

SALMON, HARRY MORREY (1891 - 1985), conservationist, naturalist, soldier

Name: Harry Morrey Salmon
Date of birth: 1891
Date of death: 1985
Child: Hugh Salmon
Child: Norman Salmon
Parent: Florence Isabella Salmon (née Thurston)
Parent: Harry Edgar Salmon
Gender: Male
Occupation: conservationist, naturalist, soldier
Area of activity: Nature and Agriculture; Military
Author: David Saunders

Morrey Salmon was born in Cardiff on 20 December 1891, the eldest of five children of Harry Edgar Salmon, the proprietor of the South Wales India Rubber Company, and his wife Florence Isabella (née Thurston). Morrey was the surname of his father's mother, Jane Susan Morrey, the daughter of an estate manager on the staff of the Duke of Beaufort. He had three younger brothers and a sister, and for much of his childhood the family lived at Heol Don, Whitchurch where, aged nine his interest in birds was awakened by the discovery on the way to school of a blackbird's nest.

Salmon's bird diary commenced in 1903 when he listed the birds' nests he had found. With his friends Bert Evans and Alex Lawrence he bird watched along the nearby Glamorgan Canal and soon further a field. In 1908 aged seventeen he bought his first camera, a quarter-plate reflex, immediately taking his first photographs of birds, a dipper's nest under a bridge and a rook's nest to which he climbed high in a tree. In 1910 he joined the Zoological Photographic Club, his photograph of a nightjar taken in 1913 being described sixty years later as a 'unique achievement'. His illustrated article *The Nightjar in Glamorgan* was published in the magazine *Wild Life* in 1914, and the previous year in the same magazine an article about the black-headed gull included thirteen of his photographs. He joined the Cardiff Naturalists' Society in 1910, the same year as another youthful enthusiast, Geoffrey Ingram, and thus began a friendship which was to endure until Ingram's death in 1971.

In his youth Salmon was an active member of the 4th Cardiff Scout Troop, which despite its title was the first Scout Troop to be set up in Wales. As if this were not enough Salmon and Bert Evans enlisted in the 7th (Cyclist) Territorial Battalion, Welch Regiment. There were two drill evenings a week, range firing at weekends and an annual training camp, in 1912 cycling in fifty mile a day stages to East Anglia and back. Promoted to corporal, then lance-sergeant the pressures of the family business were such that initially he shelved his ambition to obtain a commission.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 Salmon was required to remain with his Territorial battalion, guarding the east coast of Scotland between Aberdeen and Arbroath, and subsequently on the coasts of Durham and Yorkshire, but was commissioned into the 3rd Battalion of the Welch Regiment in December 1915 and reached the Western Front in late August 1916 in the northern part of the Ypres salient, where he served for twelve months as Intelligence Officer for the 16th (Cardiff City) Battalion and later for the Brigade.

Although to carry a camera in the front line was against regulations, that regulation was fortunately disregarded by many, including Salmon who, using a Vest Pocket Kodak, took some 250 photographs on the Western Front, the collection now being in The Welch Regiment Museum in Cardiff Castle. He was mentioned in despatches at the beginning of 1918 and in the King's Birthday Honours List of June he was awarded the Military Cross, to which was added a bar for bravery in battle in November. The citation reads:

He displayed great courage and devotion to duty during the attack on Bry on 4th November 1918. His company came under heavy machine-gun and shell-fire as soon as they started to attack. In spite of heavy casualties, he led them on, succeeding in capturing the village and consolidating it with a very depleted company. His excellent leadership and gallantry were directly responsible for the success of the operation.

Salmon's war service ended in June 1919 with return to civilian life as a director of the South Wales India Rubber Company, the family firm in West Bute Street, Cardiff. The following year he purchased his first car, a Godfrey-Nash two-seater, paid for using a gratuity of £280 on leaving the Army as a Captain. In this he and Geoffrey Ingram could explore further afield on bird-watching expeditions, one of their first, to Gower in 1921, subsequently being reported in the *Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society*, vol. LIV .

Together they were to become authors of no fewer than eight Welsh county avifaunas, commencing with Glamorgan in 1925 and concluding with Cardiganshire, with **W. M. Condry** as co-editor, in 1966. In addition Ingram and Salmon were contributors of articles to the *Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society* and fourteen articles well illustrated with their photographs to the magazine *The Romance of Nature*. Their illustrated book *Birds in Britain Today* published in 1934 concludes with a plea for a more tolerant approach to birds of prey: 'In other words, as sportsmen, will you not give the most sporting birds we have, the larger raptors, a sporting chance?'

In 1921 near Builth Wells they met with Arthur Brook (1886-1957), one of the best natural history photographers of the first half of the 20th century, and that was the start of a friendship which would continue until Brook's death. It was also the start of Salmon's long involvement with the protection of the red kite, those nesting in central Wales, the only ones in Great Britain, then numbering no more than nine breeding pairs. Salmon was awarded the RSPB's Gold Medal in 1972 for 'his chronicling of the past and present history of the kite.' An epic pioneering venture in 1924 was the first census of the gannet colony on Grassholm, indeed of any gannet colony, using photographs. With Clemence Acland he succeeded in counting 2,000 pairs of nesting gannets in two hours on the island, having sailed there from St Justinian near St David's.

In 1926 Salmon married Violet Evans (1896-1978), always known as Queenie, sister of his close friend Bert Evans whom he had first met as a four year old child when he was nine years of age. They had two sons, Norman born in 1929 and Hugh born in 1932.

In 1928 he and Queenie joined a group of staff from the National Museum of Wales undertaking survey work on Skomer, at the same time by chance meeting with R. M. Lockley (1903-2000), now residing on Skokholm, who was a friend of Queenie's youngest brother. Three years later Salmon and his family went to stay on Skokholm with the Lockley family, and were to return annually until the outbreak of the Second World War. These visits were far more than family holidays for Salmon helped in the establishment in 1933 of the Bird Observatory, the first in Great Britain, he and Ingram ringing the first birds caught, willow warblers in August of that year. The following year he was present during the visit by the International Ornithological Congress on their Long Excursion from Oxford. With his camera he took pioneering photographs of Manx shearwaters gathering offshore, and then using magnesium powder flash of the birds outside their nesting burrows after dark. Salmon was elected President of the Zoological Photographic Club from 1934 to 1936.

Recalled to the Welch Regimental Depot in Cardiff on the outbreak of the Second World War his first task was to take part in the training of new recruits before being posted in December 1939 to RAF Carew Cheriton, Pembrokeshire where he organised the defence of the airfield. This was quickly followed by appointment as Command Defence Officer at Coastal Command, Northwood, travelling extensively from Cornwall to the Shetlands, from Kent to Northern Ireland. The formation of the RAF Regiment in February 1942 saw Salmon reorganising and training the new units, and in September he was appointed the Commander-designate of all the units taking part in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, arriving in Algeria on 12 November. Following the end of fighting in North Africa his units took part in the Italian campaign and later in Greece, and he was awarded the CBE in recognition of his distinguished contribution to operations in the Mediterranean from November 1942 until May 1945.

He returned to civilian life with the family business after the war, but as always immersed himself in voluntary activities, including the creation of the Welch Regiment chapel in Llandaff Cathedral and the Regimental Museum in Cardiff Castle, where he deposited the unpublished manuscript of his war service memoirs, 'Blue Hats in the Line'.

He was much sought after to serve various organisations in the field of wild life and nature conservation, including the British Ornithologists' Union, the Council of the National Museum of Wales, Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales, Nature Conservancy, Prince of Wales Committee and the RSPB. In 1961 he was involved in the formation of the Glamorgan Naturalists Trust, now the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. His long struggle since the 1920s to provide protection for Kenfig Dunes

culminated in the establishment of the Local Nature Reserve in 1978. In 1982 the National Museum of Wales, on the 75th anniversary of the Museum's Royal Charter, mounted an exhibition of Salmon's bird photographs, and in the same year he was awarded an honorary DSc by the University of Wales.

Morrey Salmon died of a heart attack on 27 April 1985. His funeral was held in Llandaff Cathedral and he was buried in the churchyard of St Mary's, Whitchurch, close to his early bird-watching haunts.

Author

David Saunders

Sources

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Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Harry Morrey Salmon](#)

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