

LEWIS, BENJAMIN WALDO (1877 - 1953), Baptist minister

Name: Benjamin Waldo Lewis
Date of birth: 1877
Date of death: 1953
Spouse: Enid Mari Lewis (née Wheldon)
Parent: Anne Lewis (née Williams)
Parent: John Lewis
Gender: Male
Occupation: Baptist minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Benjamin George Owens

Born 7 September 1877 at Holyhead, Anglesey, the son of John (according to family tradition, but David according to the biographies) Lewis, (born 29 August 1829) from Bridell, and Anne Lewis (née Williams, in February 1848 or 1849) from Fishguard. They married at Newport, Monmouth on 31 January 1871. His father was, according to tradition, of the lineage of a brother of **Titus Lewis** while his wife was the niece of **Benjamin Davies** (1826 - 1905), his sister's daughter. His father was a stonemason who enjoyed a period of success in Cardiff c. 1850-75, but as the trade deteriorated he was forced to move to other places to seek work, at first at Holyhead and then, c. 1880 at the village of Broughton near Wrexham. In 1887 his father decided to visit the USA, where a son of his first marriage was living, in the hope of establishing a new life there, but he was taken ill on the voyage and he died shortly after arriving at Danville, Pa. on 27 May 1887.

Benjamin Waldo Lewis was baptised at Salem, Mass. within a week of his eleventh birthday, but less than three years later the family had moved back closer to the extended family in south Wales. They moved to Tylorstown and, in July 1891, enrolled as members at Hermon, Pontygraith. There he was persuaded to begin preaching, at the same time as **James Thomas Evans**, the principal of the Baptist College, Bangor. He began to earn his living in a colliery, at first underground and then in the smithy. After taking night-classes for some 7-8 years he was accepted for a period of about a year to 18 months at the Pontypridd Academy (again along with **J.T. Evans** and another of his friends, **Ben Bowen**). From 1900-05 he went to the Baptist College and University College, Cardiff where he graduated B.A. in 1905. From 1905-08 he attended the Presbyterian College, Carmarthen where he suffered a breakdown in his health in the middle of his B.D. course. He was ordained on 21 January 1909 as the minister of Penuel, Carmarthen, where he had already enrolled in membership during his college days. This was his only pastorate until his retirement in 1946, when he was appointed honorary minister. During World War I, c. May 1915-November 1916, he was released by his church to work with the Y.M.C.A., first of all for some months at Dover and thereafter, for almost a year, in Malta. There he was promoted to become a 'Regional Leader', thereby being responsible for all the work of the Society on the island. He died at his home at Briarleigh, Longacre Road on 31 December 1953, after a long illness which followed an accident at Borth the previous September. He was buried at Carmarthen public cemetery on 4 January 1954.

He was married on 14 June 1922 at Zion English Presbyterian church, Carmarthen to Enid Mari Wheldon (born 14 March 1892), a native of Crickhowell, the daughter of Pierce Jones Wheldon and Louisa Arnaud Wheldon (née MacKenzie). Her father was the manager of the National Provincial bank and a brother of **Thomas Jones Wheldon** (1841 - 1916), who had settled in Carmarthen in 1900. She died 2 May 1963 at Glangwili Hospital, Carmarthen. There was one son of the marriage.

For very many years B.W. Lewis was an active supporter of a variety of movements and good causes in the town of Carmarthen and its environs, e.g. he was for 35 years a member and also the chairman of the governing body of Carmarthen hospital. When the National Health Service Act was enacted in 1947, he became a member of the Welsh Regional Hospital Board and chairman of the governing body of the West Wales hospital. He was a member of the governing body of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School from 1917 onward and its chairman in 1944. Until 1944 he was a member of the Carmarthen Borough education committee; a member of the County Library Committee; a member of the South West Wales branch of the Historical Society founded in 1931 and its chairman from the end of World War II until March 1950; chairman of the Community Council established in the town in 1932 to allay the distress of unemployment; the first chairman of the Carmarthen Christian Churches' Council; a member of the Carmarthen Arts Club; chairman of the committee of Baptist students of the Presbyterian College and a member of its board of Trustees. Throughout his life he was a student and collector of books; he conducted extra-mural courses under the auspices of the University College, Aberystwyth. He lectured at the Presbyterian College during the illness of **J. Oliver Stephens** in 1928-29. He contributed extensively to the literature of the Baptist denomination, e.g. a series of articles on the Baptists among the other denominations in *Seren Cymru* 1930, and between 1911 and 1937 intermittent lessons for the syllabus of the Sunday school for *Yr Hauwr* and *Yr Arweinydd Newydd*. He was elevated to become president of the Carmarthen and Cardigan Baptist Association in 1946-47 and the subject of his address was, 'Yr hyn a erys'. Politically, he was at first a Liberal, but at the general election of December 1923, he turned publicly to the Labour Party, becoming a pioneer of the movement in the town and thereafter a close friend of Daniel Hopkin (1886 - 1951) who in May 1929 was elected as Member of Parliament for the county.

His wife was an able musician, and she, like her husband, was prominent in public circles, e.g. president and chairman of the Arts Club; a member of the Amateur Operatic Society in the town; a member of the South Wales Consultative Council of the National Assistance Board; a member of the management committee of the County Nursing Association; a member of the house committee of Kensington Hospital in Pembrokehire and prominent in the work of the W.V.S.

Author

Benjamin George Owens

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personal information from his son

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