

## **Oakwood and District in Parliamentary Elections, 1885 -1955.**

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Before 1885, Leeds was represented by two or three M.P.s, but they did not represent any particular part of Leeds. The Leeds: North constituency was formed in 1885, covering a large area and including Oakwood and much of the surrounding district. Oakwood remained in Leeds: North until the 1955 general election, when it became part of Leeds: North East, where it remains today. This article relates to the parliamentary elections held while Oakwood was part of Leeds: North.

The 1885 general election was a very close fought one, with both candidates being notable people. The Conservative (4,494 votes) was William Lawies Jackson, an Otley-born man who had inherited the family tanning and currying works at Buslingthorpe when he was 18 and the business was practically bankrupt. His hard work and vitality had done more than resuscitate it. He had already been a Headingley councillor and one of the three Leeds members before 1885. He was to hold several government positions, become a peer and also a freeman of Leeds, and lived at Allerton Hall, but for cricket-lovers his main claim to fame was to be the father of Ashes-retaining captain and fine all-rounder F.S. Jackson.

The defeated Liberal candidate (4,237 votes) was Sir Arthur William Rucker, a physicist and researcher on electromagnetism, who was currently engaged with a series of magnetic surveys of the British Isles. He was to get the Royal Medal of the Royal Society in 1891.

In the 1886 general election W.L. Jackson had a more comfortable majority against the less-exalted A.O. Rutson (Liberal), the 'score' being 4,301 to 3,682. When he was made

Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Jackson had to face a bye-election (1891), but was unopposed. He remained the Leeds: North MP. until 1902, increasing his majority each time at the three general elections in that period. His Liberal opponent in the 1895 general election was Herbert S. Baines, grandson of Sir Edward Baines, the founder of the Leeds Mercury, and himself editor of that newspaper. H.S. Baines was a radical both in politics and as a newspaper editor. Although only in his twenties he died within a year of the election, succumbing to "the deadly influences of the Gold Coast" while returning from the Canary Isles, he having voyaged there, ironically, on medical advice.

When Jackson became Lord Allerton there was a bye-election (29/7/1902) and Leeds: North became Liberal for the first time. R.H. Barran (7,539 votes) was the successful candidate, defeating Sir AT. Lawson, Bt., the Conservative (6,781 votes) - a close-run thing. Rowland Barran was the 5<sup>th</sup> son of Sir John Barran of Roundhay Park fame. He held Leeds: North more comfortably in the Liberal landslide election of 1906 (majority 2,484), but his majority was cut and further cut in the two 1910 elections, being down to 268 in December 1910. He married a Canadian heiress in Montreal in 1909, the bride's mouth-wateringly expensive presents (listed in the Leeds Mercury) including a diamond pendant, a ruby necklace, a pearl and coral bracelet, and the ubiquitous cake stand (silver of course). In 1912 he announced his decision not to seek re-election at the next election 'for business reasons', but due to the First World War, the next election was not held until 1918! He was knighted in 1917.

Barran's Conservative opponent in 1902, Sir AT. Lawson, was also a notable person, being chairman of Fairbairn Lawson Combe Barbour Ltd, the engineering firm, and leader of the

Conservative Party in Leeds. His lack of oratorical powers and terse manner probably led to him losing this safe Conservative seat.

J.D. Birchall, Barran's Conservative opponent in 1906 and 1910 was more notable later as the MP. for the new neighbouring Leeds: North East constituency between the wars. He was reprimanded for his views on compensation for slum landlords - "You don't pay the butcher for bad meat" - views that did not appeal to the Tories of Burmantofts!

In 1918 A.C. Farquharson, who had served with distinction in the RAMC in World War I, was the new Coalition Liberal MP., gaining a large majority of 10,440 because he represented both Liberals and Conservatives. He was to serve for only four years, however, finding the hours and work too much of a strain.

In the 1922 general election the Conservatives regained control of Leeds: North with a good majority (6,541). The new MP. was H.M. Butler, who was "actively associated with Kirkstall Forge", according to the Yorkshire Evening Post-presumably in a managerial capacity rather than as, say, a stoker! He described himself as Conservative "without prefix, affix or hyphen", but was succeeded in the 1923 general election by Sir Gervase Beckett, who increased the Conservative majority (to 7,442). Sir Gervase was the second son of William Beckett Denison, the banker, who came to a sad end when killed by a passing train while walking along the railway track. Sir Gervase had already been MP. for Whitby (1906 -1918) and Scarborough and Whitby (1918-1922). He increased the Conservative majority to 10,582 in the 1924 general election, when the Liberals did not stand.

After a merciful five year break from general elections, Leeds: North had another change of MP. in 1929, Osbert Peake winning the seat for the Conservatives with a majority of 8,481 in the three-party contest, Labour coming second above the

above the Liberals for the first time. Peake held Leeds: North until 1955, when the seat was abolished, having massive majorities (25,537 and 16,844) in the National Government elections of 1931 and 1935. He just scraped in in the Labour landslide election of 1945 (majority 128), but his majorities were back in five figures in 1950 and 1951. He was to continue to represent Oakwood and district briefly (May to December 1955) as M.P for the newly-enlarged constituency of Leeds: North East, which now included Oakwood. He achieved Cabinet rank in 1954 despite "taking the Mickey" out of Churchill over his age in office. Churchill took it well, but Peake and Eden did not hit it off and Peake resigned, becoming 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Ingleby. His son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount, was a polio victim and championed the disabled.

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