

JENKIN, THOMAS JAMES (1885 - 1965), plant breeder and Professor of Agricultural Botany

Name: Thomas James Jenkin
Date of birth: 1885
Date of death: 1965
Spouse: Kate Laura Jenkin (née Griffiths)
Parent: Sarah Alice Jenkin
Parent: David Jenkin
Gender: Male
Occupation: plant breeder and Professor of Agricultural Botany
Area of activity: Education; Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics
Author: Llywelyn Phillips

Born 8 January 1885 at Budloy, Maenclochog, Pembrokeshire, younger son of David and Sarah Alice Jenkin. After leaving the elementary school at Garn'rochor he worked on the farm with his parents and brother. He went to U.C.W., Aberystwyth, in October 1907 to attend a short course in agriculture (one term), and returned for a follow-up course of two terms in 1908-09. He went to the Old College School, Carmarthen, in 1909 to attain university matriculation, and returned to the college at Aberystwyth in 1910, gaining a first-class honours B.Sc. degree in 1914 in botany. He was the agricultural organizer for Brecon and Radnor, 1914-15, and adviser in agricultural botany for the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in the counties served by the University College of North Wales, Bangor, 1915-19, and in those served by Aberystwyth college in 1919-20. He joined the staff of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station in 1920, being senior research officer until he was elevated assistant director in 1940 and director and Professor of Agricultural Botany, 1942-50. He was acknowledged as the pioneer in the breeding of new and improved grass varieties and the techniques which he developed have been adopted world-wide. The first written mention of the need to establish an official plant breeding station is to be found in his honours thesis of 1914, and his paper, written jointly with R.G. Stapledon in *Jnl. Agric. Sci.*, 8 (1916), on indigenous grasses, was fundamental to much of the work which was done after establishing the Welsh Plant Breeding Station in 1919. In addition to his practical knowledge of agriculture as a farmer and agricultural adviser, he had an exceptionally keen eye to recognize the attributes of verdancy and of good cropping and the persistence of native grasses. His talent as a scientist and his dedication as a researcher enabled him to cross the various plants he had chosen, to select from among the offspring, and to develop better varieties in order to establish new productive and permanent pastures. An example of this is his perennial ryegrass S.23 which contributed immeasurably to the work of re-seeding productive pastures in the lowlands, sheepwalks and hill country from the 1930s onwards. In addition, his fundamental research work into the relationship within varieties and between varieties of grass, such as *Lolium*, *Festuca* and *Phalaris*, stand as an example of strict scientific dedication using a mere fraction of the apparatus and resources which became available to the plant breeder in the second half of the 20th c. After retiring in 1950 he published much of the fruit of his research into the genetics of grasses. He published several articles in this field in the *Jnl. of Genetics* and other scientific journals, as well as in the bulletins of the Plant Breeding Station. He contributed valuable articles in Welsh to *Gwyddor gwlad*, and to the journal of the agricultural society of the college at Aberystwyth. His short story 'Cawl' in *Y Wawr*, 1917, the Welsh magazine of Aberystwyth college, is a treasure-house of Pembrokeshire dialect. He was consultant director of the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau for Pastures and Field Crops from 1942 to 1950, and he gave valuable service on the council and committees of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany in Cambridge. He was president of the Welsh Black Cattle Society, 1950-51, and he was the first recipient of the gold medal of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society. He received the degrees of M.Sc. and D.Sc. of the University of Wales, he was created a C.B.E. in 1950, and he was made honorary member of the Swedish Seed Association in 1961.

He married, 1919, Kate Laura Griffiths and they had two sons. He died 7 November 1965 in Aberystwyth and was buried in the public cemetery.

Author

Llywelyn Phillips, (1914 - 1981)

Sources

Personal knowledge

Report of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station for 1965

Who was who?

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Thomas James Jenkin](#)

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