

## Richard Livsey, Lord Livsey of Talgarth (1935–2010)

*J. Graham Jones*

Richard Arthur Lloyd Livsey was born on 2 May 1935, the son of Arthur Norman Livsey, master mariner of Brecon who worked as a canal lock keeper, and Lilian Maisie (née James), a schoolteacher who later became a headmistress. His father died in Iraq in 1938 when Richard was just three years old, and consequently it was his mother who had a great personal influence on his early development. He was educated at Talgarth County Primary School, Bedales School in Hampshire (a progressive independent school), Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, where he studied for a National Diploma in Agriculture, and later at Reading University, where he gained the degree of M.Sc. in agricultural management.

Richard Livsey had enjoyed a rich and varied life before entering the House of Commons in July 1985 at the age of fifty. He had worked initially as a farm labourer at Bwlch in Carmarthenshire. In 1961, he had moved to Galloway in Scotland to work for a year as an Assistant Farm Manager on one of the company's farms; this was when he met Rene, his future wife. He was then transferred to Northumberland where he worked as ICI's agricultural development officer for the next five years. When Richard left ICI, it was to return to Scotland to become Farm Manager of the Blair Drummond Estate in Perthshire. He was then a senior lecturer in Farm Management at the Welsh Agricultural College, Llanbadarn Fawr, near Aberystwyth, from 1971 until 1985, initially under the leadership of Dr David Morris. Livsey had played an important role in setting up the pioneering college and thereafter in providing a wide range of exciting and innovative courses there. He and his wife also farmed some sixty acres of land at Llanon in Cardiganshire. He was later Deputy Director, subsequently Development Manager, at ATB-Landbase Cymru from 1992 until 1997, when he was not in parliament.

Richard Livsey had first joined the Liberal Party in 1960. He stood unsuccessfully as the party's candidate for Perth and East Perthshire in 1970 (where he came fourth and lost his deposit), and was then considered as a possible party candidate in several Welsh divisions in the early 1970s. Pressed to stand for Denbighshire, he declined on the grounds of his then lack of proficiency in the Welsh language, understandably considered nigh on essential for selection in the constituency. Moreover, 'My real interest lies in Brecon and Radnor, I am a native of those parts and have strong connections there. I am sure if I got the opportunity, I could do well there. ... In the past my experience of Liberals in Breconshire is that they need quite a lot of badgering to be stung into action. However, once that is done, quite a lot can be achieved.'<sup>1</sup>

Although the governing body of the Welsh Agricultural College at Llanbadarn

1 National Library of Wales [hereafter NLW], Emlyn Hooson Papers, box 44, Richard Livsey to Rhys Gerran Lloyd, 31 December 1972, marked by RGL, 'Dear Emlyn [Hooson], Urgent, Can you please stir this up urgently[?] Richard fought in Scotland last time'. See also *ibid.*, Sir Russell Johnston MP to Emlyn Hooson, 23 February 1973, 'I think he [Richard Livsey] would be an excellent candidate and we were very sorry to lose him from Scotland.'

Fawr did not in any way object to Livsey standing as a parliamentary candidate and were prepared to grant him leave of absence to conduct a general election campaign, by the end of 1973, with a general election likely to take place the following spring, he himself felt unable to go ahead. Preparation for his innovative master's degree course at the college had proved unexpectedly arduous and time-consuming, his wife (who was expecting a child the following May) was increasingly unwell, and his personal financial situation at the time was 'a bit stretched'.<sup>2</sup> In the event, Dr Noel Thomas was chosen and polled a highly creditable 8741 votes (19.4 per cent) at Brecon and Radnor in the February 1974 general election. By April it had become clear that yet another general election contest was likely before the end of the year. Frustratingly both for him personally and for his party, Richard Livsey again felt unable to allow his name to go forward as the Liberal candidate there. As he wrote to Emlyn Hooson, the veteran MP for Montgomeryshire,

I continue to believe that a campaign of about three years' duration is needed to get into a winning position. In the meantime the initiative must not be lost. It could be that some members of the [Brecon and Radnor Liberal] Association may be reluctant to have a go again so soon after the last time, for reasons of cash etc. But I am sure you and Geraint [Howells] will persuade them otherwise, if they need such persuasion. Again it is a pity I cannot stand, particularly in view of the current situation in livestock farming, especially beef. This is – politically – one of the most frustrating years I have had to suffer. My ambitions will have to remain temporarily submerged.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, Richard Livsey stood in the marginal constituency of Pembrokeshire in the general election of May 1979. On his adoption as the prospective Liberal candidate for the county in November 1977, Emlyn Hooson wrote privately to the chairman of the Pembrokeshire Liberal Association, 'Mr Livsey has been active within the Welsh Liberal Party for some considerable time, both as a Candidate and in other spheres, and has proved himself to be a person of outstanding ability and dedication. ... With the solid base of support which has already been built up in Pembrokeshire, I feel sure that Liberalism in the constituency will now go from strength to strength.'<sup>4</sup> During the course of the general election campaign Richard Livsey told the local electorate:

Since 1945 we have had thirty-four years of Labour or Tory Governments. Precisely seventeen years of rule by either party. Britain is now the poorest but one nation in Europe. Whatever is said during this election, these Governments have presided over the

2 Ibid., Vivian Roberts, Acting Principal of the Welsh Agricultural College, Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, to Emlyn Hooson, 10 December 1973; *ibid.*, Richard Livsey to Hooson, 4 December 1973.

3 *Ibid.*, Livsey to Hooson, 23 April 1974.

4 *Ibid.*, Emlyn Hooson to W. C. Philipin, chairman of the Pembrokeshire Liberal Association, 24 November 1977 (copy).

decline of Britain. We are sick of confrontation politics and one has only to look back to the past winter to see where that road leads.

Liberals practise and preach the politics of co-operation. We are one nation whether we work on the shop floor, in the board room, on the farm, or in an office. We have to bury our differences and work together for a new Britain. This time you, the electors, have it in your power to vote for something new and positive – the Liberal party, the key to change in Britain today.<sup>5</sup>

By this time he had emerged as a generally highly respected figure of some consequence within the Liberal Party and had lent his support to the formation and continuation of the ‘Lib-Lab’ pact formed with Callaghan’s Labour administration in March 1977, indeed the only official bi-party agreement in Britain since the Second World War – until the formation of the Coalition Government of Conservatives and Liberals in 2010. At a special conference convened by the party at Blackpool on 21 January 1978, he threw his weight unequivocally behind the continuation of the innovative pact between the two parties: ‘The easy path to take would be to scrap the Pact now and throw away all the advantages we have gained and leave no chance of further gains in the future. But I think we are only just over half way through and this is the time to keep our nerve and support David Steel. The skipper and crew should not abandon ship halfway through the voyage.’<sup>6</sup> Significantly, during the same impassioned speech, he continued:

As regards devolution it is essential that we see the Welsh devolution Bill through Parliament. The Welsh Liberal Party have been fighting for increased autonomy for Wales since the days of Lloyd George at the end of the last century. Now that our ideals are at last coming to fruition it is not the time to pull out and prevent a Welsh Assembly being set up. The Welsh nationalists are now opposing the Wales Bill on the grounds that it will ultimately lead to a federal system of government throughout Britain. That’s just what we want. The issue must be settled now – there will be no chance under the Tories. If we support the Pact today we will be half way to letting the Welsh Liberal Party realize the aspirations of the Welsh people. What is good for the Liberal party is good for Wales and is good for Britain. *Annwyl gyfeillion*, fellow Liberals, don’t hesitate now. Our vote here today can show the way ahead for radical politics in Britain. We must have the courage of our convictions and carry on with our courageous experiment in modern government.<sup>7</sup>

Richard Livsey then also contested Brecon and Radnor in 1983 as the Liberal-SDP Alliance aspirant, when he came third, but he had succeeded in more than

5 Election address of Richard Livsey to the Pembrokeshire electorate, May 1979.

6 NLW, Merfyn Jones Papers, file 83, press release issued by the Pembrokeshire Liberal Association, 21 January 1978.

7 Ibid.

doubling the previous Liberal vote in the constituency – from 4654 in 1979 to 9226 in 1983. The Labour Party vote there was nigh on halved. In the recent re-drawing of the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies, the division had lost some 12,000 constituents in the Brynmawr and Cefn Coed area, that southern strip at the top of the mining valleys. In consequence, political pundits ventured the opinion that the Labour Party stood no prospect of re-capturing a division which included Brecon, Rhayader, Builth Wells, Llandrindod Wells and hundreds of small rural villages. It contained one of the largest farming votes in the whole of the United Kingdom, fully 17 per cent of the local workforce.<sup>8</sup> At this time no more than a small proportion of the farming community within the constituency was wholly committed to voting for the Labour Party. Only one corner of the constituency remained safe for Labour – the area surrounding the still sizeable town of Ystradgynlais where there remained a massive Miners' Welfare Hall, a by now fissured monument to the age-old tradition of self-improvement and self-reliance. During the course of the 1983 general election campaign, Richard Livsey told the electors of the substantially revised constituency:

In Brecon and Radnor the situation is now far worse than at any time since I was growing up in Talgarth. I love this constituency and its people, but like so many before and since, I was forced to move away to find work. I know what it is like to long to come back to one's homeland, and the frustration of being unable to do so through lack of opportunity. The scourge of unemployment amongst our young people, and middle aged family people is totally unacceptable. Through Government policies our education, transport and social services have been cut to the bone. Powys has lost its intermediate area development status and that has cut us off from a lot of European and other aid, yet our people are some of the lowest paid in Britain.

... Do not be put off at this election by negative stories of the Alliance letting Labour or the Tories in. Due to Boundary changes in the constituency, 12,000 electors have left us in Brynmawr and Cefn Coed. The political map of Brecon and Radnor has totally changed. This is a new and great opportunity for you to cast aside the old politics. Be positive and vote for the Liberal Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

Richard Livsey then finally entered the House of Commons, with a slim majority of 559 votes, as the Liberal MP for highly marginal Brecon and Radnor following a key by-election on 4 July 1985 held on the death of the sitting Conservative MP Tom Hooson. Hooson was a first cousin of the former Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire from 1962 until 1979 Emlyn Hooson, now a Liberal peer. Tom Hooson had suffered from ill-health for a considerable period. Although viewed as something of a loner at the House of Commons, he had earned deep respect within

8 Compared with less than 3 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom.

9 NLW, Merfyn Jones Papers, file 83, election leaflet of Richard Livsey, June 1983 general election.

the Brecon and Radnor constituency as a conscientious, committed, hard-working constituency MP since his initial return there in the general election of May 1979 when he had certainly emerged as one of the more prominent beneficiaries in Wales from the nationwide swing to right-wing Conservatism potently personified in Margaret Thatcher. Indeed, he was still working, signing letters to his constituents, only hours before he died, the victim of incurable cancer. Tom Hooson's majority of 3027 votes in 1979 (6.3 per cent) had dramatically surged to 8784 votes (23.2 per cent) by June 1983, when Richard Livsey had polled just 9226 votes (24.4 per cent), at the time trailing third, just behind the Labour candidate the Revd David Morris. In any general election, such was Tom Hooson's local standing and personal vote that the seat seemed pretty safe for the Conservatives. But a mid-term by-election, when a government was inevitably unpopular to some extent, was a different kettle of fish.

Other factors, potentially beneficial to Richard Livsey and the Liberal Democrats, had intervened too.<sup>10</sup> Back in 1982, the Boundary Commissioners had discussed at length revising the electoral boundaries of both the Brecon and Radnor and the Montgomeryshire constituencies. The Labour Party, sensing the possible re-capture of the seat, had pressed for the retention of the existing boundaries. This was because the division included the extreme north end of the coalfield and industrial south Wales – a solid reservoir of about 10,000 Labour votes. It was Tom Hooson's wish that Brecknock should be amalgamated with the Monmouth division to the south, an amalgamation which would have created an enormous constituency, rock-solid for the Tories in any eventuality. The implementation of such a drastic plan would probably have also led to the merger of Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire, thus creating a new electoral division potentially also promising terrain for a reviving Conservative Party. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats in Wales, the submission to the Boundary Commissioners was made by Councillors Gareth Morgan and Richard Livsey. They argued that as Brecon and Radnor comprised five local authorities, the new constituency should simply adhere to and replicate the local authority boundaries of the local authorities. The Commissioners did indeed implement these proposals, thereby depriving the Labour party of a solid reservoir of its support in this area.

On 26 May 1985, the Brecon and Radnor Liberal Association had selected Richard Livsey as the prospective Alliance candidate for the forthcoming by-election campaign. His old friend and political associate Geraint Howells, who had polled a relatively impressive 8169 votes (18.9 per cent) in the constituency back in June 1970, had known of Tom Hooson's terminal illness, and had tipped off Livsey of the likelihood of an imminent by-election. Howells had also thrown his not inconsiderable weight behind Livsey's selection there, pointing up his strong local links with the area through both his parents. Ever since the previous general election, Livsey had spent considerable periods of time nursing the constituency and had spared no effort to revitalize the local party organisation. An additional advantage was that Andrew Ellis, prominent within his party at national level

10 On this theme, I am much indebted to Professor Russell Deacon, typescript pre-publication draft copy of *A History of the Welsh Liberal Party* (2008), Chapter Six, pp. 16–17, very kindly placed at my disposal by the author.

and twice its general election candidate at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central, now became the party election agent at Brecon and Radnor. Other fortuitous factors had intervened too. The Labour candidate in the 1983 general election was now sitting in the European Parliament at Brussels, while his successor at Brecon and Radnor, the academic Dr Richard Willey, had spent but little time on the ground in the constituency. Labour Party morale was conspicuously at its nadir at this time as the party was dogged increasingly by severe internal disputes, little short of civil war in fact during the leaderships of Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock, and the unpleasant legacy of the failed miners' strike of 1984–85 inevitably remained fresh in the minds of the electorate. Brecon and Radnor did not even appear on the published list of the Labour Party's 130 top target seats at this time. Another factor was that the Conservative aspirant Dr Chris Butler also had no local links with the division and was given only a few short weeks to campaign on the ground there. Ironically, the wish of the local Conservative Association to have the by-election in September or October of that year had been bizarrely thwarted by the decision of the Tory administration to move the writ on 10 June 1985 for the by-election to be held on 4 July.

The famous Liberal party machine had swung powerfully into action during the frenzied by-election campaign, with party activists arriving from all over the country, not a few of whom got lost trying to find the addresses of isolated voters in the constituency. Prominent heavyweights from each of the political parties also began to arrive in increasing numbers. The Brecon and Radnor by-election was one of the most notable successes of the SDP-Liberal Alliance period. It was the only Welsh Liberal parliamentary gain in Wales, and the first Liberal by-election victory in a Welsh constituency since 1923. Richard Livsey's success there was widely claimed to be 'a rebirth of Liberalism in Wales'.<sup>11</sup> Brecon and Radnor was the largest and most rural constituency in the whole of Wales, and the one with the highest concentration of sheep numbers. The elongated constituency was also one of great contrasts, stretching from the sparsely populated uplands in the north to the once heavily industrialized town of Ystradgynlais in the south, from the borders of Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire in the west over to the English borders in the east.<sup>12</sup> At the height of the keenly observed by-election campaign, *The Times* reported:

Brecon and Radnor is as near to being uninhabited territory as any tract of land that hopeful candidates ever went foraging into. Voters are amongst the rarest forms of livestock among its mottled mountains. If a rare human figure does plod into view, to be surrounded instantly by candidates eager to show off their command of EEC sheepmeat regulations and reporters intent on testing the mood of the nation, it is ten to one that he proves to be a backpacker from Birmingham. After a few rebuffs one begins to suspect that this is a form of protective colouring adopted by the locals: they will

11 Kirsty Williams, leader of the Liberal Democrats in Wales, in the *Western Mail*, 18 September 2010.

12 See Richard Livsey's election address, June 1985.

have increasing need of it in the weeks ahead.

Campaigning here is less a matter of door-stepping than of orienteering, and if the candidates all muster for the count without losing their way in the up-country lanes, they will have done well. The constituency is the largest in area in England and Wales, with only 48,000 voters scattered across wide-open acres of delectable landscape. Almost half the constituency lies higher than the 1,000 feet said to denote a mountain. The electoral statistics place Brecon and Radnor securely among the 50 prettiest seats in the House, and by moving the writ for a July 4 vote the Government's political managers have given a host of political commentators an excuse for excursions into Mid-Wales while the hawthorn and cow-parsley are still at their best.<sup>13</sup>

At the core of Livsey's local campaign there was a call for novel approaches to tackle the inter-related problems of unemployment and rural depopulation. He called for local assistance for locally based firms, a greater flexibility on the part of the Mid-Wales Development Corporation to generate new jobs, assistance for people wishing to set up new businesses, and a revitalisation of the local economy. He maintained that the relative political complacency pointed out by commentators could be attributed to the fact that scarcity of work locally meant that the division had fewer young people than most seats and more pensioners.<sup>14</sup> In the words of the *Daily Mail*,

Out around the sheep pens, and beside the mud-spattered land-rovers, the Alliance candidate, smallholder sheepfarmer Richard Livsey blends more naturally with the local landscape than the others. And the word of mouth goes that he is 'all right'. If constituencies need MPs who fit their profile, then the quiet spoken Mr Livsey is probably the man for Brecon and Radnor.<sup>15</sup>

The record of the Conservative government on unemployment was generally unimpressive. There was an announcement that some £175 million was to be cut from the funding available for the payment of child benefit, and the personal popularity of the veteran Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had plummeted significantly since the heady days of the Falklands War in the spring of 1982 and the ensuing June 1983 general election campaign.

But, during the second week of the 1985 by-election campaign, the air at Brecon and Radnor was allegedly 'filled with innuendos, slurs and smears' when the Livsey campaign team distributed their second leaflet asserting that not only was their candidate a family man, but that he was also 'the only major party candidate with a secure family background':

13 George Hill, 'Looking for votes over hill and under dale', *The Times*, 15 June 1985, p. 10.

14 Ibid.

15 NLW, Welsh Political Ephemera Collection, election leaflet in file BB/5.

Most people feel Brecon and Radnor deserves a *local* M.P., in touch with local opinions, able to *really* represent local needs and interests. Richard Livsey could do that. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, ‘He is the lost authentic local candidate.’ ***Richard is the only major party candidate in this election with a secure family background, and that’s important.*** Richard knows how important the values and traditions of family life are. This area is Richard’s home and he shares our own deep pride and love for mid-Wales. Our concerns are his concerns and, with his many local contacts and interests, Richard could be relied upon to continue our longstanding tradition of independent and fair-minded representation in Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

This was an unpleasant reflection on the Conservative contender Chris Butler who, at 34, was still single, and more particularly at the Labour candidate Dr Richard Willey who had lived with his ‘common-law wife’ Celia for sixteen years without going through a formal marriage ceremony. Chris Butler declared at his next press conference that he was indeed ‘deeply offended’ by the leaflet: ‘A man who started out being Mr Nice has become Mr Nasty. I would like an apology for that remark.’

Initially, Richard Livsey declared in response that his Conservative opponent had become ‘over-sensitive’ to the implications of the leaflet, but soon felt obliged to issue ‘an unreserved apology’, asserting that he himself had not, in fact, approved the content of the leaflet which was the work of ‘the hardened backroom boys of the Liberal Party’. But by this time the offensive literature had found its way into every home in the constituency and, although later withdrawn, would make an impact.<sup>17</sup> The following Saturday Nicholas Edwards, the Secretary of State for Wales, told delegates at the Welsh Conservative Party conference at Llandudno that the opposition candidates in the by-election had been behaving like ‘a mixture of the mafia and the mentally handicapped’.<sup>18</sup> Personal attacks and unpleasant back-biting had unfortunately begun to dominate the local campaign. The Conservatives dubbed Richard Livsey ‘a loser, a split choice, a ditherer, an opportunist, a political nomad and not his own man’.<sup>19</sup> During the course of the campaign it had been suggested to those on the left wing of Plaid Cymru that, as it was such a close campaign, the party should not put up its own candidate, and rather lend support to the Labour aspirant Dr Richard Willey. Party leader Dafydd Wigley responded that it would be more fitting to throw their weight behind Richard Livsey.<sup>20</sup>

In the aftermath of the striking by-election victory, *The Times* political correspondent wrote of the newly elected MP, ‘He is not a man of outward brilliance,

16 NLW, Gwyn Griffiths Papers, file 50, by-election leaflet of Richard Livsey, June 1985. The emphasis is mine.

17 ‘Liberals provoke family feud’, *The Guardian*, 25 June 1985.

18 Ibid.

19 *Liberal News*, 12 July 1985, pp. 6-7, cited in Deacon, *A History of the Welsh Liberal Party*, p. 17.

20 Dafydd Wigley, ‘Ysgrif goffa: Richard Livsey (1935-2010)’, *Barn*, 574 (November 2010), p. 30.



and as a public speaker he is flat and a little diffident. But he has a real warmth, especially in face-to-face contacts, and he had the advantage over his main rivals of looking like a man mature and at home in the workaday world, slow-spoken and reassuring and not like a product of some rarefied political environment.<sup>21</sup> In the House of Commons, Livsey joined a group of three Welsh Liberal MPs (the others being his old friend and mentor Geraint Howells [Ceredigion] and Alex Carlile [Montgomeryshire]). After the result had been declared, Carlile had told the euphoric audience, 'With the three constituencies of Ceredigion, Montgomery, and Brecon and Radnor, the Liberals now represent between 1.5 and 2 million acres of Wales.' Andrew Ellis, the well-known local Liberal organizer and agent, asserted on the same occasion that, based on a new principle of proportional representation, 'Liberals now represent more land area in the UK than the entire Labour Party'.<sup>22</sup> This quite dramatic victory represented the Liberal Party's first gain in Wales since Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris's largely unexpected capture of Carmarthenshire in the post-war general election of July 1945. A Liberal MP had not represented Brecon and Radnor since 1939, and in some of the intervening general election campaigns the party had been unable even to find a candidate there. Livsey's victory was of considerable significance to his reviving party which now had eighteen MPs sitting in the House of Commons and, for the first time since 1957, three active serving MPs from Wales.

As Livsey took his oath of allegiance on assuming his seat in the Commons for the first time, the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher grudgingly congratulated the new MP, but ventured the opinion that 'he might well not be around for long'. Party loyalists, however, rejoiced that six of the Liberal victors in by-elections during the last twenty years were still at Westminster, all having become in the interim prominent and generally respected political figures: David Steel, Cyril Smith, Clement Freud, Alan Beith, David Alton and Simon Hughes.<sup>23</sup> Richard Livsey was immediately rewarded with his party's agriculture portfolio. He was re-elected in the 1987 general election, but now with an even slimmer majority, determined after several recounts, of just 56 votes, and on this occasion over the Conservatives. Now he campaigned on his record as an excellent constituency MP and on the well-deserved slogan, 'Everybody knows somebody who has been helped by Richard Livsey'.<sup>24</sup> In this general election campaign, he was given responsibility for his party's countryside portfolio, while Geraint Howells assumed responsibility for 'Wales' and Alex Carlile, who had re-captured Montgomeryshire for the party in 1983, was given responsibility for legal affairs.<sup>25</sup> In a moving tribute to Livsey at the Lloyd George weekend school held at Llandrindod Wells in February 2011, his local agent from the 1987 campaign, Baroness Celia Thomas, recalled:

21 'Winning style of friendly neighbourhood farmer', *The Times*, 6 July 1985, p. 2.

22 'Marginal fight gives Brecon last laugh', *The Guardian*, 6 July 1985.

23 David McKie, 'The new boy and the old lags', *The Guardian*, 10 July 1985.

24 NLW, Welsh Political Ephemera Collection, leaflet in file BA3/4 (general election 1987).

25 *Welsh Liberal Party Campaign Bulletin*, 17 (February 1987), cited in Deacon, *A History of the Welsh Liberal Party*, p. 19.

Two years later [i.e. in 1987], the General Election presented a formidable challenge. The by-election unit had gone, and I was asked to be his agent – a most daunting task. I discovered that he was a very popular and well-loved MP who knew every inch of his vast constituency and many of his constituents personally, for whom he worked his socks off. But nothing was simple. Before we mapped out his itinerary, he said, in his rather mournful voice: ‘Celia, there’s something you ought to know about me.’ My heart sank. But he went on: ‘I just can’t live on sandwiches for lunch.’ Phew, what a relief – and so a pub lunch was factored in each day. But his next instruction was more than a little frustrating. He believed that he must be seen in the north and south of his constituency every day, which meant that he spent a huge amount of time on the road. He was also determined to hold meetings in every village and town, enjoying the challenge of the occasional difficult question from one or two keen to catch him out.<sup>26</sup>

On his return to Parliament, Richard Livsey was at once appointed the Liberal Democrat’s Shadow Secretary of State for Wales. He served as Liberal Party spokesman on agriculture, 1985–87, and as Alliance spokesman on agriculture and the countryside and on Welsh Affairs, 1987–92. He also served as the Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats and Party Spokesman on Wales from 1988 until 1992. He was also a member of the Welsh Select Affairs Committee.

In the 1992 general election, Livsey was narrowly defeated by Conservative Jonathan Evans by the agonizingly tiny majority of only 130 votes. Baroness Celia Thomas has again recalled the course of events:

Then came the next General Election and once more I was asked to be his agent. This time the hunting issue was very much to the fore, and Richard was in a dilemma, which is when I saw the stubborn side of his character. I urged him to make his position clear, but he declined, saying that although he had nine hunts in his constituency, he had actually received more letters against hunting, mainly from the Ystradgynlais area, and didn’t want to inflame passions. Besides, he thought, quite understandably, that there were far more pressing issues to speak about, such as the real poverty in much of the rural economy. But Brecon & Radnor was targeted by the British Field Sports Society, who characterized his position as being anti-fox hunting, and Richard lost the seat by just 130 votes – perhaps the only constituency in the country where hunting may have made a difference.<sup>27</sup>

26 Baroness Celia Thomas, ‘Tribute to Richard Livsey’, 25 February 2011, *Lloyd George Society Website* <<http://lloydgeorgesociety.org.uk/en/>> [accessed 21 December 2011].

27 Ibid.

Five years later, in the 1997 general election, following a dynamic local campaign based on support for public services and small businesses and farms, Livsey was able to re-capture the seat, now by the impressively wide margin of more than 5000 votes, to become one of a solid cohort of 46 Liberal Democrat MPs in the new Parliament. In the process, he delighted in having ousted the sole remaining Tory MP in Wales, Jonathan Evans. As Brecon and Radnor was the last Welsh constituency to declare in 1997, the re-elected MP heartily rejoiced in his key role in creating within Wales 'a Tory-free zone'.<sup>28</sup> For someone used to running farms, Richard Livsey could be surprisingly impractical at times. During one election campaign, while on a visit to Margam college, south Wales, his car suffered a flat tyre and he had to appeal helplessly for someone to change the wheel. Such incidents were commonplace during his election campaigns.

Immediately following his re-election, Richard Livsey was appointed a member of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and of the Constitution Reform Strategy Committee. He was his party's spokesman for Wales. He was awarded the CBE in 1994. He retired voluntarily from parliament at the general election of 2001 and then entered the House of Lords as Baron Livsey of Talgarth. In the Upper House, he at once became his party's spokesman on agriculture and countryside affairs, he was made a member of the European Environment and Rural Affairs Committee and became President of the EU Movement in Wales. From the House of Lords he campaigned vigorously for registered hunting, rather than a hunting ban, being released from his earlier caution. The House of Lords always warms to experts, and Richard Livsey's impressive knowledge on all matters to do with farming, the countryside, the rural economy and Wales, was much appreciated in the less combative atmosphere of the Upper House. He was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Powys in 2004. When he went to the Upper House, Livsey's position as leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats was then taken by Lembit Opik, the MP for Montgomeryshire.

As well as being a central figure in Welsh Liberal politics in the post war era, Baron Livsey's main success was to build Brecon and Radnor into a Liberal Democrat stronghold which enabled Kirsty Williams (National Assembly Member), who herself became the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats in 2008, and his successor as the local MP Roger Williams, to further strengthen the Liberal Democrat hold there. Livsey had also been a keen supporter and activist on behalf of the Yes Campaign during the 1979 St David's Day referendum on a Welsh Assembly, and in the ensuing general election campaign in Pembrokeshire he gave pride of place to Welsh issues.<sup>29</sup> On one occasion, when the Speaker of the House of Commons had failed to call a single Opposition MP from Wales to speak in a debate on devolution, Richard Livsey was unrestrained in his indignation, 'As a Welshman, I am used to being treated with contempt, but I would not have expected my nation to be disgraced in this way in this House.'<sup>30</sup> He continued thereafter to be central to the pro-devolution cause and was the leader of the Liberal Democrat campaign in the successful Welsh devolution referendum in 1997, certainly helping

28 Wigley, 'Ysgrif goffa: Richard Livsey (1935-2010)', p. 30.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

to increase the ‘Yes’ vote within largely intransigent Powys which had polled a most substantial ‘No’ vote back in March 1979 in an anti-devolution outburst which had contributed to the shock unseating of Emlyn Hooson in Montgomeryshire just months later.

Richard Livsey worked amicably for the cause of devolution with leading figures from the other political parties in Wales like Peter Hain, Ron Davies, Dafydd Wigley and Ieuan Wyn Jones. Livsey took to the stage alongside the then Welsh Secretary Ron Davies and the other campaign leaders as the extremely narrow result in favour of devolution was announced. Recalling the campaign in an interview with the *Western Mail* in 2009, he said: ‘We had the right people in the right place at the right time. We were all working for the same objective and we knew where we were going. If other personalities had been involved, a different mix of people, it could have been diabolical.’<sup>31</sup> Yet, significantly, now conscious of the passage of the years, he chose to remain a member of the Westminster Parliament rather than go to the National Assembly at Cardiff Bay as some of his political associates (Dafydd Wigley among them) certainly wished. He was also an active member of the executive of Tomorrow’s Wales / Cymru Yfory, serving actively on its executive committee for several years, and utilising to great effect his influence on a large number of peers of different political persuasions whom he counted as personal friends.

It was Richard Livsey’s personal wish that the resultant Government of Wales Bill would give the embryonic National Assembly far more extensive powers, including, specifically, control over the police and broadcasting in Wales. He proposed that Wales should have a Prime Minister (or First Minister) and the Assembly itself ten more members: seventy instead of sixty. He also wanted the right to send a delegation to Brussels, and to establish an office there, but he graciously conceded that the very act of establishing the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 was in itself ‘a step in the right direction’. In his maiden speech in the House of Lords, Lord Livsey drew attention to the unfairness to Wales of the Barnett formula. Later, in 2005, he pressed vigorously for the implementation of the recommendations of the Richard Report, and he expressed his profound dismay that no more than six ‘all Wales’ bills had passed through parliament since the success of devolution, which, in his view, underlined graphically ‘the legislative log jam’ at Westminster. It was Livsey’s heartfelt fear that the proposals of the Labour Party, embodied in the white paper Better Governance for Wales, would be likely to lead to a deadlock between the Westminster Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. ‘Ultimately, this will fan the flames of Welsh nationalism,’ he predicted as he pressed for the setting up of a Scottish-style parliament for Wales. As events transpired, the powers of the Welsh Assembly did increase substantially as a result of the Government of Wales Act, 2006, which gave its ministers the right to make some laws relating to Wales via ‘Assembly Measures’.<sup>32</sup> Within just a week of his death, Lord Livsey was avidly preparing for the next devolution vote in March 2011.

Together with his old ally, Geraint Howells, Richard Livsey personified the

31 *Western Mail*, 18 September 2010.

32 *The Times*, 21 September 2010.

dwindling Welsh radical tradition, now so conspicuously in decline. He was an extremely active constituency MP and remained closely involved with the local community even after his elevation to the Upper House. One of Lord Livsey's many campaigns was the fight to save Bronllys Community Hospital, near Brecon, which had been under threat for many years. Lord Livsey also fought for a bypass for Talgarth, his home town. He was patron of and active in many of the organisations in Brecon and Radnor. He was the chair of the Brecon Jazz Festival, a patron of Brecon Cathedral, president of the Hay festival, and a member of the Talgarth Male Voice Choir with whom he sang at the Royal Albert Hall in 2009 for a Welsh Association of Male Voice Choirs concert. He was also a trustee of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales. His many interests included rugby football, fly fishing and music. He had gradually acquired a mastery of the Welsh language, and was made a Fellow of Aberystwyth University in 2007. He was very supportive of the establishment of the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences there (a much-enlarged successor to the Welsh Agricultural College), and he was an unfailingly good friend of the university more generally.

In 1987, Livsey had successfully steered the Liberal Assembly away from a motion banning the export of live animals for slaughter and later, as a member of the House of Lords, was one of the leaders of the resistance to the proposed hunting ban which, he argued, would 'result in the decimation of the fox population by shooting'. Once in the House of Lords, he had joined his party's Defra team speaking on agricultural and rural affairs. In a debate in the Lords during 2002, he claimed that the nine hunts which took place in his constituency were essential for the control of foxes, and that a total ban on fox-hunting would be 'out of the question because it would result in an explosion of the fox population'.<sup>33</sup> In 2004, he suggested the government should offer a bounty of £1 on the heads of grey squirrels, and in 2006 he spoke up on behalf of hedgehogs whose numbers, he said, were threatened by the government's failure to agree a badger cull: 'I understand hedgehogs are treated as an hors d'oeuvre by badgers. If this can be confirmed, public opinion would be less hostile to culling badgers sick with TB', he claimed.<sup>34</sup>

Richard Livsey was a man of immense honour and decency who was loved and respected by his constituents, colleagues and by politicians of all parties. One scribe complained that Livsey's 'melancholy drone' left him with a strong desire to emigrate. But what he lacked as an orator, he made up for in hard work and a kindly, gentlemanly air which won him firm friends in all parties. He will be remembered particularly as a champion for the rural communities in which he lived and an expert on agriculture, which he worked in all his professional life. He had a life-long passion for Welsh devolution. Regarded with much respect and great affection by all who knew him, he was a courteous and mild-mannered man, lacking any pretension, but with an unwavering determination when pursuing issues about which he felt strongly.

He had married on 3 April 1964 Irene Martin, the daughter of Ronald and Margaret Earsman of Castle Douglas, Galloway. They had two sons and one daughter, David, Jenny and Dougie. All four survive him. He died peacefully in his

33 *The Times*, 21 September 2010.

34 *Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 2010.

sleep on 15 September 2010 at his home at Llanfihangel Tal-y-Llyn near Brecon, aged 75 years. Among those who attended the funeral service were Simon Hughes, the Deputy Lib Dem leader, Lord (Roger) Roberts of Llandudno, who delivered the moving eulogy, and Kirsty Williams, the AM for Brecon and Radnorshire and the Welsh Lib Dem leader – an eloquent testimony to the respect in which Lord Livsey was held by all generations within his party. On hearing of Lord Livsey's death, Glyn Davies, by then the Conservative MP for Montgomeryshire, paid this tribute:

Sad to learn that Lord Richard Livsey has died. Like most people who knew Richard, I liked him. He was a very good friend to Mid-Wales in particular, to agriculture and to the cause of devolution. We were political opponents throughout the time I knew him, though never directly. Hadn't seen him to talk to since he and I became political 'colleagues' last May. Always thought he had a wonderful feel for his constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire.<sup>35</sup>

A very large collection of his political papers, some deriving from the family home and others held at his office at the House of Lords, was recently presented by his widow to the custody of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales.

35 Glyn Davies, *A View From Rural Wales: Welsh Politics and Countryside* <<http://glyn-davies.blogspot.co.uk/>> [accessed 20 December 2011].