

MILES, WILLIAM JAMES DILLWYN (1916 - 2007), local government officer and author

Name: William James Dillwyn Miles

Date of birth: 1916

Date of death: 2007

Spouse: Joyce Eileen Miles (née Ord)

Partner: Judith Graham Jones

Child: Anthony Miles

Child: Marilyn Mason (née Miles)

Parent: Anne Miles (née Phillips)

Parent: Joshua Miles

Gender: Male

Occupation: local government officer and author

Area of activity: Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Literature and Writing

Author: David Saunders

Dillwyn Miles was born in Newport, Pembrokeshire on 25 May 1916, the eldest son of Joshua Miles, the proprietor of the Castle Hotel, and his wife Anne (Nancy, née Phillips). His brother Herbert was born in 1918. Following the death of his grandfather his grandmother asked that he stay with her on the outskirts of Newport, where he remained for twelve years. Welsh was his first language. Primary school in Newport was followed by Fishguard County School where, in the sixth form, he was appointed Head Boy. At the age of 16 he was invited by Newport Parish Council to become, at £10 per annum, the parish clerk, a position he held for three years before election as a Burgess of the Town and Corporation of Newport. His life of service to the community had commenced.

At the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth, where he studied geography, he was so dogged by ill-health and periods of acute depression - culminating in a nervous breakdown - that the editor of the college magazine, *The Dragon*, prepared his obituary. Recover he did, although he failed to complete his degree, and he began his working life as a school teacher, first at Letterston followed by Dinas, then Ysgol Dewi Sant at St David's.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 he enlisted in the Royal Army Service Corps and served in the Middle East, working on preparations for the invasion of Vichy French Lebanon and Syria in 1941 and rising to the rank of Captain. He was stationed in Jerusalem, where he founded a Welsh Society and met Joyce Ord, an ATS officer from Canada, whom he married at St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem on 2 February 1944. Their son Anthony was born in Pembrokeshire in May 1945, and their daughter Marilyn in London in July 1946. On leaving the army in December 1945 Miles spent two years as National Organiser at Palestine House, before moving back to Pembrokeshire where the family made their home at Portfield House on the outskirts of Haverfordwest.

As before the war Miles quickly immersed himself in local affairs, being elected to Newport Parish Council, Cemaes Rural District Council and Pembrokeshire County Council, and a little later, Mayor of Newport - a post he was to fill on three later occasions. In 1952 he was appointed Community Centres Officer for Wales and two years later General Secretary of the Pembrokeshire Rural Community Council. Initiatives as diverse as Chiropody for the Elderly, the Pembrokeshire Tourism Association, Meals on Wheels and the journal *The Pembrokeshire Historian* are just a few that benefited greatly from his industry.

Following the amalgamation of the counties of Carmarthen, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire into one as Dyfed in 1974, Miles became Director of the newly formed Dyfed Rural Council. He would later write how saddened he was by the change, even though he was able to look back with satisfaction on what had been achieved over the previous two decades. His contributions to public life continued unabated, including serving on the Mental Health Review Tribunal for Wales, the Sports Council for Wales, the Prince of Wales Committee for Wales, and as Mayor of Haverfordwest and Admiral of the Port.

A member of the Gorsedd of Bards since 1936 under the bardic name Dillwyn Cemais, Miles was elected a member of the Gorsedd Board in 1945 at the National Eisteddfod held at Rhosllannerchrugog. He remained a member for half a century and was the Grand Sword Bearer from 1959 to 1966 and Herald Bard for thirty years from 1966 to 1996. He represented the Gorsedd at the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in 1969.

Miles also gave valuable service to conservation of the natural environment and wildlife of his locality, commencing in 1958 as the Honorary Secretary of the West Wales Field Society, later to become the West Wales Naturalists' Trust and finally the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. He took over as the Field Society was raising funds to purchase Skomer Island, followed by its declaration as a National Nature Reserve. From 1960 to 1976 Miles was the landward link for the Skomer warden and from 1970 to 1976 also for Skokholm, dealing with all enquiries and accommodation bookings and providing support in countless ways for a succession of wardens. In 1964 the first radio telephone for Skomer was skilfully obtained from Trinity House, previous to which there had been no radio communication. Help with building projects was provided by the City of London Police Cadets and the Royal Naval Air Service at Brawdy, their helicopters proving particularly helpful. Indeed Miles himself was the first civilian to be landed by helicopter on the island. He played a key role in the development of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path, and was editor of the HMSO Guide *Pembrokeshire Coast* (1973).

An immensely knowledgeable local historian, Miles was the first secretary of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society from 1954, and served as its president from 1994. In addition to his broadcast features and articles for magazines and journals he was the author of twenty-three books, including *The Sheriffs of the County of Pembrokeshire 1541-1974* (1976), *The Royal National Eisteddfod of Wales* (1978), *Secrets of the Bards of the Isle of Britain* (1992), and a modern edition of **George Owen's** *The Description of Pembrokeshire* (1994). He published his autobiography in Welsh, *Atgofion Hen Arwyddfardd* in 1997, and in English, *A Mingled Yarn* in 2000.

His wife Joyce died in 1976, and for the last 23 years of his life his companion was Judith Graham Jones. Dillwyn Miles died at the age of 91 on 1 August 2007. A service in

celebration of his life and achievements was held on 26 October 2007 at St Martin's Church in Haverfordwest.

Author

David Saunders

Sources

Dillwyn Miles, *Atgofion hen arwyddfardd* (Dinbych 1997)
Dillwyn Miles, *A mingled yarn: recollections* (Llandybie 2000)
Obituaries in:
The Daily Telegraph, 14 August 2007
The Independent, 3 August 2007
The Times, 14 September 2007
The Western Telegraph, 8 August 2007
Natur Cymru, 24 (Autumn 2007), 40-41
Personal acquaintance

Further reading

Pembrokeshire Historical Society: Tribute to Dillwyn Miles
Wikipedia Article: Dillwyn Miles

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