

# HUMANISTS FROM WALES

## ANEURIN 'NYE' BEVAN (1897-1960)

Aneurin Bevan was the son of a miner, born in Tredegar in 1897. Known by many as 'Nye', he went on to become a much loved and respected politician, best remembered today for bringing the National Health Service into being – improving the lives of millions.

Nye left school at 13, and immediately began working in the mining industry, just like his father and grandfather before him. It was through this that he first became involved in political action, championing better and safer working conditions for his fellow miners. He was first elected to Parliament in 1929, as the Labour MP for Ebbw Vale. Nye later became the Minister of Health and Housing, during which he oversaw the creation of the NHS in 1948: providing free healthcare for all. Before this, many people had to pay to receive medical treatment, often having to wait for a long time, and services varied greatly from place to place.

The impact of the Second World War had also been severe, affecting people, hospitals, and housing. Nye firmly believed that no society could call itself civilised while there were people who could not access healthcare due to lack of money. His belief that all human beings deserved dignity and security drove his work

to create a health service which helped all people, regardless of wealth or background. After his death in 1960, Nye's wife – politician Jennie Lee – described him as 'a great humanist whose religion lay in loving his fellow men and trying to serve them'.



**Above:** Aneurin Bevan and Jennie Lee in Corwen, 3 October 1952 by Geoff Charles. National Library of Wales Licensed CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 UK



**Left:** Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, on the first day of the National Health Service, 5 July 1948 at Park Hospital, Davyhulme, near Manchester

## **HAFINA CLWYD** (1936–2011)

Hafina Clwyd was a teacher and writer, who has been described as 'one of the liveliest women journalists ever produced in Wales'. She was born in Gwyddelwern, the daughter of a farmer, and went on to train as a teacher of religious education – even though she was an atheist.

Hafina was fascinated by history and loved literature: she published 11 books (lots of which were based on her own diaries), and also edited *Welsh Family History: A Guide to Research*. As a



journalist, she was a devoted champion of the Welsh language, and even during the years she lived in London she was active in many Welsh societies. One of these was the Book Club, which led to the creation of the Welsh Books Council in 1961, a charity which supports publishing in Wales and promotes reading for pleasure.

As a writer and as a person, Hafina was known as witty, funny, knowledgeable, and unafraid to speak her mind. She supported all sorts of cultural activities in Wales, and especially in Ruthin (where she lived from 1979), including literature, drama, crafts, and family history. When Hafina died in 2011, she was given a humanist funeral, which she had planned herself, to celebrate a rich life rooted in culture and community.



Senedd Cymru National Assembly for Wales

## **RHODRI MORGAN** (1939–2017)

Rhodri Morgan was born in Cardiff, the son of a university lecturer and a teacher. Rhodri was a clever child, and fast-tracked in school, ultimately earning a scholarship to study at the University of Oxford. He didn't much like it there, but graduated from Politics, Philosophy, and Economics and went on to study at the University of Harvard in America. When he returned, he started working for the Workers' Educational Association (which provides learning for adults), and though he joined the Labour Party, he stayed working in local government for many years before becoming a politician.

Rhodri became an MP in 1987, and First Minister of Wales in 2000. As First Minister, he became known for showing that politicians from different

political parties could work with each other, and for bringing representatives from different religious faiths and beliefs together to build relationships and increase understanding. This initiative is known today as the Faith Communities Forum. Rhodri believed in, and helped to prove the effectiveness of, 'doing things the Welsh way': based on cooperation rather than competition. He stepped down as First Minister in 2009, and retired from the Assembly in 2011.

Rhodri's funeral in 2017, at the Assembly, was the first public humanist funeral in Britain, and was attended by hundreds of people wanting to pay their respects to Rhodri – remembered by many as the 'father of the nation'.





## MILLICENT MACKENZIE

(1863–1942) – professor and suffragist

Millicent Mackenzie was a university professor and campaigner for women's rights, who was Wales' first female professor, and the first woman in Wales to stand for election to Parliament. She was one of Humanists UK's earliest Vice Presidents (when it was still called the Union of Ethical Societies). Millicent Mackenzie was a dedicated promoter of moral education, rather than religious instruction, in schools. This focused on teaching children how to be good citizens, using reasons that could be understood by all, whether they were brought up with a religious background or not.



## ELAINE MORGAN (1920–2013) – writer

Elaine Morgan was a writer, who inspired thousands of people all over the world with her ideas about the history of human beings and her stories about all kinds of people. Born in Pontypridd, Elaine Morgan was the daughter of a coal miner. She won a scholarship to Oxford University, and went on to become a famous writer of books, and for television. She was known as a great storyteller, who both entertained and inspired.

## AUDREY JONES (1929–2014) –

teacher and women's rights campaigner

Audrey Jones was born in Hertfordshire, England, but settled in the Vale of Glamorgan in the 1950s. By the 1980s, she had become deputy headteacher at a school in Penarth (which was unusual for a woman during that time), and became a champion of education for girls. One of her pupils was the Paralympic athlete Tanni Grey-Thompson, who described her as 'an amazing teacher' and a big influence. Audrey Jones helped to establish the Wales Women's Rights Committee (WWRC), which became the Wales Assembly of Women (WAW), and she spoke across the world in support of women's equality. She was also a lover of art and music.

## DANNIE ABSE (1923–2014) – doctor and poet

Dannie Abse was a doctor, poet, and writer, who said: 'I like to think I'm a poet and Medicine my serious hobby.' In his poetry, Abse drew on his Welsh identity, his medical career, and his Jewish background, and he won a number of awards. He saw poetry as 'a kind of singing', which helped to make real life – even when it was hard or sad – more beautiful. His brother, Leo, was a lawyer and MP, and a humanist like him. Leo's campaigning helped improve the rights of gay people, made divorce easier for unhappy couples, and contributed to the abolishment of capital punishment (the death penalty).



## ROBERT THOMAS (1926–1999) – sculptor

Robert Thomas was a sculptor, born in Cwmparc in the Rhondda Valley. He especially liked to create sculptures of people whose ideas and achievements he admired, helping more people to learn about and be inspired by them. These included famous people – like fellow humanist Nye Bevan, who founded the National Health Service – and ordinary people, like his statue of a Miner's Family. Many humanists believe that when we die, there is no afterlife, but what can survive is the impact we had on other people and the contributions we made to society.