

JONES, DORA HERBERT (1890-1974), singer and administrator

Name: Dora Herbert Jones
Date of birth: 1890
Date of death: 1974
Spouse: Herbert Jones
Child: Elsbeth Jones
Child: Hugh Jarrett Jones
Parent: Eleanor Rowlands (née Edwards)
Parent: John Rowlands
Gender: Female
Occupation: singer and administrator
Area of activity: Education; Music; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

Dora Herbert Jones was born in Llangollen on 26 August 1890, the fifth and youngest of the daughters of John and Eleanor Rowlands (née Edwards). She was baptized Deborah Jarrett Rowlands, but known by the name Dora from childhood. Her father kept a grocer's shop which was an island of Welshness in an anglicised town. She was educated at the Llangollen County School and in 1908 went to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth to study Welsh. During her time at Aberystwyth she came under the influence of the folk-song collector [Mary Davies](#), and was a member of a quartet which sang folk-songs and performed at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1911. After graduating in 1912 she took a year's course in palaeography before her appointment as secretary to [John Herbert Lewis](#), the M. P. for Flintshire, becoming allegedly the first woman to work in the House of Commons. She came into contact with [Ruth](#), [Herbert Lewis](#)'s wife, also a folk-song collector, and with the composer [Morfydd Llwyn Owen](#).

In June 1916 she married Herbert Jones of Plas Blaenau near Llangernyw, who was serving with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers; he was wounded at Ypres later that year. During the winter of 1916-17 Dora herself spent time in France as a Red Cross nurse under the supervision of the sisters [Gwendoline](#) and [Margaret Davies](#) of Llandinam. She later became secretary to Lord Wimborne, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and undertook confidential work on his behalf in Dublin. She had returned to London before the General Election of 1918 to organise [Herbert Lewis](#)'s campaign as a candidate for the University of Wales seat, and was the first woman in Britain to serve as an election agent.

Her daughter Elsbeth was born in 1919 and her son Hugh in 1922, but her husband died in November 1922. Dora worked for four years at the National Library in Aberystwyth until her appointment in 1927 as secretary of the Gregynog Press, and she lived at Bronbechan on the Gregynog estate for fifteen years, assisting the Press during its most productive period, and organising associated activities, including the Gregynog Music Festival which was established in 1933. She remained at Gregynog when it became a Red Cross hospital at the beginning of the Second World War, but in 1940 lost her daughter Elsbeth when the ship on which she was returning from Australia, where she had gone to assist children from south Wales, was torpedoed. Her son Hugh served in the army and was seriously wounded at Arnhem, but survived to enjoy a career in the diplomatic service.

Dora left Gregynog in 1942 to work for the Ministry of Labour in Swansea, then in Cardiff where she administered a government scheme to encourage young people to resume their education. She then returned to Swansea as a careers officer at the University College until her retirement in 1956. She moved back to Gregynog to live at Tŷ Canol with her sister Gertrude, who died in 1962. Dora herself died on 9 January 1974.

She had sung folk-songs throughout her life and from 1932 onwards regularly performed and interpreted them on radio and television. She represented Wales at the International Arts Festival at Prague in 1928 and inspired the composer Gustav Holst to interest himself in Welsh folk-songs - he was to arrange twelve of them for mixed voices. Elected a Vice-President of the Welsh Folk-Song Society in 1942, she served as its President from 1972 until her death. She was appointed MBE in 1967. A collection of her papers is housed at the National History Museum at St. Fagans.

Dora Herbert Jones was a pioneer as an administrator and of the role of women in administration, a pioneer in broadcasting, and one of the committed enthusiasts who preserved and interpreted Welsh folk-songs to a wider audience.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

Gwenan Mair Gibbard, *Brenhines Powys: Dora Herbert Jones a byd yr alaw werin* (Llanrwst 2003)

Alun Oldfield Davies (ed.), *Y Llwybrau Gynt 2* (Llandysul 1972), p. 91-114

Further reading

Prydwen Elfed-Owens, *Hanes Gwobr Goffa Lady Herbert Lewis* (2019)

Leila Salisbury, 'Jones, Dora Herbert (1890-1974)', *Cydymaith i Gerddoriaeth Cymru* (Talybont 2018), pp.277-8

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Dr J. Lloyd Williams Music MSS and Papers AL1/7: Dora Herbert Jones correspondence](#)

Wikidata: [Q27876643](#)

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