

RICHARDS, ROBERT (1884 - 1954), historian and politician

Name: Robert Richards
Date of birth: 1884
Date of death: 1954
Spouse: Mary Myfanwy Richards (née Owen)
Parent: Ellen Richards
Parent: John Richards
Gender: Male
Occupation: historian and politician
Area of activity: History and Culture; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Evan David Jones

Born at Tan-y-ffordd, Llangynog, Montgomeryshire, 7 May 1884, the son of John Richards, slate quarryman, and his wife Ellen. He was educated at Llangynog elementary school, Llanfyllin county school and the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. Between 1903 and 1906 he pursued degree courses in political science, Latin, French and philosophy obtaining a first-class honours in political science, but for some reason he did not take his degree. He spent the next two years at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he graduated with honours in economics. He was appointed lecturer in political economics in the University of Glasgow where he remained until, on the urging of Sir Henry Jones, he moved to Wales as a first full-time lecturer in the department of extra-mural studies at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1911. He held classes in economics, European history, and political science at Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llanberis, Bethesda, and Pen-y-groes. In 1916 he took a post in the War Office, and later under the Board of Agriculture, but returned to Bangor in 1919, holding classes in Cefn-mawr, Rhos, Liandrillo and Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. He was appointed head of the department of economics at U.C.N.W., Bangor, in 1921. In October 1922 he was elected the first M.P. (L) for the Wrexham division. For a few months in 1924 he was Under-Secretary of State for India where he showed understanding and ability and won the sympathy of the Indians. He lost his seat in the general election of 1924, regaining it in 1929, losing it again in November 1931 and winning it for the third time in June 1935, and holding it thereafter until the end of his life. Between 1931 and 1935 he was a lecturer in economics and political science at Coleg Harlech. During World War II he was head of the civil defence service for north Wales. In 1946 he led a parliamentary deputation to India where he won the respect and trust of Gandhi and Jinnah. He contributed a series of essays on India to *Yr Eurgrawn* in 1951. With Sir Ifor Williams he edited *Y Tyddynnwr*, 1922-23, writing much of the contents of the four parts of that short-lived journal himself. He was a historian by instinct and his main contribution in Welsh was *Cymru'r Oesau Canol* (1933). In the last years of his life he used to spend much of his time in the library of the House of Commons researching the history of monasteries in Wales. He did not succeed in having this work published, but a typescript remains in the N.L.W. He did, however, publish part of it, on the Cistercian abbeys, in *Trans. of the Denbighshire Historical Soc.*, vol. i (1952). [Another part dealing with the history of Cymer abbey was published posthumously in the *Jnl. of the Merioneth Historical and Record Soc.*, vol. iii, part iii (1959)]. With R.G. Lloyd he published booklets on the history of the churches of Llandanwg (1935) and Llanfair, near Harlech (1936).

He took an interest in antiquities [he was elected F.S.A. in 1940] and for ten years was chairman of the committee of the Cambrian Archaeological Association and its president in 1953. He was chairman of the Commission on Ancient Monuments, and was a member of Council of Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion from 1936; he was made a vice-president in 1951. He was a zealous Methodist and was a Sunday school teacher in the chapel at Llangynog for years, never missing a Sunday at home if at all possible. He was a true Welshman, a man of the people and a modest gentleman. He declined the governorship of Malta, and the leaders of his party did not succeed in persuading him to be elevated to the House of Lords. It was characteristic of him that his maiden speech in parliament on 3 March 1923 dealt with the bill that sought to turn the Ceiriog Valley into a reservoir for Warrington. He was a hard worker; in spite of his political duties he continued as tutor in economics at Coleg Harlech. At the end of the war he was prevailed upon to accept the headship of the department of economics at Bangor. He was a staunch patriot, loyal to Wales, its history, literature and music; he was a fluent speaker, especially in Welsh.

He married in 1918 Mary Myfanwy Owen (died 1950) of Llangynog; they made their home in their native parish and stayed there all their lives. They had no children. He died 22 December 1954 and was buried in Peniel (CM) cemetery, Llangynog.

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

Who was who?

The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1955, 73-8

Further Reading

NLW Archives: Parliamentary General Election, 1922. To the Electors of the Wrexham Division of Denbighshire

NLW Archives: Parliamentary General Election, 1923. To the Electors of the Wrexham Division of Denbighshire

NLW Archives: Vote for Robt. Richards. The Workers' Candidate.

NLW Archives: Wrexham Division Parliamentary Election, 1924. Vote for Richards. The Workers' Candidate.

NLW Archives: Robert Richards. The Labour Candidate.

NLW Archives: Parliamentary Election, 1931, October 27th. Vote for Robert Richards, The Straight Forward Free Trader.

Wikipedia Article: Robert Richards

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Robert Richards MP Papers

VIAF: 163325902

Wikidata: Q7349268

Published date: 2001

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Jones, E. D., (2001). RICHARDS, ROBERT (1884 - 1954), historian and politician. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 10 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s2-RICH-ROB-1884>

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