

MASON, LILIAN JANE (1874 - 1953), actress

Name: Lilian Jane Mason
Date of birth: 1874
Date of death: 1953
Spouse: Edmund Fawcett Kennedy
Child: Samuel Butler Kennedy
Parent: Jane Mason
Parent: Samuel Butler Mason
Gender: Female
Occupation: actress
Area of activity: Performing Arts
Author: Stephen Lyons

Lilian Mason was born on 20 November 1874 in Park Terrace, Pontypool, the eldest of four children of Samuel Butler Mason, a physician and surgeon, and his wife Jane. Lilian was an accomplished pianist and singer, taking part in many concerts and eisteddfodau in her teenage years and early twenties. In the late 1890s she became involved with the Pontypool Amateur Dramatic Club, appearing in several productions.

On 9 April 1901 Lilian married Edmund Fawcett Kennedy, a theatrical manager at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester. The Kennedy family had lived in Pontypool when Lilian and Edmund were children. In 1903, their only child, Samuel Butler Kennedy, was born at Pontypool.

Lilian's artistic leanings, however, were strong. In 1904 she decided to launch her own acting career and, in June of that year, was playing a small part in a touring production of *East Lynne*. Edmund was also in the cast. They were to work together many more times in their careers. In 1906 and 1907 they played husband and wife in a production of *Lucky Durhamand*, in 1909, were once again touring in *East Lynne*.

In May 1911 Lilian appeared as Mary Edwards in a production of *The Bells of Lin Lan Lone*, produced and directed by the famous Welsh actor Lyn Harding (1867-1952), who also played the lead role. One review reported that Miss Mason 'displayed quite an uncommon degree of artistic instinct and a capacity for much greater things'. Over the next year she appeared with her husband in *The Gate of Dreams*, *Lucky Durham again* and *Right to Die*.

In the summer of 1912 Lilian joined Edmund Gwenn and Hilda Trevelyan's production of *Yours* at the Vaudeville Theatre, London. This was followed by *Little Miss Llewellyn*, a Belgian farce translated and relocated in Wales. Lilian played the maid Lizzie. Also in the cast were Richard 'Dick' Hopkins, one of a large family of performers from Neath, and Tom Owen, a comedian from Gorseinon. The play was extremely successful and ran for 192 performances.

In 1913, Edmund Gwenn recruited more Welsh actors to tour the play around the UK, effectively forming what was to become known as the Welsh Players. Lilian, Hopkins and Tom Owen were now joined by **Gareth Hughes**, William Hopkins (Dick's brother) and **Eleanor Daniels**.

The Welsh Players was the first company of its kind. They played a production of *The Joneses* at The Strand Theatre in London in October 1913 before presenting three performances of **J. O. Francis's** award-winning play *Change* at The Haymarket Theatre. It was hoped that these productions would be the beginnings of a National Theatre for Wales. However, while others performed *Change* in Cardiff, Lilian and her colleagues sailed from Southampton for America in January 1914 to present the play in New York. One actor, who played the only Englishman in the play, was unable to sail with the company and his place was taken by Lilian's husband.

The play had not been well publicised, and many thought it was to be an amateur production. This and below freezing weather in the city kept the public away. In any case, the critics thought the play 'turgid' and 'grey'. The New York run was abandoned and the play toured to Canada, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Washington before returning for another chance in New York in early April. Lilian was often singled out for praise in the reviews, especially for a scene in which she watches from a window as one of her three sons is shot as he tries to dissuade his brother from rousing a squad of striking miners.

After a short run in Chicago, Lilian and her family sailed back to the UK in May, and in July 1914 she was again working with her husband at the Croydon Hippodrome in *A Scrap of Paper*. She then spent many months working again with Lyn Harding in *For France*. Lilian and her husband continued to work throughout the war years, occasionally together, but there were more periods of unemployment or being 'disengaged' as it was termed then.

The silver screen came calling in 1919 when she made two films in America. *Valley of the Giants* starred Wallace Reid and involved rival logging companies battling for Redwood trees, with a romance thrown in. *You're Fired* also starred Wallace Reid. Lilian played minor parts in both films.

In April 1920 Lilian became involved in a Welsh production once more, but only for a six-night run. Ernest Cove, who had played her husband in *Change*, was producing *A Gentleman From Wales* and Lilian was advertised as 'the greatest of all Welsh actresses'.

In 1922 and 1923 Lilian worked predominantly in repertory theatre at Birmingham, Edinburgh, Nottingham and Leeds. She then joined a touring production of the comedy *Lilies of the Field* in which she played a masterful old grandmother. The tour lasted from February 1924 to February 1925. For the remainder of the 1920s Lilian mixed theatre with occasional radio productions. She was also involved as a council member of The Stage Guild.

Another attempt at a Welsh National Theatre was made in the summer of 1933 when another play by J. O. Francis, *Howell of Gwent*, was staged in south Wales. Lilian played the part of Arianrhod. She continued to act until in her 60s; in the 1939 *Register* she is described as a 'retired actress'.

Tragedy had struck when, in 1932, Lilian and Edmund's son, Samuel, died of heart failure in New York. Lilian and Edmund lived out their last years in Brighton until, on 28 January 1953, they both died within hours of each other, Edmund aged 79 and Lilian 78. They were buried on 3 February at Patcham cemetery, Brighton. Their devotion to each other is recorded on their grave with the words 'In their death they were not divided'.

Author

Stephen Lyons

Sources

Welsh Newspapers (National Library of Wales)

British Newspaper Archive

Ancestry

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [The Valley of the Giants \(1919 film\)](#)

Additional Links

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