

The rise and fall of David Lloyd George

From humble origins

The man called the Welsh wizard was actually born on the outskirts of Manchester in 1863, but his parents brought him back to his native Wales when he was just six months old. Not long afterwards his father, a schoolteacher called William George, died suddenly at the age of 43, leaving his young widow, Elizabeth, with two small children and another on the way.

Lacking the money she needed to raise the family as a single mother, Elizabeth had no choice but to move back the house where she had grown up in the tiny village of Llanystumdwy. The house was called Highgate and it still stands today. It's been carefully restored in recent years by the local council and now looks pretty much the way it did during Lloyd George's childhood.

Anyone who's interested in Lloyd George would be well advised to come here. Seeing the very modest surroundings in which he grew up gives you a strong sense of who he was and what his early life must have been like.

Lloyd George, the great statesman, once proudly described himself as a cottage-bred man and he wasn't joking. Back in those days prime ministers of Great Britain were not expected to emerge from little places like this. Just two bedrooms. This is the bigger of the two, and if you can believe it there were five people sleeping here as we understand it: Lloyd George and his brother and sister and their mother and then her mother too. No loo. That's at the bottom of the garden – what we call in Welsh a *tŷ bach* or a little house.

The other bedroom is through here. Take a look at it. It's much smaller than the other one, and this was the room of Richard Lloyd, David's uncle. The man who had more influence on Lloyd George than anyone else. Richard Lloyd – 'Uncle Lloyd' as David and his siblings called him – was a trained shoemaker and the family's only breadwinner. But that's not all he was by any means.

Dr John Davies: He was a man of considerable learning, Richard Lloyd. Although he spent his life making shoes he read considerably. He had a very nimble mind. He was very politically involved, and very theologically involved. So it was, in a sense, an ideal upbringing.