

## WALTER JOHN CONWAY



Walter Conway was a member of the Query Club, a group of young socialists formed circa 1920-21 and of which Aneurin Bevan was a leading member. Conway was born at Rhymney in 1873 where his father Thomas was a puddler in the local ironworks, the family living at 17 Manest St. in that town. Conway's mother Mary married in 1881 and his father Thomas a year later aged only 47, the 9 year-old Walter being sent to Bedwellty Workhouse Tredegar where he lived for several years. He often referred to his experiences as a workhouse boy, paying tribute to the treatment received, especially the

Master's teaching to do everything well. Here his great love of books developed, "*books are my best friend*" he would claim. At 17 he was working as a coal miner, lodging with James and Elizabeth Morgan at 18 Pochin Crescent. In 1901 aged 28 he married his wife Mary and had a daughter Catherine.

Conway would become a workhouse guardian and 30 years after leaving the workhouse became Chairman of its Board of Guardians, a position held with distinction. During his chairmanship controversy raged over seemingly-reckless spending and Conway, as the Chairman, was responsible for thrashing out the issue with the government. Both his understanding of the issues and attitude much impressed all those with whom he came in contact: he was able to speak and debate on any subject. His Guardian duties brought contact with children for whom he had great affection but, although having great sympathy for the poor and distressed, he believed they should not be pampered or spoon fed but helped to become usefully-occupied and self reliant. Walter Conway did not believe in unnecessary borrowing for social spending, but only enough to finance essential requirements, always firmly opposing extravagance, opinions that alienated the Board's Labour members and caused some unpopularity. A clear and effective speaker, he had a reputation of being a generous and fair opponent, always gentlemanly and dignified.

In 1915 when employed as a haulier in a local colliery, he was selected from 50 applicants as Medical Aid Society Secretary where his management skills would help guide and consolidate it. Largely due to Conway's efforts the society would provide the town's 20,000 people with medical services as good as any in the country.

Walter Conway lived with his wife Mary and their children - 3 girls and a boy - at 1 Rawlinson Terrace where family life was very happy with many hours spent together walking

local hills. He was a strict disciplinarian although never known to raise his voice in anger, being considered patient, calm and tolerant. Conway also championed the cause of temperance, attending Park Place Presbyterian Church three times every Sunday, acting as deacon. His death in 1933 was a sad blow to the Society he had served for eighteen years. *“His integrity, business-sense and diplomacy created a local health service that covered 95% of the population of the town... a huge achievement,”*

**John Morgan & Jane Wilcox.**

(With acknowledgments to “Health of a Nation” by Kenneth M. Bryant.)



A Tredegar classroom – 1930's (?) School unknown.