

## Rapport - Research Trip, Joelle Gorno

For three weeks during the month of May 2023, with the help of a grant from CRECIB, I spent my time in Aberystwyth, Wales, studying parts of the archive collection at the National Library of Wales. The collection at Aberystwyth is the biggest in Wales, containing documents concerning the Principality as a whole. Aberystwyth is a university and beachfront town, in the region of Ceredigion, situated in mid-Wales.

Amongst the various documents that I consulted, there were many relating to Lady Rhondda, found in the papers belonging to her husband, Member of Parliament, D. A. Thomas. This collection consisted of scrapbooks with countless letters and newspaper cuttings. Though most date to the 1920s, which is towards to end of research period, it was extremely useful to find documents linking to her work on getting women to sit in the House of Lords, to obtaining universal franchise at the age of twenty-one, and the launch of her organisation, the Six Point Group.

Another collection that proved particularly useful were the documents linked to Megan Lloyd George, and her campaign. She was the daughter of a former Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, and she was the first female MP for a Welsh constituency, winning Anglesey for the Liberal Party in 1929. Her campaign papers give us a profound insight into the life of the woman active in politics at this time. I also consulted many correspondences between different Welsh MPs and women's organisations. For example Thomas Edward Ellis, Welsh Liberal MP for Merioneth, 1894-95, also the leader of Cymru Fydd, corresponded often with different Welsh female pioneers concerning the new franchise campaign. This was also the case for Edward Thomas John, a radical Welsh Liberal Party politician, who later joined the Labour Party; he served as Liberal MP for East Denbighshire from 1910-18. Both men were active supporters of the women's cause.

Concerning local politics and the role women held, the collections of the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Association, Elizabeth Amy Dillwyn Papers and the Young Women's Christian Association Records proved very fruitful. Amy Dillwyn, from Swansea, was a pioneering British industrialist, one of the only women with such a profession in the whole country at this time. The archive included documents linked to her campaign as an independent candidate for Swansea (however, she was unsuccessful - the newspaper clippings identified her gender as her primary disability). Not only involved in local politics, she was a generous supporter of the militant Women's Freedom League from its early days in 1907, and later she served as President of the Swansea Branch of the National Union for Women's Suffrage Societies.

The WUWLA reports contained lists of committee meetings that were held across the Principality, with details of women speakers, debates, number of members within the various branches dotted around Wales. They also provide details of the Council and Conference Meetings held at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, showing the women's various ambitions for the role of women within Liberal politics. What is interesting with this Association

is the various different causes they supported; women's emancipation not necessarily being the first priority. Two major topics of discussion were the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales and Home Rule for Wales - naturally women's suffrage and women's position in society are also discussed, along with temperance and educational opportunities for Welsh women. It is interesting to see the differences and comparisons of priorities and aims of this group, with other societies, such as the CWLA (affiliated to the WUWLA), the NUWSS, and the Women's Liberal Federation.

The NUWSS Llangollen Society Minutes (1914-1918) were also extremely useful documents. These reports gave me a first insight into the suffrage movement in the north of Wales, an area I have yet to discover profoundly in my research. It will be interesting to do a comparison and see what the differences are with the suffrage societies in south Wales, if there are any. I was able to consult several of their Annual Reports, which include details of the members, subscribers, meetings, deputations, finances, etc. These reports also contain tables, which list the different meetings that occurred during that specific year, indicating the date, location and speakers.

While I was at the National Library, I did not dedicate my time solely to the archival material. I also took advantage of the vast majority of books at hand. With such a specific research topic, it can often be challenging to find books relating to my subject in libraries in France, therefore it was very useful to be in the biggest library in Wales, with its 6.5 million books and periodicals.

One difficulty that I encountered on a couple of occasions was the obstacle of the Welsh language. I am not a Welsh speaker and therefore the language barrier did mean that there was some documents that I was unable to read.<sup>1</sup> This has not yet been an issue with my research in south Wales, as it is a predominantly English speaking area. However, I believe that this will be a bigger problem when my research takes me to north Wales, where the Welsh language is heavily spoken. That being said, many official documents were often published and distributed in both English and Welsh, to ensure that they were accessible to all.

Though many of the documents were very useful for my research, sometimes the lack of certain items proved disappointing. Part of my research focuses on the Poor Law Guardians, looking at women guardians specifically. The National Library collection linked to the Poor Law was very underwhelming. I found documents concerning the Machynlleth Union, a small town located eighteen miles north of Aberystwyth, however this was the extent of their resources. No documents appear to be in existence for, for example, the union of Aberystwyth, which would have been fairly substantial given the size of the town and its importance in Wales. However, what is interesting to see with the minute books, that I was able to trace, is the connection between Wales' first female guardians to the early suffrage movement. I need to research this further, with the documents available, to see to what extent this was the case, but it has proved interesting and fruitful thus far.

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<sup>1</sup> I have taken photos of said documents, and at some point, later down the line, I will find a translator to help interpret these documents with me.