

An Introduction to Newport's Chartist Heritage

Melinda Drowley and Elin Jones



Chartists aimed to improve living and working conditions for all through Parliamentary reform. The People's Charter comprised six demands: votes for men over 21; secret ballots; payment for MPs; equal size constituencies; no property qualification for MPs; and annual parliaments. In November 1839, thousands of working men from the South Wales Valleys marched on Newport, in the last armed uprising on UK soil. The event marked a significant milestone on the road to universal suffrage. Our Chartist Heritage works to enable more people from diverse backgrounds to explore a history and claim a heritage that affirms the rights of all to citizenship.

Dr Melinda Drowley first got involved in Our Chartist Heritage in 2016 and became Chair in 2020, after serving for two years as a Trustee and Chair of the Festival Committee. Although she initially qualified as a Social Worker and Probation Officer, most of Melinda's career was spent in higher education as Director of Studies at Dartington College of Arts, as Academic Registrar at The University of St Mark and St John in Plymouth and at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, where she was Vice Principal (Academic) and undertook a two-year secondment as Associate Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of South Wales. For the last ten years of her career, she worked with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK and Hong Kong. Originally from Blackwood, Melinda returned to Wales in 2002 after a long sojourn in England and now lives in Caldicot. She is also the Chair of Newport and Gwent Literary Club and a member of the group campaigning and fundraising for a statue of Lady Rhondda in Newport.



Dr Elin Jones is Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees and Chair of the Education Committee of Our Chartist Heritage.

In 1996 Elin started work in an advisory role with the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, with responsibility for regulating history qualifications and developing the curriculum for history as well as its assessment methods, and commissioning history teaching resources. In 2013 she chaired the taskforce that was responsible for preparing a report to the Education Minister on the Cwricwlwm Cymreig (the Welsh perspective on curriculum subjects), history and the story of Wales. Elin is a popular guest on Radio Cymru where she discusses stories and characters from Welsh history.