government was at the height of its popularity. Yet subsequent elections witnessed a decline in its popularity as it failed to win a seat in 1997, a situation repeated in 2001. Even in 2005, as the Conservative party reclaimed much ground nationally, it still only won three seats in the Principality.

The reasons for this marginalisation has its antecedents in the mid-nineteenth century, where an anglicised landed gentry led the party, which ‘alienated itself from the overwhelming majority of the people by its ‘blind’ adherence to the minority Established Church, its general disregard for the native language and its determination to maintain its privileges as a landed elite’.³ This image of Englishness obviously did little to enhance Conservative prospects and while the power of the landed elite in Wales has diminished, its

¹ Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, p. 1.

² 66 of this number were Liberal Unionists.

³ Aabel, ‘Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935’, p.439

political influence declining as a result of franchise reform in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the sell off of the great estates during the first quarter of the twentieth century, its image as English party has remained. Internal Conservative party research in the 1960s suggested that a negative image of the party still existed in Wales – the party was still seen by many as only representing English interests.⁴ However, little was done to correct this perception over the next four decades and in 2005 there were only six Welsh speaking Conservative candidates selected to contest seats for Westminster elections.⁵ In a speech at University of Wales, Cardiff just two months before the 2005 general election Nicholas Bourne, Welsh Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales, said:

Despite our pride in Welsh culture and heritage, and our Unionist credentials, Welsh Conservatives have been hindered by the notion that we are in some ways an ‘English party’. The idea that Conservatism is something imposed on Wales, not truly Welsh, has lingered for sometime.⁶

In addition to its image as an English party the political issues that have influenced Welsh voters have all been driven by the Conservative party’s opponents. Prior to the Great War the issues that dominated the political landscape in Wales were all ones that were espoused by a radical Liberal party: Church Disestablishment, Disendowment, land reform, education and temperance reforms were all extremely popular with Welsh voters.⁷ As a result the Conservative party was relegated to a minor cause in Wales by the Liberal party whose grip on Welsh politics started at the 1868 general election, as a consequence of the 1867 Reform Act, and continued until the outbreak of war in 1914. Then with the passing of Church Disestablishment Bill and the advent of Coalition Government, especially that led by Lloyd George, radical Nonconformist Liberalism lost its impetus to the Welsh voter. Even as the Liberal party went into terminal decline during the 1920s, the void it left in

⁴ Aubel. ‘Welsh Conservatism’, p.444.

⁵Welsh Conservatives Candidates, General Election 2005 [Online]. Available: www.conservative.com/getfile.cfm?

⁶ ‘Bourne: Welsh Conservatism – A Chance to Shine’, speech to the Welsh Governance Centre at Cardiff University, 5 March 2005 [Online] Available:

www.Conservative.party.org.uk/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=120431&...

⁷ Aubel, ‘Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935’, p.439

Welsh politics was quickly filled by the Labour party, which found its influence increasing as industrial disputes and trade unionism spread through the South Wales coalfields during the First World War.⁸ At the 1918 general election Labour had ten MPs elected - by 1929 it dominated Welsh politics when 25 Labour candidates were elected to parliament. The Conservative party's opposition to organised trade unionism, in particular the union levy, brought it into conflict with Labour whose domination of Welsh mining seats ensured the continued marginalisation of the party.⁹ At its lowest point, the general election of 1983, the Labour party still won 20 seats, and such was the eclipse of the Conservative party in 1997 that 'Labour took great pleasure in announcing that Conservatism was dead in Wales'.¹⁰

Yet throughout the last 120 years the Conservative party has remained resilient in Wales. This resilience, however, has not always been rewarded – the party's electoral failure not commensurate with its substantial share of the vote. For example in 1906, the first time the Conservative party failed to win a single seat in Wales, it still gained nearly 30 per cent of the vote. When this absolute failure was repeated in 1997 its share of the vote at 19.6 per cent was still nearly ten per cent more than Plaid Cymru's which won four seats. Moreover, since 1885 the Conservative party has averaged over 28 per cent of the vote in the Principality, but has only been rewarded with 170 victories from the 938 candidates it has fielded at the 32 general elections between 1885 and 2005.

It is the party's resilience and not insubstantial vote that prompted the only in-depth study of the Conservative party in Wales to date: Felix Aubel's 'Welsh Conservatism 1885-1935, Five Studies in Adaptation'. Aubel acknowledges that his thesis is ultimately one of failure and that during the period under study the party was 'relegated to the status of a minority political cause'.¹¹ But his work is also one of a dynamic vibrant party, which averaged virtually 30 per cent of the vote in the 50 years under review – nearly three times higher than the best results ever achieved by Plaid Cymru. Aubel's study examines five constituencies in Wales – Cardiganshire, Rhondda, Monmouth,

⁸ Morgan, *Wales In British Politics*, pp.283-285.

⁹ Evans, *A History of Wales*, p.102.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935', p.445.

Llandaff, Barry and Cardiff South and concludes that with the evidence available it is 'obvious that Welsh Toryism was a permanent force in the politics of the Principality'.¹² It was the party's resilience and the gap still left after Aubel's study of the party in Mid and South Wales that prompted this investigation of Conservatism in North-east Wales between 1906 and 1924; the aim of the thesis was to see if the adaptability that Aubel accords to the Conservative party in the five constituencies he analysed was repeated in North-east Wales.

As such this study concurs with Aubel's findings and suggests that Conservatism was as resilient in North-east Wales as it was in the rest of the Principality. Nonetheless, where this work differs to Aubel's is in the interpretation of the role played by the landed elite. Aubel asserts that:

The social exclusiveness of the leadership of Welsh Conservatism, its association with English interests and the generally poor organisation of the party throughout most of the Principality were responsible for the Tory failure to capitalise on the dramatic upheaval within Liberalism which occurred during the inter-war years.¹³

In this study there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the local landed elite in North-east Wales were aware of their shortcomings as English speaking, Anglican Church communicants and despite their sectional interests were at the forefront of attempts to address their negative image amongst the Welsh speaking Nonconformist population. This was especially the case in employing Welsh speaking parliamentary candidates, some of whom were even Nonconformists, and local Agents. At the same time, some landed leaders were also determined to introduce organisational change to improve Conservative prospects, despite the inhibiting and almost omnipotent control of such people as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn. Thus, the landed elite in North-east Wales were not typical of all Conservative party leaders in Wales. This thesis does not seek to exonerate landowners who evicted Welsh speaking Nonconformist tenants for not voting for their political choice, but what it does

¹² Aubel, 'Welsh Conservatism, 1885-1935', p.442.

¹³ Ibid.,pp 440-441.

stress is that by the 1920's this elite had learnt their harshly inflicted lessons well and were in most cases leading their reorganised Conservative Associations effectively, either as figureheads or democratically elected officers.

Furthermore, while a similar pattern of failure as that described by Aubel was experienced in North-east Wales, with only three Conservative election victories recorded between 1906 and 1924, two in Denbigh Boroughs in 1910 and the surprise victory in Flintshire in 1924, the results do exhibit a larger core Conservative vote here than elsewhere in the Principality. An analysis of election results between 1906 and 1924 bears this out. The average share of the vote, excluding 1918 when no Conservatives stood for election, was nearly 40 per cent in North-east Wales, but the average for the same period for Wales as a whole was 27.9 per cent. In addition the party performed well in county council elections, tying the number of seats with the Liberals in Flintshire in 1907 and winning the council in 1910 and 1913. The results were not as good in the more rural Denbighshire but were still creditable and needed explaining. After an analysis of the evidence this thesis has concluded that there was no single overriding reason, but a number of factors that contributed to the party's survival, resilience and even relatively strong election performances.

Firstly a number of demographic factors helped the party's cause in North-east Wales. By the turn of the twentieth century, largely caused by the influx of migrant industrial workers, less than 50 per cent of the population spoke Welsh in Flintshire.¹⁴ In Denbighshire Welsh was still dominant, but by 1921 less than half the population spoke the language, and in Flintshire only just over 30 per cent spoke Welsh.¹⁵ In theory this Anglicisation process helped the Conservative party, which was further aided by the fact that the region contained a large number of English-speaking Anglican Church communicants – in 1905 nearly 17,000 people attended church regularly in Denbighshire and nearly 12,000 in Flintshire, but here the percentage of churchgoers was the highest in Wales.¹⁶ Consequently, Nonconformist Liberal demands for Welsh Church Disestablishment were strongly resisted and

¹⁴ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Studies*, p.86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, p.315.

helped to galvanise a Conservative party led by Anglican Church-going landowners.

Other radical Nonconformist issues, such as temperance reform and land reform also had less impact in the region. The drinks and associated trades in 1911 employed over 3,000 people in Denbighshire and the centre of the North Wales brewing trade was in Wrexham, home to several small and large brewers at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ It was unlikely that too many people would vote for temperance measures that were likely to increase unemployment.¹⁸ The Conservative party's association with the 'trade' was therefore less damaging to its position in North-east Wales than elsewhere in the Principality.¹⁹

The demands for land reform were also less strident in a region where many Tory landowners were sympathetic to the plight of their tenants. Indeed, despite Liberal claims to the contrary, landlord-tenant relations were usually cordial in North-east Wales, and many tenants were unwilling to be associated with any agitation that took place against landlords.²⁰ The evidence demonstrates that there was strong support for many landowners in North-east Wales, perhaps suggesting that there was sympathy for their political aims. Furthermore, Tory landlords who led the Conservative party in North-east Wales were more in-tune with the changing and expanding electorate than at first appears evident. After the debacle of the 1906 general election Conservative leaders were only too aware that the party's survival depended upon their success in widening the party's appeal. Such local leaders as Lord Kenyon, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Colonel Mesham played a pivotal role in formulating plans to make the party more popular. As early as 1871 the party had forged links with the working-class when a Conservative Workingmen's Association was formed at Ruabon and by 1908 the Wrexham, Conservative Workingmen's Association had over 800 members.²¹ During the

¹⁷ Williams, *Digest of Welsh Studies*, p.111.

¹⁸ *North Wales Times*, 22 January 1922.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* The Conservative party's victory in Denbigh Boroughs in January 1910 in part was blamed on its association with the liquor trade.

²⁰ DRO, Wynnstay MSS, DD/WY/9060, Letter from William Owen to Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 18 February 1886.

²¹ DRO, Wynnstay MSS, Ruabon, Rhos, Penycae and Cefn, Workingmen's Association, DD/WY/5801, Rules of the Association, 24 August 1871.

same year, acting on a recommendation from Lord Kenyon, the West Denbighshire Constitutional Association selected, Sam Thompson, a working class parliamentary candidate. Thompson was one of only eight working class candidates, and the only miner to be selected by the party to contest the January 1910 general election. His candidature in West Denbighshire ended in failure, but the move signalled the intentions of the party to widen its appeal to the electorate. After 1911 an initiative to open workingmen's clubs saw many new clubs open across the region, especially in East Denbighshire where six new clubs opened between 1911 and 1913.²² By the start of the First World War most major towns and villages in North-east Wales had a Conservative workingmen's club. After the War a number of initiatives were also undertaken to increase working class support, most notably the Conservatives attempted to establish an alternative movement to the Trades Unions as labour committees were set up in many towns and parishes. This movement was part of a wider Conservative programme to combat trade unionism, but as happened elsewhere they petered out, often through lack of support but also because the workingmen's club offered a more convivial environment. It did not necessarily mean that the party lacked support amongst the working classes.

These moves belie the accusation Caradoc Rees levelled at William Ormsby-Gore during the December 1910 Denbigh Boroughs general election campaign that he represented a party, which stood for 'the privileged classes against the masses'.²³ Even though the vast majority of Conservative candidates 1906 and 1924 came from the landed and professional classes (see table 7.1) their representation was very similar to that of the Liberal party's in the region. Yet only one Conservative candidate came from the aristocracy, Ormsby-Gore, who curiously was the only Conservative victor between 1906 and 1924, and only four were major landowners, the rest came from the professional and business classes. On the other hand from the 27 Liberal candidates who fought at the six general elections, three were industrialists, one of whom was a steelworks owner, one was a manufacturer, one a timber merchant, and the rest came from the legal profession or were high-ranking

²² *North Wales Guardian*, 10 December 1913.

²³ *North Wales Times*, 26 November 1910.

civil servants. In fact it could be argued that by fielding one working class candidate the Conservative party was more representative of the masses.

Table 7.1: Professions of Conservative Party Candidates, 1906-1924.

<u>General Election</u>	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Profession</u>
1906	Denbigh Boroughs	G.T. Kenyon	Landowner
	Flint Boroughs	J. Eldon-Bankes	Judge/Landowner
	Flint County	H. Edwards	Barrister
1910 (J)	Denbigh boroughs	W. Ormsby-Gore	Aristocrat/Landowner
	East Denbighshire	D. Rhys	Lawyer
	West Denbighshire	S. Thompson	Miner
	Flint Boroughs	H. Tilby	Businessman
	Flint County	Col. H.R.L. Howard	Professional Soldier/Landowner
1910 (D)	Denbigh Boroughs	W. Ormsby-Gore	Aristocrat/Landowner
	East Denbighshire	Alfred Hood	Businessman
	Flint Boroughs	Col. H.R.L. Howard	Professional Soldier/Landowner
1922	Denbighshire	G. Brodrick	Farmer/Landowner
	Flintshire	A. Jones	Judge
	Wrexham	Major R.C. Roberts	Barrister
1923	Denbighshire	D. Rhys	Barrister
	Flintshire	E.H. Goodman Roberts	Barrister
	Wrexham	E. Bushby	Businessman/Landowner
1924	Denbighshire	G. Brodrick	Farmer/Landowner
	Flintshire	E.H. Goodman Roberts	Barrister
<u>By Elections</u>			
1906	East Denbighshire	A. Griffith-Boscawen	Politician/Landowner
1909	East Denbighshire	Sir F. Cunliffe	Landowner
1913	Flintshire	Hamlet Roberts	Professional soldier

The Conservative party also made strides to incorporate women into the party after 1906. This was initially accomplished through the activities of the Primrose League, which embraced members from all walks of life regardless of sex. Many women joined, some rising to the highest ranks in the League in North-east Wales.²⁴ During its heyday prior to the First World War the League was an overwhelming success in the region. Attendances of over 1,000

²⁴ BLO, Primrose League MSS, Roll of Habitations for 1186, 1904 and 1912.

people at its fetes were not uncommon, and membership in many parts remained buoyant. In 1914 there were over 400 members at the Henllan and Ruthin Habitations, nearly 600 members at the Colwyn Bay and Hundred of Maelor Habitations and over 800 at Denbigh. At its peak there were over 4,200 League members in North-east Wales.²⁵ In the Primrose League Roll of Habitations held at the Bodleian Library Oxford, a handwritten entry against the Denbigh Habitation, which still had over 800 members in 1914, reads 'the best in North Wales'.²⁶ Women were also successful fundraisers and canvassers for the party and thus remained an important cog in the party machine. By 1911 there were 27 branches of the Flintshire Women's Unionist Association with a membership in excess of 2,500. In Wrexham no such membership figures were recorded but the Women's Association held regular outings, fetes and bazaars which proved to be some of most successful Conservative party functions in the region. This involvement continued after the Great War. In Denbighshire as organisation fell into decay the Ruthin Women's Association helped keep the flame of Conservatism alight with meetings and social functions. By 1923 in Wrexham there were 17 local branches of the Women's Unionist Associations and in Flintshire, by the end of the same year, over 1,300 members represented 16 branches in the county.

What the evidence demonstrates is that by developing flourishing women's, and working class movement's as well as a large Primrose League membership the Conservative party had an army of party workers that it could call on during election campaigns. Working class members were praised by Ormsby-Gore for the assistance they gave during his victorious 1910 election campaigns in the Denbigh Boroughs. Even so it was women who proved the most enthusiastic of workers, repeatedly earning praise for their tireless work on behalf of the party – taking much of the credit for the successful campaign Goodman Roberts waged in Flintshire in 1924.

Finally, the Conservative party's survival and resilience also owed much to the transformation of its organisation in North-east Wales. Poor organisation in 1906 was one of the major factors in Conservative election defeats in the region. The party slowly started to address its shortcomings after

²⁵ BLO, Primrose League MSS, Roll of Habitations for 1886, 1904 and 1912.

²⁶ Primrose League MSS, Bodleian Library, Roll of the Habitations, 1912.

this, as the improvements made to the women's and working class organisations testify, but it was after the First World War that reorganisation gathered pace as the party sought to consolidate its position during the period of Coalition Government. In essence this meant devolving power from a central Executive Committee to large number of smaller parish branches. By 1924 the three constituency associations had a network of local branches that undertook the bulk of canvassing, registration, propaganda and fundraising work – all of which reported back to the constituency Association Executive Committee on the state of Conservative affairs in each town and village in the region. This gave the Conservatives a significant advantage over the Liberal party in the region, which was suffering from the effects of inner party conflict caused by splits between Independent and Coalition Liberals. This bred apathy as canvassing and campaigning was often ignored.

There is however, no way of disguising the fact that the party was unsuccessful in achieving a major breakthrough at parliamentary elections between 1906 and 1924 and ultimately it has to be concluded that while the Conservatives did have a considerable amount of support in North-east Wales, they were unable to turn it into an appreciable Westminster presence. This does not mean that the party was not worth researching, it merely made it a more complex study - one that involved trawling through the myriad of documents and papers that related the Liberal success story to uncover the evidence that chronicled Conservative party survival during the period. In conclusion, what this thesis has hopefully demonstrated is that in spite of its poor performance at general elections, and the hostile environment, the party remained a significant force in North-east Wales politics between 1906 and 1924. Indeed, in spite of this environment the party successfully established Primrose League Habitations with a considerable membership, and was able to assess and adapt its appeal to the working class and women under a shrewd leadership that was acutely sensitive to local needs over national concerns. Furthermore, under a carefully planned re-organisation programme after the First World War, it put in place structures that would be the launching pad for success. The party was finally rewarded for its survival strategies and its persistence with a parliamentary victory in Flintshire in 1924 – its first in a mixed county constituency of working class and middle/upper class elements.

A strong Conservative tradition has remained in North-east Wales ever since. The party lost Flintshire in 1929 but regained it in 1935, thereafter maintaining a parliamentary presence in the county until after 1983. The Conservatives had to wait longer in Denbighshire but finally won the constituency in 1959, holding it until 1983. After this date boundary changes totally transformed the North-east Wales constituencies, but the Conservatives held three seats in the region until 1997, after this the party again went un-represented in the region, but in 2005 it won the Clwyd West seat. Thus the Conservative party remains to this day a potent force in the region. That it has is in part due to the way the party adapted during the period 1906 to 1924, one of the most difficult periods in its history, and emerged a modern dynamic political organisation.

APPENDICES

Appendices.
Religious Communicants North-East Wales, 1905.

<u>Denbighshire</u>	<u>Communicants</u>	
	<u>Church of England</u>	<u>Nonconformists</u>
<u>Urban Districts</u>		
Abergele	458	1, 005
Colwyn Bay and Colwyn	1, 823	2, 701
Denbigh	924	1, 658
Llangollen	820	1, 890
Llanrwst	251	1, 103
Ruthin	470	765
<u>Rural Districts</u>		
Chirk	446	1, 134
Llangollen	130	394
Llanrwst	382	2, 138
Llansilin	446	1, 104
Ruthin	985	3, 169
St Asaph	726	2, 144
Uwchaled	177	1, 134
Wrexham Urban/ Rural	8, 429	14, 428
Llanelian/ Llansantffraid	<u>222</u>	<u>572</u>
<u>Grand Total</u>	16, 689	35, 339

<u>Flintshire</u>	<u>Communicants</u>	
	<u>Church of England</u>	<u>Nonconformists</u>
<u>Urban Districts</u>		
Buckley	788	811
Connah's Quay	170	584
Flint/Colehills Fawr	918	655
Holywell	496	670
Mold	525	992
Prestatyn	326	460
Rhyl	1, 538	1, 613
<u>Rural Districts</u>		
Harwarden	1, 191	1, 747
Holywell	2, 346	5, 046
Overton	954	245
St. Asaph	<u>1, 461</u>	<u>1, 163</u>
<u>Grand Total</u>	5, 952	8, 201

Appendices

Primrose League Habitations and Membership in North-east Wales.

Habitations with known members:

<u>Year Founded</u>	<u>Habitation</u>	<u>Members</u>
1886	Wrexham	246
1886	Ruthin ¹	586
1886	Denbigh ¹	816
1886	Llangollen ²	76
1886	Vale of Clwyd, Henllan ²	553
1886	Vale of Clwyd, Llanwrst ²	119
1886	Elwy ²	113 (1886); 196 (1891).
1886	Llandrynog ²	70
1892	Llangedwyn ²	300
1886	Ruabon ³	571
1886	Brynhinalt, Chirk ³	43
1886	Rossett ³	208
1886	Gresford ³	150
1886	Hundred of Maelor ⁴	336
1886	Chwilir, Bodfari and Caerwys ⁴	167
1886	The Mostyn, Mold ⁵	525
1886	The Mostyn, Holywell ⁵	50
1891	The Pellyn (Bala – Merioneth)	438

Habitations – unknown membership

Habitation

Holt and Marchwiell ¹
Abergele ²
The Yale, Llandegla ²
The Eyarth, Llanfair ²
The Plas Power, Bersham ³
Cefyn and Rhosymedre ³
Sir Watkin, Brymbo ³
Rhyl ⁴
The Mostyn, Whitford ⁴
Llewelyn, Ysceifog ⁴
Llwynegrin ⁴
Connahs Quay (founded 1896) ⁴
St Asaph ⁵
The Mostyn, Flint ⁵
The Mostyn, Greenfield ⁵
Bagillt ⁵
Caerwys (founded 1894) ⁵

All information taken from M. Pugh, *The Tories and The People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).
Constituencies: 1: Denbigh Boroughs; 2: West Denbighshire; 3: East Denbighshire; 4: Flint County; 5: Flint Boroughs.

Appendices

Structure of Wales /North-east Wales Conservatives, 1885-1918.

1885-1906.

2 PROVINCIAL DIVISIONS OF THE NATIONAL UNION:

- SOUTH WALES DIVISION - Consisting of 17 County and Borough Parliamentary constituencies of Brecon, Carmarthenshire, Glamorgan, Pembrokeshire, Radnorshire.
- NORTH WALES DIVISION - Consisting of 4 Borough and 8 County Constituencies of Caernarfonshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Merionethshire, Montgomeryshire, Anglesey.

NORTH WALES DIVISION LEADERSHIP, 1893.

- President: Lord Penrhyn, Penrhyn Castle, Llandegai, Bangor.
- Chairman: P.P. Pennant, Nantlys estate, Flintshire.
- Vice Chairmen: G.T. Kenyon, MP Denbigh Boroughs.
Earl of Powys, Powys Castle, Welshpool.
Colonel W.E. West, Ruthin Castle, Ruthin, Denbighshire.

NORTH WALES DIVISION LEADERSHIP, 1906.

- President: Lord Penrhyn.
- Vice Presidents: Earl of Powys.,
Lord Kenyon, Gredington Hall, Hanmer, Flintshire.
- Treasurer: Hon L.A. Brodrick, Coed Coch estate nr Abergele, Denbighshire.
- Hon. Secretary: Mr. R.A. Mainwaring, Galltfaenan estate, Denbighshire.

WEST DENBIGHSHIRE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSOCIATION, 1908.

- President: Colonel Mesham, Pontrufydd, Bodfari, nr. Denbigh.
- Vice Presidents: Col.R.W.Wynn, Dolben estate, Abergele.
Col. Mellor, Abergele.
Mr. Joseph Nanson, Llangollen.
Col. Sandbach, Hafodunos hall, Abergele.
- Treasurer: Mr. G. H. Denton, Trefnant, Denbigh.
- Secretary: Mr. C.C. Mott, Ruthin.

1913. Same officers as above, except 20 Vice Presidents, including:

Lord Bagot, Ruthin.

L.A. Brodrick, Coed Coch.

Countess Dundonald, Gwrych Castle, Abergele.

Col. W. Cornwallis West, Ruthin Castle.

Seventh Baronet Sir Watkin Williams- Wynn, Wynnstay, Ruabon.

Duke of Westminster.

Appendices.

Structure of Wales/North-east Wales Conservatives, 1885-1918,Continued.

EAST DENBIGHSHIRE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSOCIATION.

1908. Chairman and Treasurer:- Seventh Baronet Sir Watkin Williams- Wynn.

President: Lord Kenyon.

Agent and Secretary: Mr.J.Leah, Wrexham.

1918. Same officers as above, but Sir Watkin Williams- Wynn listed as President, Chairman and Treasurer, Lord Kenyon as Vice- President.

DENBIGH BOROUGHES UNIONIST ASSOCIATION, 1917.

Chairman: Lord Kenyon.

Treasurer. Hugh Peel, Bryn-y-Pys estate, Overton.

Executive Committee of the 4 Contributory Boroughs:

Wrexham. J.A. Chadwick, J. Buchanan Taylor, Charles Murless, Edwin Hughes, Harry Armstrong, S.Edward Jones.

Holt. T.H. Lester.

Denbigh. R,H, Bowdage, Charles Cottom, W.H.Williams, Edgar J. Swayne.

Ruthin. S. Gregson Ellis, H.H. Springman.

FLINTSHIRE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSOCIATION.

1910. President: Lord Mostyn, Mostyn Hall, Mostyn, Flintshire.

Vice President: W.J.P Storey.

Treasurer: P.T. Davies- Cooke, Gwysaney Hall, Mold.

1915. Same officers as above, except W.J.Owen, Shotton as Vice President.

THE PEOPLE SHALL PREVAIL!



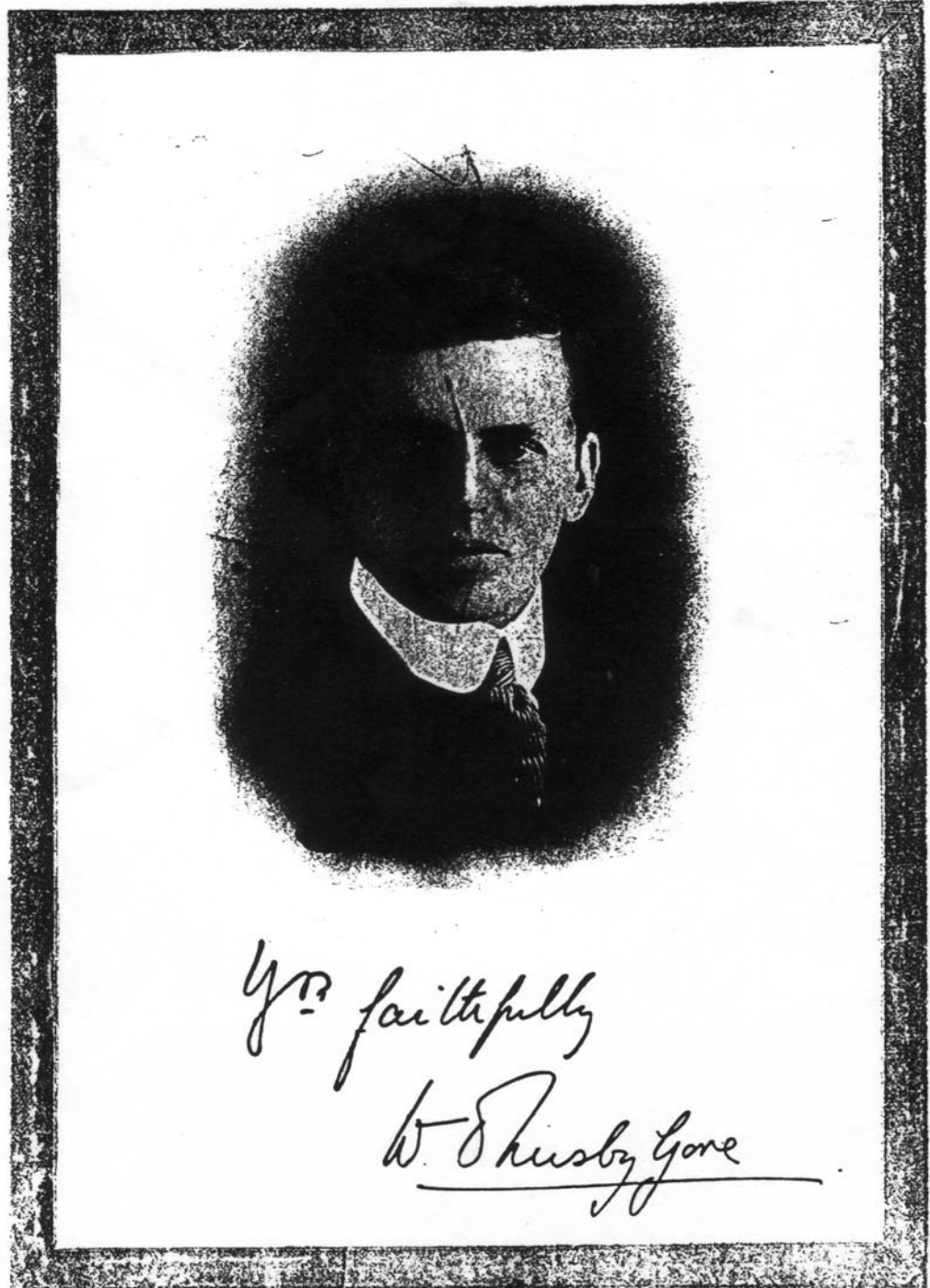
CLEMENT EDWARDS

AGAIN
FOR .. *Denbigh Boroughs!*

The People! The Budget! and The Constitution!

Printed and Published by Woodall, Minshall, Thomas & Co., Border Press, Wrexham.
From an original election handbill held at the Denbighshire Record Office, DD/GL/188.

VOTE FOR



ORMSBY GORE

Printed and Published by Jarman & Sons, Ltd., Argyle Street, Wrexham.

From an original election handbill held at the Denbighshire Record Office, DD/GL/189



SIR WATKIN WILLIAMS-WYNN,

"THE PRINCE IN WALES."

**"I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute."**

Taken from: D. Canadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*.

Appendices

Untitled Poem

I stood on the bridge at midnight
I admit it was rather late
I wondered if again the Tories
Would win this fight be eight

To tell you the truth I'd been boozing
With some Tory pals at a pub
And we finished up the night
Down at the dive – that's their club

So you can really understand
That my head was not very clear
As to how the Tories won before
Unless they were helped by beer

Or did the 'Lords' ordain it
That Gore should go to town
And with the ancestral sword
Should there with great renown....

I could not quite believe it
That the Lords would serve him so
His sire fared rather badly
In the days of long ago....

Taken from Denbighshire Record Office, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/1697.
Notes on the family of Orsmby Gore.
Untitled poem on December 1910 general election.

Appendices.

Once More! As Before.

Once more! As before
In with a roar! – Ormsby Gore!

So were in for a general election
And everyone asks – What for?
And they say ‘That the Lords may
Be done with
That Lloyd George may then have some
Fun with
What is left – is – our pockets! Oh lor’
Once more! As before
In with a roar! – Ormsby Gore!

He cares not a bit for his country
He praised up Redmonds Home Rule
He stays with a Duke in his palace
And then calls that Duke a big fool
Once more! As before
In with a roar! – Ormsby Gore!

His speeches at Limehouse or Mile End
Have captured the Yankee, I hear;
For a thousand a week they now offer
If he’ll go and Limehousey them there
Once more! As before
In with a roar! – Ormsby Gore!

A fine old Welsh name in Caradoc
It employs a short surname like Rees
But he ‘Goes the whole hog for destruction,
So send him away if you pleas,
Like a candle he’ll flicker, or perhaps
Even Quicker
Be blown out like No. 8 grease
Once more! As before
In with a roar! – Ormsby Gore!

Taken from Denbighshire Free Press Saturday 10 December 1910.
For the December 1910 general election.

Appendices

Ormsby-Gore Again.

Why are all enlightened workmen
Turning Tories now in Wales
'Tis because our able member
In his wisdom never fails
Pleading at the legislature
That their wrong he may restore
That is why the Denbigh workmen
Mean to vote for Ormsby-Gore

Note his courage in the Commons
And his weighty speeches scan
Men of different views proclaim him
As the future leading man
With his aid and skilful worker
Soon shall lock the foreign door
That is why the Denbigh workmen
Mean to vote for Ormsby-Gore

Mark the way in which he labours
Read his writings in the press
See how other nations prosper
With no signs of deep distress
Now we understand the reason
And our hearts begin to glow
That is why the Denbigh workmen
Mean to vote for Ormsby-Gore

Bring your best you will not beat him
Fight the fight and take defeat
Glowing tributes from our statesman
Show reverses you will meet
You will wonder at the verdict
And your torch lamps as of yore
Will remain for ever darkened
Enter William Ormsby-Gore.

Denbighshire Free Press, 26 November 1910.
For the December 1910 general election.

Appendices.

Victorious

Rest awhile triumphant warrior
Duty called you and you obeyed
Though opposed by fierce destroyers
Denbigh Boroughs is still saved
We were bound to win the battle
Trusting as we did before
To our gallant young commander
William Arthur Ormsby-Gore.

Mighty shells around us burst
But they failed to mow us down
Every scheme was wrought to rout us
But he held the princes crown
Let the fearful cannons thunder
And the lions let them roar
Who shall tame those wild offenders
William Arthur Ormsby-Gore.

Hate was strong, but we are victors
No surrender in the right
We retained the true position
And have put the foe to flight
Look ahead the clouds are breaking
There are brighter days in store
Honour then your brave commander
William Arthur Ormsby-Gore.

Do not cast away your weapons
Righteous arms you may preserve
First the welfare of the nation
Must not be allowed to swerve
Fight for freedom truth and justice
Hold the good for evermore
You have now a good defender
William Arthur Ormsby-Gore.

Denbighshire Free Press 17 December 1910.

For the December 1910 general election.

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