

## LEWIS, Lady RUTH (1871 - 1946), a pioneering collector of Welsh folk-songs, and advocate of educational, religious, temperance and philanthropic bodies

**Name:** Ruth Lewis  
**Date of birth:** 1871  
**Date of death:** 1946  
**Spouse:** John Herbert Lewis  
**Child:** Kitty Idwal Jones (née Lewis)  
**Child:** Mostyn Lewis  
**Parent:** Alice Caine (née Brown)  
**Parent:** William Sproston Caine  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** a pioneering collector of Welsh folk-songs, and advocate of educational, religious, temperance and philanthropic bodies  
**Area of activity:** Education; Music; Philanthropy; Poetry; Religion  
**Author:** Evan David Jones

Born 29 November 1871, at 16 Alexandra Drive, Liverpool, the third child of William Sproston Caine (*DNB*, 1901-50), and his wife Alice, the daughter of Hugh Stowell Brown, minister at the Myrtle Street Baptist church, Liverpool. When her father was elected M.P. for Scarborough, the family moved to London where she studied at Clapham Secondary School for Girls before entering Newnham College, Cambridge. She completed a degree course at Cambridge but, as the university did not award degrees to women, she received an M.A. from the University of Dublin. She worked for a few years, after she graduated, at the Caine Mission Hall in Vauxhall where she took an interest in temperance and in working with young women. She married **John Herbert Lewis** in 1897 at Clapham; **Thomas Gee** officiated at the wedding. The married couple lived at Penucha Mansion, Caerwys, and at 23 Grosvenor Road, London. A daughter, Kitty, was born in 1898 and a son, Mostyn, in 1901. She had attained a thorough knowledge of Welsh and the children were fluent in Welsh. The family were regular worshippers at Welsh chapels in Caerwys and in London. Ruth Lewis identified herself with Welsh life; she involved herself in public life and took a particular interest in her husband's work. She possessed a gift for public speaking which proved a great strength for a number of causes. She was frequently asked to address public meetings, especially at temperance meetings sponsored by Undeb Dirwestol Merched Gogledd Cymru (the North Wales Women's Temperance Union). She was generous both in her welcome and in her assistance, both at her home and at the Charing Cross Calvinistic Methodist chapel, to young Welsh women who came to work in London.

During World War I, Ruth Lewis ran a canteen for soldiers in the borough of Westminster. This canteen was the first to stay open throughout the night in order to provide for soldiers arriving at Victoria Station. For this service, she was appointed O.B.E. She was appointed a J.P. in the borough and she became the first woman to sit on the Flintshire Commission of Peace; she appeared often on the Caerwys bench.

Because of her great interest in music, she was among the founding members of the Welsh Folk Song Society in 1906. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ruth Lewis, **Dr. Mary Davies** and **Grace Gwynedd Davies**, with the use of a phonograph, preserved many folk songs which were about to vanish from folk memory. She contributed on several occasions to the Society's journal. In 1927, she was responsible for revising the Society's constitution and she was elected president in 1930. At her own expense, she published a collection of Flintshire folk songs. She was elected a member of the Gorsedd of Bards. She was industrious in the Presbyterian Church of Wales, both in north Wales and in London. In recognition of their outstanding contributions to the life of the Church, an illuminated address was presented to Ruth Lewis and her husband in 1923. In the same year, they both spent nine months working as missionaries in Lushai where their daughter was a missionary.

After the death of her husband in 1933, Ruth Lewis was elected a member of Flintshire County Council for the Ysgeifiog and Caerwys districts. She was also a member of the courts of the university colleges in Bangor and Aberystwyth and of the courts and councils of the National Museum and the National Library. She took a great interest in Flintshire County Library and in the Women's Institute and she served as president of the Caerwys branch of the Institute and of the nursing society there. She died 26 August 1946 and was buried in the graveyard at Ddôl on 29 August

### Author

**Evan David Jones**, (1903 - 1987)

### Sources

*Journal of the Welsh Folk-Song Society*, passim

*The Chester Chronicle*, 31 August 1946

*Y Gymraes*, 1921

information from her daughter, Kitty Idwal Jones

## Further Reading

E. Wyn James, 'An 'English' lady among the Welsh folk: Ruth Herbert Lewis and the Welsh Folk-Song Society' in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation* (Aberdeen 2004)

Andrew Green, *Morfydd Llwyn Owen a Ruth Herbert Lewis*

David R. Jones, Lady Ruth Herbert Lewis (1871-1946) : indefatigable collector of Flintshire's folk-songs, *Flintshire Historical Society journal*, Vol. 37, (2007), pp. 106-168

Wikipedia Article: [Ruth Lewis](#)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 22681C: Welsh folk-songs](#)

NLW Archives: [Dr J. Lloyd Williams Music MSS and Papers AH2/1: Ruth Lewis Collection](#)

NLW Archives: [Dr J. Lloyd Williams Music MSS and Papers AL1/9: Ruth Lewis correspondence](#)

Wikidata: [Q20733768](#)

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