

HUGHES, EDWARD ERNEST (1877 - 1953), first Professor of history at the University College, Swansea, and a notable intermediary between the university and the public

Name: Edward Ernest Hughes

Date of birth: 1877

Date of death: 1953

Spouse: Sarah Hughes (née Evans)

Spouse: Sarah Agnes Hughes (née Thomas)

Parent: Catherine Hughes

Parent: Owen Hughes

Gender: Male

Occupation: first Professor of history at the University College, Swansea, and a notable intermediary between the university and the public

Area of activity: Education; History and Culture

Author: Marian Henry Jones

Born 7 February 1877 in Towyn, Merionethshire, one of the 8 children of Owen, a policeman who ended his career as deputy chief constable of his county, and Catherine Hughes. He became blind in one eye and damaged the other in an accident as a child, a disability which he overcame to a large extent by developing his memory and hearing. He went to Bala grammar school, and lodged with the headmaster J.C. Evans, to whom he acknowledged his great indebtedness, as well as to the school. In 1895 he went to U.C.W., Aberystwyth, graduating with first-class honours in history in 1898. Then he went to Jesus College, Oxford, and graduated with second-class honours in modern history in 1902. He often talked of the kindness of **Sir John Rhys** to him and of his enjoyment of the meetings of the Dafydd ap Gwilym Society. His first appointment was as history master in Llanelli boys' secondary school; then in 1905 he moved to lecture in the history department of University College, Cardiff, where he acted as professor during the long illness of Professor Bruce. During these years, before the college had an extramural department, he began to lecture under the W.E.A. in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire Welsh history was his favourite topic, and his aim was to give the cultured workers who had hardly ever heard any mention of it at school some notion of the past history of their country. Since his school days, according to **R.T. Jenkins**, a school companion, he had been a gifted story-teller, and because the material for his lectures was of necessity in his memory rather than on paper, his style of lecturing was like that of a preacher so as to gain the attention of his audience. According to **R.T. Jenkins** he did more than anyone since **O.M. Edwards** to popularise the study of Welsh history.

In 1920, when the University College of Swansea was founded, he was persuaded by the new principal, **Franklin Sibly**, to join him there as a Welshman who understood the needs of a college in a Welsh industrial district. For some years Ernest Hughes was the only lecturer in the arts faculty there, but his main task initially was to bring the new college to the notice of the public and obtain their support. He lectured on the history of Wales in the area which the college was to serve, and gave the proceeds of the lectures to the fund to establish the college library.

He continued to lecture in Welsh and English to external classes and cultural societies after a chair of history was established in 1926 -he had been an independent lecturer until then. During the whole of his period as history Professor in Swansea he insisted that every student in his department take a course in Welsh history. So great was his respect for the highest academic standards that he did not lecture on this topic himself in college but entrusted the work to **Glyn Roberts** who had the research qualifications that were impossible for him to attain with his poor and deteriorating eyesight. He restricted himself to his own special field, namely that of the constitutional history of England in the Middle Ages. He prepared those lectures with the help of his wife, who read for him. He lectured to the first-year students on Europe after the fall of Rome. Many of the colourful phrases, clearly enunciated in his melodious voice, remained in the memory of generations of his students.

He was chairman of Swansea Drama Company for many years, as well as serving as actor and producer. He led the Union of Welsh Drama. He was chairman of the Swansea Orpheus Musical Society for years, and sang folk-songs well. He served on the councils of the National Eisteddfod and was drama adjudicator in the festival many times. He showed much zeal for the unity of the University of Wales and served regularly on its committees. He worked for Undeb Cymru Fydd during the difficult years of World War II and afterwards. He was a member of the court of governors of N.L.W. He presided over the Swansea and Llanelli branch of the Historical Association, fostering connections between the teaching of history in schools and in his college. Although he was not able to write much himself, he constantly urged others to do so. He collected material for the magazine *Y Beirniad* for **Sir John Morris-Jones** and supervised its finances.

When a studio was opened in Swansea by the B.B.C. he broadcast in English to the schools of Wales, and when the '*Welsh Interval*' was provided he discussed the topics of the day in Wales for some years. He was a zealous Calvinistic Methodist and an excellent Sunday school teacher who attracted to his class in Trinity, Swansea, men of all ages and denominations. He continued to be active with cultural movements after he retired from his chair in 1944.

He died 23 December 1953 in Swansea and was buried in Llanycil churchyard. He married twice: (1) in 1907, Sarah Agnes, daughter of William Thomas (coal merchant), Aberystwyth. She died in 1918 leaving two daughters; (2) in 1920, Sarah (Sally), daughter of Thomas Evans, Abergavenny, who died in 1967. They had two sons.

Author

Marian Henry Jones

Sources

Sally Hughes, *Ernest Hughes* (Llandysul 1967) (private edition, 1967)

R. T. Jenkins, 'Professor Ernest Hughes', *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society*, July 1954, 8, 4-8

R. T. Jenkins, *Edrych yn Ɔ'1* (London 1968)(1968)

O. Llew Owain, *Hanes y ddrama yng Nghymru, 1850-1943* (Liverpool 1948)(1948)

information provided by his son, Owen Hughes, Aberystwyth

personal knowledge

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Edward Ernest Hughes](#)

Additional Links

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