

## ROBERTS, IOAN (1941 - 2019), journalist, producer and author

**Name:** Ioan Roberts  
**Date of birth:** 1941  
**Date of death:** 2019  
**Spouse:** Alwena Roberts (née James)  
**Child:** Sion Roberts  
**Child:** Lois Roberts  
**Parent:** Ellis Roberts  
**Parent:** Esther Roberts  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** journalist, producer and author  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing  
**Author:** Alun Jones

Ioan Roberts was born on 22 November 1941 in the village of Rhoshirwaun on the Llŷn peninsula, the son of Ellis Roberts (1908-1980) and his wife Esther (1911-1988). He had one sister, Catherine (later Katie Prichard). He was educated at Llidiardau Primary School and Botwnnog Grammar School, and went on to Manchester University where he studied Civil Engineering for two years, before leaving to begin work as an engineer first with Montgomeryshire County Council and then with Shrewsbury Town Council. It was in Montgomeryshire in the 1970s that he met Alwena James; they married and had two children, Sion and Lois.

During this period Ioan Roberts began writing articles for the Welsh-language newspaper *Y Cymro* about the area and his portraits of local characters became very popular. He soon came to realize that he was no engineer, but a man of words. He decided to apply for a job as a journalist with *Y Cymro*, and even though he had no formal qualifications the editor, D. Llion Griffiths, had no doubt that he was the man for the job.

Gwilym Owen noticed Ioan Roberts's capabilities as a journalist and appointed him as an editor on the HTV news programme *Y Dydd* in 1977. When S4C was established in 1982 *Y Dydd* came to an end and Ioan lost his job. In the meantime Gwilym Owen became Radio Cymru news editor and thanks to him Ioan got some work with BBC Cymru.

In the mid-1980s, he moved away from 'hard' journalism to editing and scriptwriting, and in 1989 he joined the team of S4C's magazine programme, *Hel Straeon*, one of the most popular series that has ever been on the channel. The series was originally produced by Teledu'r Tir Glas and Ffilmiau'r Nant and later by Uned Hel Straeon and then Seiont, a company of which Ioan was one of the directors. He was delighted when his travel series to Scotland and Ireland with Lyn Ebenezer achieved the highest viewing figures on S4C. However, it was a great disappointment to him when *Hel Straeon* ended in 1998 and he found himself once more without work.

He turned then mostly to writing and editing books. His gift for finding and telling stories is evident in the many volumes he published over the following twenty years. He produced *Elfed: Cawr ar Goesau Byr* (2000) in memory of the minister and folk-singer Elfed Lewys by collecting other people's stories about him. His sympathy for people suffering oppression by the state is evident in his book *Achos y Bomiau Bach* (2001) on the Welsh Socialist Republican Movement conspiracy trial at Cardiff Crown Court in 1983, at which Ioan was present as a reporter for Radio Cymru. For the book *Rhyfel Ni - Profiadau Cymreig o Ddwy Ochr Rhyfel y Falklands/Malvinas* (2003) on the Falklands war, he visited Patagonia to interview families of Argentinian soldiers of Welsh descent, some of whom were killed in that war. Finding more than the eye can see is key to good travel writing, and there is no better example in Welsh than Ioan Roberts's *Pobol Drws Nesa - Taith fusneslyd drwy Iwerddon* (2008) on his travels in Ireland. In *Stori Tim o Walis* (2013) he chronicled the making of the popular comedy *C'mon Midffid*.

He also did important work as an editor, including three volumes of Beti George's radio interviews, and the autobiographies of Gwilym Plas, Llwyndyrus, Stewart Jones and Hywel Heulyn. He was one of the ablest editors of Plaid Cymru publications in both languages - at the national level with *Y Ddraig Goch* and *Welsh Nation* and in his local constituencies, Pontypridd in the 1989 by-election, and later Caernarfon after he returned to live in Pwllheli. Dafydd Wigley has said that he owes Ioan Roberts an enormous debt for the work he did on his autobiographical writings and for his shrewd political judgement.

Ioan Roberts was acutely aware of the importance of pictures in journalism. In his role as correspondent for *Y Cymro* he collaborated for several years with the photographer Geoff Charles, editing and composing texts to accompany his pictures, and he published four collections of Charles's work with Y Lolfa press. One of his outstanding works is his book on the great photo-journalist Philip Jones Griffiths from Rhuddlan. *Philip Jones Griffiths Ei Fywyd a'i Luniau*, which was published by Y Lolfa in 2018, was the first study of his life and work in any language.

In his last years Ioan Roberts was part of the Plas Carmel community project on the Llŷn peninsula, with the aim of restoring Capel Carmel as an interpretation centre for the rich culture of the region and telling the story of pilgrims to Bardsey Island. He heard the good news about funding for the project, but did not live to see the realization of his dream. His last book, published posthumously, was the product of years of research into Welsh-language Catholicism, *Gwinllan a Roddwyd: Hanes y Cylch Catholig* (Y Lolfa, 2021).

Ioan Roberts died on 29 December 2019 from a heart attack as he walked home from Porthdinllaen beach. His funeral was held at Seiloh Chapel, Chwilog, and he was buried in the cemetery of Penuel Baptist Chapel, Tyddyn Shôn.

### Author

## Sources

Alun Jones (ed.), *Cofio Ioan* (Llanrwst 2020)  
Personal acquaintance and family information

## Additional Links

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