

## Former Dr. Williams Head Girl found herself at the centre of the Profumo Scandal

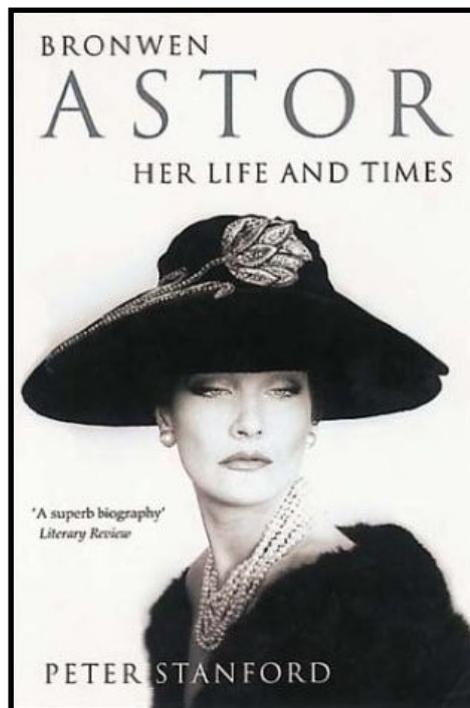
On reading the article on Mrs Lloyd George, as a former pupil, opening a new wing at the Dr. Williams School, Dolgellau, I was reminded that there were many famous women who went to this private school. However, I know nothing about them except for one who I met in later life. She was Bronwen Pugh, the youngest daughter of barrister, who then became a judge, Sir Alun Pugh. She followed her two elder sisters to become Head Girl in 1947. Bronwen did not follow her sisters to Oxford as expected but had an interest in fashion and became a fashion model and soon became a well-known face on the cover pages of magazines such as *Vogue*. She became known as “The Face of the Fifties”

Alun Pugh worked as a barrister in London and on his visits with his work in southern Wales he met and became friendly with Saunders Lewis. When Saunders set up Plaid Cymru, Alun Pugh quickly joined and established the London Branch of Plaid Cymru. I became chair of the Branch in 1968 and Sir Alun was the President and this is how I got to know him. In those days he lived in Surrey and wasn't in good health. He didn't come to London very often so my contact with him was by phone but this was quite frequent so I felt that I knew him. When I learnt of his death in 1972 I prepared to go to his funeral. I then had a phone call from the Plaid office in Cardiff saying that Gwynfor Evans had intended to attend but that he was not now able to go. I was therefore asked to officially represent Plaid at the funeral. I can't remember the name of the Church but it was right at the top of Haverstock Hill and I could find it today if I wished.

Following her success as a fashion model, Bronwen was named “Woman of the Year” in 1959 and became the third wife of Bill Astor, the then Lord Astor, in 1960. She then became Lady Astor and went to live in the traditional home in Cliveden. It was here that she was present in July 1961 when John Profumo first met a naked Christine Keeler coming out of the swimming pool at Cliveden. She had now, quite innocently, become involved in the centre of the Profumo Scandal, which was the biggest political scandal during the second half of the twentieth century. Bill Astor was, like his mother the famous Nancy Lady Astor before him, a Tory MP. This is how he knew John Profumo.

The publicity and the subsequent trial of Stephen Ward had a damaging effect on the health of Bill Astor – particularly the allegations of his relationship with Mandy Rice-Davies. His health deteriorated rapidly following the trial and he died in March 1966. Bronwen had become a widow

after only 6 years of marriage and, as there was now a new Lady Astor, Bronwen announced that she no longer wished to be called Lady Astor but to be known simply as “Mrs Bronwen Astor”. During the Profumo crisis she had started to attend Jesuit meetings. Following her husband's death she took a more active part in religious activities and undertook considerable charitable work, with the homeless in particular. She carried on Bill's charitable work and became Chair of the Refugee Circle and head of the William Waldorf Astor Foundation. She converted to Catholicism, at the end of 1969. The Catholic Church held a reception service in March 1970 with David Astor (Bill's brother and the then editor of *The Observer*) and members of the Astor family attending. Alun Pugh attended but her mother and her two sisters refused. Her daughters Janet and Pauline also joined the Catholic Church soon after.



When I went to Alun Pugh's funeral in November 1972 I knew that Bronwen Astor was his daughter but didn't really know what the relationship between them was and whether she was aware of his close relationship with Plaid. At the end of the service we started to go out and there was a family member at the end of each aisle waiting to greet us and at the end of our aisle I recognised Bronwen. I approached, shook her hand and introduced myself and said I was the official representative from Plaid Cymru. To my relief she gave a big smile and said, “Plaid Cymru was always very close to my father's heart.” I went on to explain that I knew him as he was the President and I was the Chair of the London Branch and we exchanged a few more words.

In the year 2000 I learnt that Bronwen's biography had been published. I couldn't find it anywhere in the bookshops in Caernarfon, Bangor or Llandudno and the reviews I'd heard on the radio and TV or in the London press had made no mention of the Welsh connections.

Later in the year I was in London and on my way to Euston I visited Foyles and found the book on the shelves, “*Bronwen Astor, Her Life and Times*” by Peter Stanford (Published by Harper Collins). From the cover it didn't look at all the type of book that I would buy but I had a look at the index and there I saw the words Plaid Cymru and the names Saunders Lewis and J E Jones and numerous Welsh place names! I bought it and on the train on the way home started reading it eagerly and found it fascinating.

That is a very brief outline of the story of one former Head Girl at Dr. Williams' School and I thoroughly recommend the book to anyone who wants to learn more or come to listen to one of my talks about the subject. ■