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Women in the Organisation of the Conservative Party in Wales, 1945-1979.

Sam Blaxland

Abstract

Despite being hidden from view and side-lined by history, women were a key and active part of the Conservative Party's success in Wales in this period. Although rarely candidates or Agents, a number of Conservative women were forceful and brave political campaigners. Whilst they were often the defenders of social conservatism and rigid gender norms their actions and discourse sometimes owed more to the kind of 'progressive' politics they were resisting than they seemed to realise. On a wider scale, many middle-class women members in Wales, as in Britain on the whole, provided the Party with financial and electoral support, but their membership of branches and associations was often part of a broader patchwork of respectability, social activity, conservatism and resistance of societal change. As a result, these groups offered women an opportunity to exercise a form of social and organisational leadership.

Introduction

Despite popular perceptions and consequent misunderstandings, the Conservative Party, and right-wing politics, have always had firm bedrocks of support in Wales. Although the Labour Party dominated, electorally, in prominent industrial regions, support for Conservatism in places like Cardiff, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, significant sections of the North Wales coast, and the large rural counties that border England has been substantial. For the vast majority of the post-Second World War period, the Party has been Wales' second strongest political force both in terms of parliamentary seats won, as well as the share of the vote gained at election times. Of (roughly, depending on boundary changes) 36 Parliamentary seats in Wales the Conservative Party held between three at its worst performance in 1966, and eleven at its best in 1979. In 1983 it won fourteen.ⁱ The share of the vote the Party won was at its highest in 1959 and 1979 at 32 per cent, whilst its lowest was 24 per cent in October 1974. The Welsh share of the vote tended to be ten percentage points lower than the equivalent figure for England.ⁱⁱ The Party, therefore, whilst weaker

overall in Wales than in other parts of Britain, was the nation's 'second party' in this period, providing a threat and a challenge to Labour in some of the nation's most marginal seats.

Conservatism relied heavily on various peoples and groups to bolster or to reinforce these significant but often precarious foundations. The fact that many seats outside of the industrial heartlands were marginal demonstrates that there were tangible rewards for working in the Party's name. It is in this context that Party activists, and women in particular, were key cogs in the political machine. Although a myriad of factors determined how the electorate chose to vote, historians have concluded that grass-roots activist support undoubtedly helped advertise, raise funds for, and provide a voting base for the Party.ⁱⁱⁱ The women in these ranks continually outnumbered their male counterparts by a considerable margin, including in Wales. Indeed, more women were members of the Conservative Party in post-war Britain than any other political movement, forming the backbone of local Conservative politics as a result.^{iv} Although many women were members of the Labour Party in this era as well, the proportion of women members was lower, deterred, perhaps, by the Party's more general 'cloth-cap' and masculine image.^v Although there are no precise surviving figures, what evidence there is suggests that there were twice as many female as male members of the Conservative Party in Wales in the post-War period.^{vi} In comparison, women made up 40 per cent of the total membership figure for the Labour Party in 1949, for example.^{vii} Some of these Tory women were more than just members, becoming active and vociferous public campaigners. Despite this central role, their presence in the broader picture of this period – particularly in Wales - has thus far been underrepresented.

To redress this imbalance, this article focuses on the activities and the rhetoric of local female activists and associations in Wales from 1945-1979. In a break from most political history scholarship on this period, it utilises less conventional archival and printed sources, many of which are from the perspective of women themselves, like secret constituency reports, petitions, letters, committee minutes and newspaper reports. The latter is of particular value because it was through the local press (and the generally conservative *Western Mail* in particular) that women activists were occasionally given a platform to articulate opinions that tended to be a blend of their Party's, and their own, views on politics and society. This article addresses two different aspects of women's involvement in local Conservative politics. It discusses the campaigning work of a handful of

senior activists, and the language used as part of that. It then focuses more broadly on the role played by wider women's associations. Few women filled the role of parliamentary candidate, but a significant number were influential campaigners in public at election time, deconstructing any notion that all were passive or subservient cogs in a patriarchal machine. Whilst women performed many of the typical gendered roles ascribed to them, such as organising tea parties and stuffing envelopes, this forum gave prominent figures in their ranks a platform to exercise a form of organisational and social leadership that often had much more to do with attempts to buttress a more traditional version of their world view whilst resisting the rapid social and cultural changes of the era, than it did with pure politics. In both cases women actively shunned the emerging language and actions of second-wave feminism and 'liberation'. However, because these political women were much more three-dimensional than is often presumed, their actions and language often meant they more closely mirrored these movements than they would have admitted or recognised, or that stereotypes allow for. This therefore poses wider questions about the persistence, in some quarters, of conservatism in this period, but it also sheds light on the similarities and the differences between those women who identified as 'left' and 'right' wing.

In addressing this issue, the article makes a contribution to several historiographical fields. Welsh women's history is a relatively new area of study and scholarship is still developing. It was not until 1981 that Deidre Beddoe mused upon what an alien, newly arrived on Earth, would think if she read the entire cannon of Welsh history. Beddoe suggested that the alien would be confused about how the Welsh procreated, so absent were women from the narrative and the analysis.^{viii} Since then, Beddoe has been at the forefront of redressing what was a clear imbalance, along with fellow historians like Angela V. John, and Ursula Masson. Their work offered strong pieces of social history that filled yawning chasms in the historiography.^{ix} When these authors mentioned politics, however, there were curious absences. For example, when Beddoe gave the Welsh Political Archive lecture in 2004 with the promising title 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', the legions of Welsh Conservative, or right-wing, women were absent from the discussion.^x This was in-keeping with more general historiographical trends. Although Beddoe had no call to say it in 1981, what the same alien would have noticed, had she been inclined to look, was that the Conservative Party was also wildly under-represented in an unfortunately small corpus of Welsh political history that was dominated by Liberalism or the politics of Labour

and unionism.^{xi} Even since 1981, only a handful of pieces of scholarship have attempted to engage with either women or Conservatives in any great depth or detail.^{xii}

Wales, therefore, is not the first natural port of call for anyone studying either Conservative or women's history, let alone a fusion of the two. But it is not just the Welshness of the historiography that impedes this; so does the politics of gender history. This historiography has long emphasised the links between (big and small 'l') Labour and women. Although sources on working women are often less conventional and regularly more difficult to obtain – like oral testimonies - the context of growth in the field of social history and feminism from the 1960s onwards meant that historical research tended to lean towards areas such as working mothers and women's life in working-class areas or neighbourhoods.^{xiii} Hence, the popular image of the politicised woman from modern Wales takes the form of the miner's wife, heroically joining the world of picket lines, strikes, and nation-wide travel tours – in many cases for the first time – during the infamous 1984/85 strike.^{xiv} The former MP for Swansea East, Sian James, perhaps typified this; even more so after she featured as a central character in the 2014 film *Pride*, which was based on that period. Labour history has tended to shun Conservatism for obvious reasons, whilst a strong nationalistic strain in Wales has dismissed it for the way in which it emphasises Britishness and continuity, not separateness and difference.^{xv}

When thinking about Conservative women in British history more broadly, there is, most obviously, the burgeoning corpus of work on Margaret Thatcher. This presents her as an individual who made remarkable symbolic strides for women in British politics, who rhetorically espoused many feminine qualities, and who 'displayed little interest in helping other women advance, made anti-feminist statements and distanced herself from the women's movement'.^{xvi} For Green, Thatcher was someone whose hostility to ideas like working women grew as she herself became more successful, although she was 'clearly aware that her femininity could be politically useful'.^{xvii} She was a middle-class 'domestic feminist'.^{xviii} Jackson and Saunders argued that Thatcher had to 'create her own model of female leadership', whilst for Laura Beers Thatcher worked to 'valorise housewives' but was 'unsupportive' of equal rights and did 'little to encourage' women's participation in the workplace.^{xix} For her latest biographer Charles Moore, she made much of 'housewifely virtues', whilst having a resolute belief in the notion that 'she alone' through her actions and her policies had 'rescued Britain from its post-1945 years of semi-Socialist decline'.^{xx}

At the other end of the scale, when focusing on 'ordinary' Conservative women, historians have tended to concentrate on them as voters, analysing their natural social conservatism, the overtly masculine image of Labour, and the effective rhetoric the Party deployed around household budgets and family life.^{xxi} Much less attention has been paid to women in their capacity as vigorous and politically conscious activists, or to the nature of Women's Associations across the country, and how they shed light on the nature of middle-class culture after the Second World War. Some work has discussed the nature of women's activities as rank-and-file members and the importance of local associations, groups and committees, but this kind of female conservatism, as Cowman argued, is presented by such authors as 'a problem that required investigation' or as 'something unexpected and perplexing'.^{xxii} Campbell, for example, presented Conservative women largely as 'powerless' and 'subordinate' actors in a 'highly conformist' organisation.^{xxiii} Few have questioned the extent to which women exercised a significant degree of political independence and agency in the form of social leadership as part of, or through, these forums, often commanding and marshalling larger groups of peers more effectively than their male counterparts. There has also been little attention paid to the role key female activists played in disseminating the Party's policy and – crucially – their own personal messages to a wider electorate. Examples from Wales as explored in this article demonstrate both that Tory women wielded a form of quiet but forceful influence in and around their spheres, and that they were sometimes, in their own right, brave and vociferous independent political campaigners.

The period 1945-1979 has been selected for a number of key reasons. It was after the General Election defeat of 1945 that Women's Associations were formally incorporated into the Party structure and a deliberate recruitment drive under the guise of Lord Woolton's scheme spiked their numbers, albeit temporarily.^{xxiv} The 1940s is also a useful point to begin the discussion because it has been suggested that women born before 1945 were inherently more conservative than those raised after it under the welfare state. As the increasingly older membership of the Conservatives between 1945-1979 would have tended to have fallen into this bracket, this period allows for an exploration of the social attitudes of such groups.^{xxv} Although the character and the timbre of local political societies had changed markedly by 1979 – the year a Conservative woman was elected Prime Minister – the vehicle and the mechanisms had not crumbled to ruins or rusted as they would do by the beginning of the twenty first century. Tory women activists still performed many,

although not all, of their traditional functions, so a further sense of continuity within this time-frame can be established. On the other hand, however, the wider nature of societal change between 1945 and 1979 adds a different dimension. The period witnessed a sea change in British political culture and social life almost unrivalled in the modern era, one that encompassed rising affluence, and dramatic social change with the arrival of second-wave feminism, radical left-wing politics, and the dawn of a distinct and unbridled youth culture.^{xxvi} In the specific realm of politics, this was the era of rapid changes in the field of electioneering, conducted more on the television as time passed and less through the public meeting or on the doorstep.^{xxvii} The latter had always been a crucial part of the local activist's *raison d'être* in a less technologically advanced Britain. As such things impacted particularly on women, this makes charting the changes, continuities, and the reactions within their associations all the more fruitful and intriguing. A greater body of work exists on this topic from pre-Second World War years, and the inter-war period.^{xxviii} This article's analysis of the post-war period allows comparisons with that better understood era to be teased out. Although Conservative women and their culture changed significantly after the Second World War, in many respects there are significant parallels to draw between the post- and the inter-war periods.

Grass-roots activists and their ideologies

It is easy for the historian to miss the level of influence Conservative women had in Wales because they so rarely occupied prominent positions or ones associated with power like prospective parliamentary candidate or Agent – the figure who was trained by the central Party and employed to organise and run Associations.^{xxix} When women were chosen for such roles it was because the results were foregone conclusions or inconsequential, or because, in the case of an Agent, they possessed the feminine 'gift...of administration'.^{xxx} Almost all Agents in this period were young, unmarried, and working in unwinnable seats.^{xxxi} Between 1945-1979, only nine women stood as Conservative candidates throughout Wales' 36 constituencies^{xxxii} – none of which were marginal, let alone winnable. That averaged out at less than one per General Election.^{xxxiii} Many of the barriers that willing women ran up against were local selection panels, where Association chairmen regularly side-lined women.^{xxxiv} Even though she was labelled an experienced and good campaigner, Pamela

Thomas was struck off the interview list for the seat of Newport in the run up to the 1964 election purely because of her sex.^{xxxv} Women, as Maguire noted, were often complicit in the drive to stop other women becoming candidates on the grounds of their natural conservatism, or jealousy.^{xxxvi} The sources sometimes reinforce many of the more obvious interpretations and stereotypes of Tory women as rather politically naive and interested only in the superficial. A visit by David Gibson-Watt MP to speak to the Barry constituency's women in 1970, for example, was reported as having gone 'down a treat' because of his 'lofty charm' which the women thought was 'nice'.^{xxxvii} It is in this context that much of the analysis about women's relative lack of prominence in the higher echelons of local Conservative politics has been conducted.

The context of Welsh political culture in this period is also vital to our understanding of Conservative women, their backgrounds, their activities and the pattern of their dispersal across Wales. Labour dominance – both politically and culturally, with a small and large 'l' – in Wales was one key factor that determined why, in some seats, despite reasonable numbers of Conservative votes, very few people, including women, were willing to declare themselves as outright Conservatives, or to work for the Party.^{xxxviii} One woman in Rhondda was reported to have shooed the Conservative candidate, Francis Pym, away from her door in 1959 even though she was going to vote for him, because of her concern at 'what the neighbours would say' if she saw them talking.^{xxxix} Jonathan Evans, a future Conservative politician, growing up in the Ebbw Vale seat in the 1960s described how he perceived there to be a system of political nepotism that abounded in Labour-dominated regions, particularly the public sector. He sensed that promotion would go to teachers, for example, who were generally supportive of Labourism, and this added to people's reluctance to declare a Conservative affiliation.^{xl} It was said, only half-jokingly, that to put up a Conservative poster in many parts of industrial Wales was to invite a 'half brick through the living room window'^{xli}, or a 'whiz-bang' through the letterbox.^{xlii} Even by the end of this period, reporters in the Valleys still commented on the strength of such feelings and attitudes. People with long memories spoke critically of Churchill's supposed sending of troops to Tonyandy, whilst children declared they would vote Labour, when they were old enough to, like their parents.^{xliii} Although the Party was strong in many parts of Wales this overarching attitude had the potential to colour broader perceptions of it.

Despite this, however, the case of Wales in this period opens up an opportunity to re-evaluate the wider role played by women across Britain, the most noticeable of whom tended to be senior figures in a local association, often heading up the women's branch, or playing an active role in it. When one studies local files, and the reports in the middle pages of newspapers, however, it is possible to offer a much more nuanced picture of women's public involvement, and in assembling a small collective biography of such figures, other different themes emerge. Although backroom work was an essential task of most willing Conservative women, they sometimes took themselves, and their party's message, out on the stump, demonstrating in the process a flare, an independence of mind, and an autonomous political identity. These women were often (although not always) the wives of prospective candidates, or association chairmen: supposedly 'his staunchest supporter, his most enthusiastic worker, his permanent organiser'.^{xliv} A typical image that appeared in campaigning material, and particularly in the press throughout this period, was the candidate standing over his spouse as she stuffed envelopes full of electioneering material.^{xlv} But their organisational role sometimes extended beyond merely being a 'staunch supporter' of a husband, something that had undoubtedly been a strong feature of inter-war local Conservatism. Another of the features of that period had been the Primrose League which had the tendency to 'look back' whilst still making a 'contribution to the modernization of right-wing politics', and it was this mix of characteristics that tended to define some key Welsh Conservative activists after 1945.^{xlvi}

In assessing particular individuals it is possible to re-examine the role of Conservative women, and draw attention to the fact that they were far from a homogenous group. An important example of such a woman was Hilda Protheroe-Beynon, the leading female activist in the Carmarthen seat in the late 1950s and 1960s. As the wife of the Association's Chairman she was, in her own words, 'virtually press-ganged into being a candidate' for the 1964 General Election. On the surface, 'Mrs P-B' (as she was known locally) was an archetypal Tory woman: a self-declared 'ordinary housewife' – despite being a farming businesswoman - who organised and gave speeches strictly between 'the housework and the meals'.^{xlvii} But observers sent to report on the campaign in Carmarthen noted that she delivered such speeches in a manner that demonstrated she 'did not give a rap for highfaultin' political cross-talk', speaking her mind 'bluntly, militantly, and without fear or favour'. Concentrating primarily on pensions and agricultural issues she injected notable life

into the election 'with robust platform speeches...which [were] always off the cuff'. Although praise was understandably forthcoming from the supportive *Western Mail*, reporters took special care to note how Mrs P-B supplied 'the sparkle' and 'the fireworks of the hustings' attracting much attention for the Conservatives 'by her personality'. Local Conservatives were reported to be pleased that, whatever the outcome of the election in Carmarthen, the case for Conservatism had been put forward 'in no ineffective manner' by their candidate.^{xlviii}

It is noteworthy that her rustic and almost eccentric campaign tactics stood in such contrast to the methods of the incumbent Labour member for the seat, Megan Lloyd George, who was one of two female Labour MPs in Wales at the time.^{xlix} Lady Megan was as far from a typical Labour woman as could be imagined – and unusual even for a politician, given her elite background and 'family tradition of political service'.^l She was part of what the *Western Mail* called 'a deadpan exercise in the earnestness of political aspirations'.^{li} 'Mrs P-B' was fighting a hopeless campaign and therefore had nothing to lose, but it still remains significant that in a contest against another woman, and a Lloyd George in particular, it was she who provided the 'sparkle' that resulted in newspaper stories being about her and not Lady Megan. Such a positive interpretation is reinforced by a memo from Conservative Central Office which noted that she was 'extremely well known' because of her 'colourful and ebullient' character.^{lii} In her style and her tactics she was forthright and unlike the typical image of a Conservative women, or the wife of a senior figure. Even though she claimed to be reluctant about campaigning, there is more than just a faint echo of Margaret Thatcher in 'Mrs P-B', who, despite cultivating her own image as a housewife, had said in 1959 that she would 'vegetate if I were left at the kitchen sink'.^{liii}

This blend of conservatism with strident campaigning tactics was to be found in other women in Wales in this period. Some, like Kathleen Smith, who was an activist in Caernarfon in the 1960s, also introduced a greater sense of ideology into proceedings, making a forceful argument about her personal views on the place of women in politics and society. In 1966 she penned an article for the *Western Mail* that demonstrated a curious mix of the kind of progressive language associated with the decade, and a much longer-standing social conservatism. Under the eye-catching headline 'Why not put more women in power?', Smith argued that women should be Members of Parliament in equal ratios to men, and perhaps in even greater ratios considering their stronger abilities to budget, form

good relationships, and represent broader interests. Again, there were similarities between this piece and one of Thatcher's earliest (and most feminist) forays into public discussions on the matter, when, in 1952, she had written 'Why not a woman Chancellor or Foreign Secretary?'^{liv} It also echoed rhetoric from the wider Women's Movement in this period – the fulcrum of which was the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1968 - which had recognised that 'public life and the workplace were primarily male spaces'.^{lv} Smith set out feminine political qualities of 'persuasion' and 'selflessness' contrasting these with the masculine traits of 'belligerence, grab and exploitation'.^{lvi} Her 'overriding reason' for arguing that Britain needed women politicians, however, was because of the 'moral contributions' they could make. She wrote that 'now the Church sits on the fence' it was up to women to articulate 'guidance' on 'crime, affluence, contraception and abortion...or any other serious problems of modern life....always, women have set the moral standards through their influence in the home, but now that the Church has lost its grip on life, it is vital that women should publically exert their influence on moral issues'.^{lvii}

Although she did not explicitly say it, Smith was offering an outright disavowal of the kind of progressive and feminist ideas and rhetoric that were quickly becoming a feature of political discourse in Britain in the mid-1960s.^{lviii} For all the generalisations that have been made about that decade, it was one in which, through many areas of life – be it music, urban redevelopment, social legislation or political movements – 'modernity [was] made visible, tangible', causing high levels of excitement, anxiety and disapproval.^{lix} Conservative reactions to modernity were not new. Inter-war Conservative women had constantly disassociated themselves from feminism in its (very different) 'first wave' form on the grounds that it was too aggressive and controlling. Clear parallels, however, exist between Conservative critiques of both first and second wave versions of feminist ideas.^{lx} Smith's argument was not anti-women, but it was grounded in a traditional understanding of feminine qualities. In taking aim at the failures of the Church she bound up many of the concerns about moral decline with the role women specifically could play to fill that vacuum. What she seemed less conscious of was the fact that parts of her argument, and certainly the headline of the piece itself, owed something to this relatively new discourse that she was trying to distance herself from. Whilst her language displayed many continuities with statements from the earlier inter-war period, Smith's explicit call for women to take up positions of power was a very post-war type of rallying cry: it appeared

the same year as Juliet Mitchell's 'ground breaking' essay on women and 'the Longest Revolution' did in *New Left Review*.^{lxix} Although Mitchell and Smith would surely have balked at the idea that they shared a vaguely similar position, elements of their rhetoric were indeed familiar. Crucially, Smith's article was also indicative of the drawing of battle lines between Labour and the Conservatives in Wales. As Evans and Jones have noted, the steady decline in the strength of Labour associations since the war was given a shot in the arm and a new impetus in the lead up to the emergence of second wave feminism, and with that came renewed and fresh associational activity.^{lxxii} The context of 1966 is key too. Harold Wilson had been in power for two years and his Labour government would go on to enact sweeping liberal reforms in areas like contraception and abortion that Smith was so concerned about.^{lxxiii}

Despite these very significant changes, and the ways in which the grass-roots of other political parties were changing, a sense of continuity still remained a central theme in Conservative circles, unsurprisingly so considering the socially and culturally conservative worlds of Tory women's societies. In 1970, Wales' 'top Tory' activist, Mrs Irene Everest, was still exhibiting a remarkable blend of those characteristics that had defined some of her counterparts like 'Mrs P-B' and Kathleen Smith. She ran a large association in Barry, where the 'bachelor' candidate Raymond Gower was supposedly accorded 'hero' status (he had defeated a rare female Labour MP, Dorothy Rees, to win the seat in 1951) and whose 2,000 members took on the 'feminine election tasks of addressing envelopes'.^{lxxiv} Everest herself admitted that she only had so much time to devote to politics because her husband's business 'keeps him working late'. She spoke from platforms about 'prices, cost of living, and housewifely election issues'.^{lxxv} Again, however, initial appearances provide a telescoped view. Buried deeper in the report on Mrs Everest's activities are the revelations that she was a forceful and independently minded campaigner, deliberately travelling to Labour Party stronghold areas, 'preferably alone' and unaccompanied.^{lxxvi} These were places where a vigorous political street culture had long set the tone of debate, and the deliberate decision to travel to such places was indicative of a certain kind of independence of thought and action.^{lxxvii} Although she was quoted as saying that this wasn't 'a bit brave', the reality would have been slightly different. She had been warned that in places like Caerphilly 'I would probably have my car turned over'.^{lxxviii} Whilst this was obviously an example of exaggeration for effect, such places had large communities that were certainly hostile to Conservatism.

Mrs Everest's decision to 'go into non-Conservative areas' because she found the 'hostile looks' from other women 'exhilarating' speaks volumes about the attitudes of these women canvassers.^{lxxix} Such vignettes should encourage a re-evaluation of Campbell's suggestion that Conservative activists were 'coy'.^{lxxx} It emphasises the importance of studying individuals and not thinking about groups of political women as homogenous, and it demonstrates that those who took on leadership or campaigning roles could be quite the opposite of coy.

A note of caution should be sounded here, however. Whilst some prominent Conservative women in this period were demonstrating an unusual degree of autonomy, it is still possible to note subtle but important differences when they were compared with activists from other political parties. Two Conservative women from Wales in 1959 and 1966 went on the record to argue that it was 'male prejudice' that kept women away from front-line politics and stymied their ambitions, but in Labour ranks similar activists argued that 'prejudice' was 'dying' and on the wane in local Labour associations.^{lxxxi} One commented that she had been 'welcomed as a candidate and as a woman', signifying a subtle but significant difference between the two main political parties in Wales in this period.^{lxxxii} Labour wives like Mrs Llewellyn Williams were far more likely to talk of the need to go out to work during her husband's 1959 campaign. In contrast, when the Conservative camp were asked the same questions, Mrs Anthony Arnold replied that she provided her spouse with 'a pair of comfortable flat shoes'.^{lxxxiii} It was Labour, a party that in theory had been committed to sexual equality from its beginnings^{lxxxiv}, which adopted and supported Eirene White as the MP for Flint East from 1950-1970 whilst the Conservative Association in the seat argued that their representative had to be a man because the industrial nature of the constituency was 'unsuitable' for a woman.^{lxxxv} In terms of campaigning strategies and public profiles, Conservative women – including the fiery and independent ones – still adopted more traditional methods in this period, as they were expected to. (Mrs Everest raised eyebrows in 1970 for not wearing a hat whilst campaigning).^{lxxxvi} It would have been unthinkable, for example, for a wife of a Conservative candidate in 1970 to be pictured, dressed informally, and perched on her doorstep hugging her 13 stone Pyrenean mountain dog as a means of gaining attention. This was Plaid Cymru's tactic.^{lxxxvii} Four years later, young Plaid Cymru female activists were pictured, lined up and holding each other by the waste - physical

symbols that their (often older) Conservative counterparts would never have engaged with.^{lxxviii}

Like the women whose footsteps she followed in, Irene Everest helps complicate the historical construction of a 'typical' Conservative woman. Most women did not go so forthrightly into the political arena, or make such bold statements. The fact that these women did, however, is of great importance. They help convey a subtler and more complex idea of the Conservative grass-roots woman in this period. In some ways, and particularly in regards to their value systems, they were representative of the wider cohort of women. In public, they remained, into the 1970s, symbols and exponents of a certain brand of gendered politics, and of social and cultural conservatism. On the other hand, however, these senior activists were transgressive and less representative in their openly political nature, their willingness to parade their politics, and their campaigning techniques. In behaving as they did, and in making some of the statements they made, they certainly demonstrated that sections of the Conservative Party had moved on considerably from the turn of the century when the Primrose League was 'instrumental in keeping [women's] activities in the background'.^{lxxix} There is also evidence that some of the persuasive new ideas regarding gender that were entering British politics had not passed such women by unnoticed. The language of liberation could indirectly be found in some of their pronouncements, and their independence of thought and activity demonstrated a further sense of change from the inter-war period, even if such women were relatively rare. Such attributes reflect, in many ways, John Campbell's portrayal of the most famous Conservative woman of all, Margaret Thatcher: she was 'the archetypal Tory lady in a hat...quintessentially...suburban', but also highly unusual; someone with deep convictions and a zeal for the political, who vociferously demonstrated 'exceptional single-mindedness'.^{lxxx}

Associations, class and leadership

Despite being some of the most active and more unconventional women, key figures like Protheroe-Beynon, Smith and Everest were part of a much more densely populated world, where very large groups of women met in various circumstances to work for the Party or socialise under its auspices. At the end of the 1940s, the Conservative Party was still

something that people joined in earnest – and in many seats in Wales they did so in greater numbers than those who joined Labour. In 1949, Swansea West’s Association had 2,450 female members (and 350 male).^{lxxxix} The equivalent figures for the Labour Party were 279 and 417 respectively.^{lxxxii} The Barry seat boasted an ‘astonishing’ 6,000 Conservative women members alone in the same period, when Labour’s total membership figure was 1, 111 (564 men and 547 women).^{lxxxiii} Even seats like the notoriously radical Merthyr Tydfil had 300 women members in its Association during this time.^{lxxxiv} Strikingly, this was the same number of women members as the Labour Party had in the seat. The only seats in which Labour women outnumbered men in the post-war period were those in urban (and suburban) Cardiff, and Newport.^{lxxxv} Conservative figures were certainly healthy, although they never reached some of the towering figures in other parts of Britain in this early period, such as the 20,000 members in Bradford.^{lxxxvi} Though Conservative numbers declined notably in this period, by the 1970s many of the women’s branches in those Welsh seats where Conservatism had fertile ground were still strong. Barry for example still had 2,000 women members in 1970.^{lxxxvii} As many historians have noted, women were vital as Party workers, ensuring that the local political machine continued to tick.^{lxxxviii} But their wider activities, their political consciousness, and their social make-up demonstrates that these larger groups of Conservative women were key actors in local politics, and the associations they gathered in offered opportunities for a form of political and social engagement and leadership.

The typical image of a Conservative woman at election time was a volunteer ‘busily addressing envelopes at long trestle tables’, and this was indeed commonplace in most Welsh constituencies too.^{lxxxix} They were also door-knockers and leaflet-deliverers.^{xc} This kind of campaign tactic may already have been on the wane by the 1940s - Labour in particular had developed ‘remarkably’ in its ability to communicate with voters over the airwaves in the 1930s – but pavement politics was not suddenly displaced.^{xc} In the early post-war period the two were part of a tactical mix. For example, the likes of Peter Thorneycroft went out of his way to address crowds made up exclusively of women and offer sincere thanks for helping to elect him as the MP for Monmouth in 1945.^{xcii} Even after the television relegated the local activist’s importance for spreading the word, they did not diminish completely, and they still played a part in that process.^{xciii} The television, after all, did not enter every home, and even when electricity finally came to all houses in all remote

areas of Wales, fears of cost or modernity meant some traditional canvassing methods would have been appreciated.^{xciv} Women also raised enormous amounts of money for the Party, an activity which took on a different tone after the 1949 Maxwell Fyfe Report ruling that limits had to be put on individual donations to single constituencies.^{xcv} This cash went into oiling the mechanisms of the local Party, paying, if possible, for Agents, cars, posters, and election expenses.^{xcvi} A proportion of it was also sent to Central Office in the form of a quota scheme, calculated on a sliding scale formula.^{xcvii} Annual fetes, balls, and cocktail parties, as well as other general events, often raised enormous sums.^{xcviii} As with political campaigning, fundraising gave women a profile and an importance at the grass-roots that was recognised and acknowledged across the board. As Donald Walters, an association chairman for much of this period, noted in 1974 'we could not operate a viable Conservative Association in Cardiff North West' without 'the women'.^{xcix} Many years later he maintained that women members had been 'everything' to the local Party.^c As such, this activity should be characterised as more than just peripheral gendered work. As so many seats in Wales were marginal, and very few were ever in rude financial health, women's work sustained the Party, ensuring it could operate 'on the ground' in many parts of Wales.

Women therefore were undoubtedly the Party's 'strongest organisational assets'.^{ci} However, although money and activity helped fund and advertise Conservatism, the extent to which their activities were politically advantageous to the party is less obvious to pin down. Money in this period still came from other sources, like business and donations.^{cii} They certainly created conditions for the Party to advertise itself more effectively and more loudly, but it is impossible to know what degree of success it would have achieved without such volunteer help.^{ciii} Bale is correct to argue that 'there is no straightforward correlation between strength of organisation and constituency success'.^{civ} It is reasonable to suggest, however, as Johnson has done, that at least in terms of making the Party's presence felt, making it appear more mainstream, and for persuading some key people to vote, women were an important aspect of the local Conservative machinery.^{cv} It is also widely accepted that similar kinds of Labour activity in Wales helped draw favourable 'general attention' to the Party.^{cvi}

On the other hand, some forms of political influence that Welsh Conservative women wielded were less positive in the eyes of the Party. Two examples from the early 1950s demonstrate this. After a defeat in the Conway constituency in 1950, the local

Association dispensed with its candidate, Colonel Price-White, and instead chose another local man, Peter Thomas, to represent the Party instead.^{cvii} The Bangor Ladies' Branch took great umbrage at this, however, writing to the Party Chairman, Lord Woolton, to dissociate itself from the Association.^{cviii} They wrote letters to the local press and collected a 600-name strong petition calling for Price-White to be reinstated as a candidate.^{ciix} At the same time an argument was unfolding in Swansea West, where the Mumbles Ladies' Branch disassociated itself from the Association over a dispute about how much money should be directed to social rather than political ends.^{cx} The disagreement left the Association without a women's Chairman, and the 'rebel' women were threatened with disciplinary action from the Central and Regional Offices if they did not 'fall into line'.^{cxii} When the marginal Swansea West seat was not won by the Conservatives at the following election, the fractious nature of the Association, which very much included the women, was blamed.^{cxiii} Both incidents demonstrate, however, that forceful and principled members of Ladies' branches in Wales were not always cast from the mould of conformist and loyal foot soldiers. They were capable of operating, en masse and independently within the Party, in a manner not in keeping with their image as passive pawns in a patriarchal Party system.

Political non-conformity and attempts to disrupt the workings of an Association were possible from women's sections, but this was certainly not common. The most significant and noteworthy aspect of their activity was when the political realm met the social one. Conservative women had long been characterised (if only tongue in cheek) as a 'pack of savage matrons in mink baying for blood and flogging and capital punishment'.^{cxiii} Without doubt, Associations in Wales were shot through with a staunch social conservatism (as demonstrated by their chief campaigners). Pledges to maintain, and then to re-introduce, capital punishment were regularly met by cheers from Tory women.^{cxiv} They were often the barrier to other women achieving senior positions, and groups across Wales were reported as being 'resolutely anti-feminist'.^{cxv} Yet, simultaneously, such organisations were a place where women could exercise a form of social leadership that often had very little to do with politics. Hinton argued that during the Second World War middle-class women, through their voluntary work, upheld the continuities of class rather than broke these barriers down. Organisations like the Women's Voluntary Service provided opportunities for 'housewives to assert themselves in the public sphere, but to do so in ways that did not threaten the overarching' class and gendered norms of the era.^{cxvi} For these women, an ethos of public

service contrasted with the more 'individualistic sensibilities characteristic of the emerging consumer culture'.^{cxvii} The case of Conservative grass-roots women demonstrates a continuity with this kind of behaviour, even if their strength and numbers dwindled as the decades past. Hinton argued that, by the 1950s and 1960s, with the proper arrival of consumer culture and social movements, the 'death knell' was sounded for such organisations: explicitly feminist groups should not be seen as continuity organisations, because their aims and ideological underpinnings were so starkly different.^{cxviii} Those wartime-style organisations that did continue to exist seemed 'old fashioned'.^{cxix} This is correct, but this study of Wales suggests that these kinds of institutions did not necessarily die, even if they were weakened and even if they did indeed become more about fighting against the 'tide of the times'.^{cxx} If one kind of group symbolised continuities with the kinds of social groups and the kind of work that Hinton identified, then it was these types of socially and culturally conservative, 'resolutely anti-feminist' women's associations.

There are several layers of evidence for this, one of the most striking features of which is how such organisations remained staunchly and rigidly middle-class well into the post-war decades. This interpretation stands in contrast to many of the conclusions that are drawn about this era. Firstly, this period encompassed the so-called 'de-alignment' of class politics, with the breakdown of economic structures supposedly resulting in 1974 being the final year when definable class-based voting took place.^{cxxi} Secondly, scholarship also indicates that across Britain during this period, Conservatism attracted significant levels of working-class supporters and voters as it had done since the nineteenth century.^{cxxii} Similarly, the Labour Party had always had a distinct middle-class dimension to it.^{cxxiii} Undoubtedly, Conservatism garnered support in Wales from outside its middle-class base. If it had not, it would not have won some of its more marginal seats in the period. But activists and voters remained two very separate constituencies, and many of the long standing features of Welsh political and social life meant that to express public support for Conservatism still unfavourably marked one out in an area of Britain where the roots of class, tradition and community were buried deep. Class, as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has argued, was centred on self-perception, self-identification and collective identity as well as more material and wealth-orientated factors.^{cxxiv}

Social surveys from the 1960s highlighted that people actively associated moving to the more leafy and suburban Western fringes of Swansea, for example, with going 'up a

step', with some of them joining the Conservative women's society as a result.^{cxxv} When Charlotte Bennett, a former Organising Secretary and later Agent in Wales during the 1970s and 80s, was asked who Conservative activists were in Wales she replied: 'I think of posh ladies!'.^{cxxvi} A Labour Agent in the same period admitted that she had long received 'jibes' about her 'Conservative-type' hyphenated surname.^{cxxvii} It is telling that one Valleys activist had to launch a defence of her fellows in 1972 by saying that 'we are not snobs, not wealthy, not grinding the faces of the poor'.^{cxxviii} Dividing lines of class and perceptions, were therefore drawn between the two parties, artificially exaggerating the divide between them, their supporters and their activists. It was in this context that women exercised a similar kind of organisational agency as identified by Hinton, based on political voluntary work and social activities, or a fusion of both, that was bound up with their social class. Luncheon clubs, which were a staple of middle-class activity, were organised with vigour and rigour by Conservative women – 'arrive at 1pm prompt on the first Friday of every month'^{cxxix} - the cost and culture of which would have been off-putting to many working-class women.^{cxxx} Pictures from such events, held in places like Swansea's Dragon Hotel, show formal, and often older, women gathered in pleasant and relatively plush surroundings.^{cxxxi} Cocktail parties and cheese and wine evenings, both of which carried strong middle-class connotations, were organised so regularly (often in stately homes, or places like Cardiff Castle) that on some occasions, like in 1964, separate associations found that they had booked the same venue for the same kind of, but separate, event.^{cxxxii}

It was within this sphere that middle-class women performed leadership and organisational duties, marshalling and co-ordinating events that had a much wider social impact. What becomes clear is that, whilst events were held broadly under the umbrella of politics, this was much more an expression of a wider social, rather than political, identity. Politically, many of these grass-roots women seems to express an apathy about politics that may have been a driving factor for some of their more senior members, like Irene Everest, to transgress, perhaps feeling forced to take their message to the public sphere. Conservative women on the whole, however, tended to be far less like their Labour counterparts, who had a long history of being much more politically motivated, listening to lectures and speeches on a more regular basis.^{cxxxiii} The unusually high proportions of Labour women (and the general strength in numbers) in seats that were marginal, like those in Cardiff, might well be explained by their explicitly more politicised ethos.^{cxxxiv} Again, the

Conservative contrast echoes Hinton's analysis of those wartime middle-class groups. He argues that because 'class had a life beyond politics it can supply a richer and more fruitful conceptual framework' than politics alone.^{cxxxv} In such light, the behaviour of certain Conservative women at political meetings takes on a fresh character. Take, for example, the report from a bemused Regional Area Agent in 1957, who, whilst attending a meeting in Pontypool, watched 'an influx of about 20 women members' into the meeting 'who were actually attending a whist drive in the room upstairs. They were all members of the Association [but] to my amazement they all took a ballot paper and after handing [it] in they trooped back to the whist drive'. He added, 'it is typical of the unorthodox energies displayed by the women's organisation'.^{cxxxvi} For such women, the Conservative Association was not their first priority, but it was undoubtedly part of a patchwork of respectability, and of socialising with like-minded individuals, in whose world politics lent an air of grandeur, but was not their primary concern. (Anecdotal evidence suggests the same was true of many people - mainly men - who drank in Conservative Clubs).

This notion of community respectability and voluntary work was not just confined to political activity. Carmarthen's Hilda Protheroe-Beynon, for example, whose husband was a JP and had an OBE, was an active member of the farming union, the Girl Guides, the Church, and 'other' wider, generally middle-class, groups.^{cxxxvii} Social studies of football clubs in rural Wales in this period reveal that women exercised very similar organisational roles within those bodies, essentially ensuring that a long-standing feature of the local community could continue to function, even if they had very little interest in football itself.^{cxxxviii} To understand the rationale behind women joining and staying in Conservative Associations we need, therefore, to look beyond the boundaries of the political, whilst keeping it firmly in our sights. We also need to understand the changing nature of society, and the way in which some women were resitting this. Conservative associations had once been a conduit for middle-class housewives to do something, but in a world of more freely available entertainment and leisure pursuits, this was less of a driving force. The country was quickly changing from a time when 'acceptable behaviour was more circumscribed, conventions more rigidly adhered to, and choices in lifestyle and leisure more limited, localised, and repetitive'.^{cxxxix}

But upholding some sense of tradition and maintaining continuity was clearly still a motive for many women, especially in an era that was increasingly marked out by the

blooming of radical, feminist politics. Declining and tired Labour associations had been given a shot in the arm, and had some new life breathed into them, by fresh ideas.^{cxl} Into the 1970s and beyond the increasingly older membership^{cxli} of these associations in Wales became largely subconscious resisters of such change, buttressing traditional notions of gender and politics whilst setting their political activity into a wider social context.^{cxlii} Despite the ageing profile of the women and the more fatigued nature of grass-roots politics at the end of this period in general, dozens still volunteered, for example, to make trifles for prominent social functions, or sandwiches for branch meetings (whilst the men put away the chairs) in the stronger associations.^{cxliii} They became the last bastions of an associational and voluntary culture that was a much greater feature of the pre-war and war years, but one that continued to relate to conservatism and the Conservative Party. Hinton was correct to argue that such activities appeared old-fashioned, but that was a reflection of the Party's membership and activists, of which there was still – unlike now – a significant rump.^{cxliv}

Conclusion

Our greatest understanding of a Conservative woman is what we know about former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and yet legions of less visible women were part of the Party's structure across the country, contributing to the tone and the nature of the wider organisation. In some respects, what we know about Thatcher can be transposed onto these more 'normal' and conventional Tory women in this case study of Wales. Like her, some of the more senior and prominent activists were independently-minded, forceful and vociferous political campaigners, different in many respects to the more common image of hard-working women who ultimately played a back-stage and subservient role in local politics. Like Thatcher, also, they were the proponents of a form of social conservatism, advertising and making speeches about their housewifely virtues and concerns. What is so noticeable, however, is that they slot much more neatly into a feminist discourse than they would have admitted, or perhaps would have realised. In arguing, for example, that women should be as equally represented in parliament as men were, their language owed much to the rhetoric of the times, even if their reasoning and explanations for such attitudes certainly did not. In this sense, such women from this period represented a paradox. The values they wished to express to a broader public were rooted in a social conservatism and

a permissiveness that often had to be departed from in order for them to make their arguments.

More broadly, women's branches and associations in Wales retained their conservative and traditional character in a much more typical fashion – an avenue of analysis in itself which has remained unexplored in Welsh historiography. These Associations were also vehicles for women to explore and exercise a form of influence. Although the extent to which they did so is difficult to pin down, it is certainly the case that through their voluntary and fund-raising work, women helped advertise the Conservative Party to the Welsh electorate. As most Welsh seats held by Conservatives were marginal, and because there was a streak of suspicion about Conservatism running through the Welsh electorate, the significance and the importance of such work cannot be dismissed, even if the electorate tended to vote based on other, broader, national issues; the information for which they received more and more from the radio and, increasingly, the television. For such activists, however, politics was not always the primary motive for their engagement with political organisations. The Conservative Party in this era remained one of the final organisations through which members could express a sense of sympathy with pre-1960s society and culture. Through this associational and voluntary work, these middle-class, and increasingly older, women contributed to buttressing the traditional perceptions of class and gendered political hierarchies. Hence, despite the supposed 'de-alignment' of class politics in this period, there was still a staunch and identifiably middle-class tone to Conservative activists by the 1970s – evidenced by their behaviour, the continuation of luncheon clubs, and their increasing average age. In an era often loosely defined by radicalism, and in a part of Britain often loosely defined as left-wing, it is important to note the significance, and the longevity of such women and their organisations.

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Notes

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- ⁱⁱ Lukas Audickas, Oliver Hawkins and Richard Cracknell (2016) House of Commons Briefing Paper: UK Election Statistics, 1918-2016, 7 July, pp. 18-19.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See for example, John Ramsden (1995) *The Age of Churchill and Eden, 1940-1957* (London: Longman), p. 115; Stuart Ball (1994) Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 274.
- ^{iv} Joni Lovenduski, Pippa Norris and Catriona Burness (1994) The Party and Women, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 611.
- ^v Joni Lovenduski (1996) Sex, Gender and British Politics, in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds), *Women in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 14.
- ^{vi} See, for example: Swansea West Basic Report, 1949, CPA, CCO 1/7/521; Cardiff West Basic Report, 1949, CPA, CCO 1/7/521; Basic Report Barry, CPA, CCO 1/8/528, 21 February 1951; '1,000 women Conservatives at open-air meeting', *Western Mail*, 3 July 1953.
- ^{vii} Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds) (2000) *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 306.
- ^{viii} Deidre Beddoe (1981) Towards a Welsh Women's History, *Llafur*, 3, 2, p. 32.
- ^{ix} See, for example, Deidre Beddoe (2000) *Out of the Shadows: a history of women in twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press); Angela V. John (ed.) (1991) *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press); Ursula Masson (2010) 'For Women, for Wales and for Liberalism': *Women in Liberal Politics in Wales, 1880-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).
- ^x Deidre Beddoe (2004) Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales, *National Library of Wales Journal*, 33, 3, pp. 333-347.
- ^{xi} That year, for example, Kenneth O. Morgan published his ground-breaking book *Re-birth of a Nation*, which paid very little attention to Conservative politics. See Kenneth O. Morgan (1981) *Re-birth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).
- ^{xii} Exceptions are Felix Aubel (1996) The Conservatives in Wales, 1880-1935, in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press); Sam Blaxland (2014) A Swinging Party?: The Need for a History of the Conservatives in Wales, *North American Journal of Welsh Studies*, 9; Matthew Cragoe (1996) *An Anglican Aristocracy: The Moral Economy of the Landed Estate in Carmarthenshire, 1832-1895* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); Matthew Cragoe (2015) Defending the constitution: the Conservative Party and the idea of devolution, 1945-74, in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (eds), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885-1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester: Manchester University Press); Andrew Edwards (2011) *Labour's Crisis: Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives, and the Decline of the Labour Party in North-West Wales, 1960-74* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press); Geraint Thomas (2013) The Conservative Party and Welsh Politics in the Inter-War Years, *English Historical Review*, 533, 128 (2013); sections in Martin Johnes (2012) *Wales Since 1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
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- ^{xiv} For examples of Welsh history that stress the importance and the prominence of labour, see the iconic expression of the tradition: Hywel Francis and David Smith (1980) *The Fed: The South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London: Lawrence and Wishart). See also David Smith (ed.) (1980) *A People and a Proletariat* (London: Pluto Press); and Gwyn A. Williams (1978) *The Merthyr Rising* (London: Croom Helm).
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- ^{xvi} Harold L. Smith (2001) The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship, 1960s-2000, in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson), p. 285.
- ^{xvii} E.H.H. Green (2006) *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Arnold), p. 15
- ^{xviii} Green, *Thatcher*, p. 15.
- ^{xix} Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (2012) Introduction, in their *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 11; Laura Beers (2012) Thatcher and the women's vote, in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 118.
- ^{xx} Charles Moore (2013) *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorised Biography: Volume One* (London: Penguin), pp. xiv, xv.
- ^{xxi} See Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (1996) Explaining the gender gap: the Conservative Party and the women's vote, 1945-1964, in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 196; Butler and Stokes quoted in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the gender gap', p. 202; Joni Lovenduski (1996) Sex, Gender and British Politics, in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds), *Women in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 14; Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (1993) Gender and Party Politics in Britain, in

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xxii Krista Cowman (2010) *Women in British Politics, c.1689-1979* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 89.

xxiii Beatrix Campbell (1987) *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London: Virago), p. 265, 269, 275; See also Martin Pugh (1992) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (London: Macmillan), p. 310; David Jarvis (1996) *The Conservative Party and the Politics of Gender, 1900-1939*, in in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 188; Susan Kingsley Kent (1996) *Gender and Power in Britain: 1640-1990* (London: Routledge), p. 335, 350.

xxiv Andrew Thorpe (2009) *Parties at War: Political Organisation in Second World War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 149.

xxv Beers, Thatcher, p. 116.

xxvi Mark Donnelly (2005) *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson), p. xiii, 3, 11.

xxvii David Butler and Richard Rose (1960) *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan), p. 75.

xxviii See for example Martin Pugh (1985) *The Tories and the People 1880-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); David Jarvis (1994) *Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s*, *Twentieth Century British History*, 5, pp 129-52.

xxix Ball, Local Conservatism, p. 284.

xxx Conway Basic Report, 1 August 1956, Conservative Party Archive (CPA), Conservative Central Office (CCO) 1/11/515.

xxxi 'Women as Party Agents', *Western Mail*, 22 February 1950. In 1950 the seats that had women Agents were Cardiff South East (Miss Midgley), Pontypool (Miss Lewis), Aberavon (Miss Wilson), Abertillery (Miss Lewis), Pontypridd (Miss Hiley), Gower (Miss Maitland), and Anglesey (Miss Browning).

xxxii Again, roughly 36 depending on boundary changes.

xxxiii Figures compiled by the current author from candidate biographies in Ivor Thomas Rees (2005) *Welsh Hustings 1885-2004* (Llandybie: Dinefwr Press).

xxxiv For example, East Flint members were regularly clear on the fact that a woman was unsuitable for the seat because of its industrial profile. A Labour woman ended up holding it for twenty years from 1950-1970. G. Summers to J.P.L. Thomas, 19 October 1948, CPA, CCO 1/7/516.

xxxv Howard Davies to Paul Bryan, 3 January 1962, CPA, CCO 1/14/540.

xxxvi Maguire, *Conservative Women*, p. 168.

xxxvii 'Women found 'nice' Tory worth wait', *Western Mail*, 17 June 1970.

xxxviii 4,000 people voted Conservative in Rhondda West in 1966 – a seat and an election that were notoriously unfavourable for the Tories. See Johnes, *Wales* p. 272. Yet there was no organisation to speak of in the constituency.

xxxix 'The Steelworker who will vote for a Conservative', *Western Mail*, 6 October 1959.

xl Interview, Jonathan Evans, 21 November 2014.

xli 'A busload of hope for Tryer Tuck', *Western Mail*, 1 May 1979.

xlii This was the way Kingsley Amis chose to describe an unusual Conservative-supporting neighbour of his protagonist in the novel *That Uncertain Feeling*, which is set in a fictional south Wales town not unlike Swansea. See Kingsley Amis (1975) *That Uncertain Feeling* (St Albans: Panther Books), pp. 59-60.

xliii 'Tory braves the streets of Bevan Land', *Western Mail*, 18 Feb 1974.

xliv 'When they fight, their womenfolk are with them – shoulder to shoulder', *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.

xlv See, for example, Hugh Rees, former MP and then candidate for Swansea West, standing over his wife, pictured in *Western Mail*, 24 March 1966.

xlvi Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Explaining the Gender Gap', p. 206; Cowman, *Women*, p. 91.

xlvii 'Mrs P-B supplies the sparkle', *Western Mail*, 8 October 1964.

xlviii 'Mrs P-B supplies the sparkle', *Western Mail*, 8 October 1964.

xlix The other was Irene White for East Flint.

l 'It's 'male prejudice' that keeps so many out of Parliament', *Western Mail*, 25 September 1959.

li 'Mrs P-B supplies the sparkle', *Western Mail*, 8 October 1964.

lii Howard Davies to Paul Bryan, 6 September 1962, CPA, CCO 1/14/517/1.

liii John Campbell (2000) *Margaret Thatcher, Volume One: The Grocer's Daughter* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 101

liiv Green, *Thatcher*, p. 14.

liv Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 158.

lvii 'Why not put more women in power?', *Western Mail*, 1 April 1966.

lviii 'Why not put more women in power?', *Western Mail*, 1 April 1966.

lviii Smith, *The Women's Movement*, p. 279.

lix Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro (2014) Conclusion, in their *Preserving the Sixties: Britain and the Decade of Protest* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 192-193, 194.

lx Stuart Ball (2013) *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 169.

lxi Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, p. 159.

- ^{lxii} Neil Evans and Dot Jones (2000) 'To Help Forward the Great Work of Humanity': Women in the Labour Party in Wales, in Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), p. 238.
- ^{lxiii} Mark Donnelly (2014) Sixties Britain: The Cultural Politics of Historiography, in Trevor Harris and Monia O'Brien Castro (eds) *Preserving the Sixties: Britain and the Decade of Protest* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 10-11.
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- ^{lxv} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxvi} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxvii} Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 230; 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxviii} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxix} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxx} Campbell, *The Iron Ladies*, p. 298.
- ^{lxxi} 'It's 'male prejudice' that keeps so many out of Parliament', *Western Mail*, 25 September 1959; 'Why not put more women in power?', *Western Mail*, 1 April 1966.
- ^{lxxii} 'It's 'male prejudice' that keeps so many out of Parliament', *Western Mail*, 25 September 1959.
- ^{lxxiii} 'When they fight, their women folk are with them – shoulder to shoulder', *Western Mail*, 29 September 1959.
- ^{lxxiv} Cowman, *Women*, pp. 122-123.
- ^{lxxv} G. Summers to J.P.L. Thomas, 19 October 1948, CPA, CCO1/7/516.
- ^{lxxvi} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxxvii} 'Cardiff North', *Western Mail*, 17 June 1970.
- ^{lxxviii} 'Kilbrandon will be principal plank in Plaid platform', *Western Mail*, 11 February 1974.
- ^{lxxix} Lovenduski, Norris and Burness, *The Party and Women*, p. 617.
- ^{lxxx} Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 1, 3.
- ^{lxxxi} Cardiff West Basic Report, 1949, CPA, CCO 1/7/521.
- ^{lxxxii} Tanner, Williams and Hopkin, *The Labour Party*, p. 306.
- ^{lxxxiii} Barry Basic Report, 21 February 1951, CPA, CCO 1/8/528; Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill*, p. 112; Tanner, Williams and Hopkin, *The Labour Party*, p. 306.
- ^{lxxxiv} Ebbw Vale Basic Report, July 1949, CPA, CCO 1/7/538; Merthyr Tydfil Basic Report, undated, CPA, CCO 1/7/522. On the Chairman of East Flint claiming the seat was unsuitable for a woman, remarkably similar words were used in 1950 about the Dartford seat by its Chair. 23 year old Margaret Roberts (as Mrs Thatcher was then) ended up being selected for the seat nonetheless. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 76.
- ^{lxxxv} Tanner, Williams and Hopkin, *The Labour Party*, p. 306.
- ^{lxxxvi} Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill*, p. 112.
- ^{lxxxvii} 'A day in the life of a top Tory', *Western Mail*, 12 June 1970.
- ^{lxxxviii} Maguire, *Conservative Women*, p. 141.
- ^{lxxxix} R.B. McCallum and Alison Readman (1947) *The British General Election of 1945* (London: Oxford University Press), p.180.
- ^{xc} Maguire, *Conservative Women*, p. 141.
- ^{xcI} Laura Beers (2010) *Your Britain: Media and the Making of the Labour Party* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), P. 196.
- ^{xcii} 'Capt. Thorneycroft increases majority', *Abergavenny Chronicle*, 2 November 1945. This was after a by-election, the previous Conservative candidate for the seat, Leslie Pym, having died during the 1945 campaign. He was announced as the winner at the declaration, however, with his Labour opponent having to congratulate a dead man. See Gerard Charmley, 'Parliamentary Representation', in Chris Williams and Andy Croll (eds), *The Gwent County History, Volume 5: The Twentieth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 306.
- ^{xciii} 'Elections in the TV age', *Western Mail*, 17 June 1970.
- ^{xciv} Johnes, *Wales*, p. 73.
- ^{xcv} Stuart Ball (1995) *The Conservative Party and British Politics 1902-1951* (Essex: Longman), p. 112.
- ^{xcvi} Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill*, p. 136.
- ^{xcvii} Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics*, pp. 112-113; David Butler and Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (1980) *The Conservative Elite, 1918-1978: Does unrepresentativeness Matter?*, in Zig Layton-Henry (ed.) *Conservative Party Politics* (London: Macmillan), p. 189.
- ^{xcviii} Finance Sheet 31 May 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/510. For example, In 1949 the Conway Association's women raised £525 from their Ball, £609 from the Conway Castle Fair, and £691 from the Christmas Fair – equivalent, in total, to roughly £41,200 in 2017 money.
- ^{xcix} Cardiff North West Conservative Association Minute Book, 1974 Annual Report, undated, National Library of Wales (NLW), Welsh Political Archive (WPA), GB0210 CARCON.
- ^c Interview, Sir Donald Walters, 19 January 2015.
- ^{ci} Stuart Ball (1994) Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 284.
- ^{cii} John Ramsden (1996) *The Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957-1975* (Essex: Longman), p. 75; Tim Bale (2016) *The Conservatives since 1945: the Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 20.
- ^{ciii} Ball, Local Conservatism, pp. 308-309.

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- civ Bale, *The Conservatives*, pp. 20-21.
- cv Janet Johnson (2003) Did Organization Really Matter? Party Organisation and Conservative Electoral Recovery, 1945-59, *Twentieth Century British History*, 14, 4, p. 412; Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill*, p. 115.
- cvi Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 223.
- cvi 'Socialists Hold 25 out of 36 Welsh Seats', *Western Mail*, 27 July 1945.
- cvi Mrs Macmillan to Lord Woolton, 3 August 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/510.
- cix Petition, c. October 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/510.
- cx Unsigned report re Swansea West women, c. 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/526.
- cx Unsigned report re Swansea West women, c. 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/526.
- cxii Swansea West Basic Report 20 September 1950, CPA, CCO 1/8/526.
- cxiii 'Prisons and Punishment', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 1961.
- cxiv 'Box pledge on hanging lauded', *Western Mail*, 10 March 1966.
- cxv 'Women on the Tory front', *Western Mail*, 2 June 1970.
- cxvi James Hinton (2002) *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 2.
- cxvii Hinton, *Women*, p. 9.
- cxviii Hinton, *Women*, p. 236, 238.
- cxix Hinton, *Women*, pp. 238-239.
- cxix Hinton, *Women*, p. 239.
- cxix See in particular Bo Sarlvik and Ivor Crewe (1983) *Decade of Dealignment: The Conservative victory of 1979 and electoral trends in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) which argues that whilst class-based politics and voting behavior did not disappear in the 1970s, it was seriously weakened. Also see David Denver, *Elections and Voters in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) for a similar analysis. Also see Patrick Joyce, 'Introduction', in his *Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3.
- cxix Eric A. Nordlinger (1967) *The Working Class Tories: Authority, Deference and Stable Democracy* (London: Macgibbon and Kee); Robert T. McKenzie (1968) *Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England* (London: Heinemann); Jon Lawrence (1998) *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- cxix Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 224.
- cxix Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Explaining the Gender Gap, p. 195.
- cxix Colin Rosser and Christopher Harries (1965) *The family and social change: a study of family and kinship in a south Wales town* (London: Routledge and K. Paul), p. 83.
- cxix Interview, Charlotte Bennett, 28 October 2015.
- cxix *Western Mail*, 14 February 1974.
- cxix Rhondda Conservative and Unionist Association records, speech by Mrs J. Lysaught, 1 November 1972, NLW, WPA, GB0210 RHOCON.
- cxix Swansea West Luncheon Club Minute Book, 5 July 1968, West Glamorgan Archives (WGA), D/D CMLC 1.
- cxix Ball, *Portrait*, p. 163; Hinton, *Women*, p. 12.
- cxix Swansea West Luncheon Club Minute Book, 5 July 1968, WGA, D/D CMLC 1.
- cxix 'Air blue over Tory drinks', *South Wales Echo*, 17 September 1964.
- cxix Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 223-224.
- cxix Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 221.
- cxix Hinton, *Women*, pp.12-13.
- cxix S.B.H. Oliver to CCO, 28 March 1957, CPA, CCO 1/12/545.
- cxix Howard Davies to Paul Bryan, 6 September 1962, CPA, CCO, 1/14/517/1; See her profile in Ivor Thomas Rees (2005) *Welsh Hustings 1885-2004* (Llandybie: Dinefwr Press), pp. 239-240.
- cxix Ronald Frankenberg (1957) *Village on the Border: A Social Study of Religion, Politics and Football in a North Wales Community* (London: Cohen and West), p.104.
- cxix Ball, *Portrait*, p. 169.
- cxix Evans and Jones, 'To Help Forward', p. 238.
- cxix See, for an illustration of this (despite being slightly outside this time period) a picture from Julian Lewis' 1983 campaign in Swansea West, where he was pictures with 'loyal party workers', all of whom were very elderly women stuffing envelopes. Dr Lewis is now the MP for New Forest East. 'Special Focus: Swansea West', *Western Mail*, 2 June 1983.
- cxix Beers, Thatcher, p. 113.
- cxix Abergavenny Minute Book 2 October 1973, NLW, WPA, GB0210 MONION, file 25; Monmouth Conservative Association Minute Book, 13 April 1973, NLW, WPA, GB0210 MONION, file 24.
- cxix One only need look at half empty conference halls during keynote speeches at Conservative Party conferences, or read the words of former minister Sir Eric Pickles about the dwindling numbers of party members in the country at large. See 'Tories urgently need more volunteers, says Sir Eric Pickles', BBC News, 1 October 2017.