

SMITH, WILLIAM HENRY (BILL; 1894 - 1968) president of the Welsh National Opera Company

Name: William Henry Smith

Date of birth: 1894

Date of death: 1968

Spouse: Elsie Smith (née Allan)

Parent: Eliza Smith

Parent: William Henry Smith

Gender: Male

Occupation: president of the Welsh National Opera Company

Area of activity: Business and Industry; Music; Performing Arts

Author: Mary Auronwy James

Born 9 October 1894, the eldest of the three sons of William Henry and Eliza Smith, Cardiff. He attended Albany Road school before being apprenticed to the drapery trade. He began studying for a legal career by attending night classes at the technical college but following service as a gunner in World War I he joined a motor firm in London. Eventually, in 1932, he and David Bernard Morgan started a thriving business, Morsmith Motors Ltd., in Cardiff. He held important offices in the motor trade and gave valuable support to local sports, the Guild of Welsh Playwrights, Cardiff New Theatre Trust and the University College in Cardiff, but he is remembered particularly for his services to music. During the 1920s, after a visit to La Scala, Milan, when his interest in opera was roused, he became secretary of the Cardiff Grand Opera Society. It was not till 1946 that the Welsh National Opera Company held its first season in Cardiff, and when a board of management was formed two years later he was chosen as its chairman, an office he held for twenty years. The chorus at first rehearsed in a room over his showrooms. Having gained an early invitation for the company to perform at Sadler's Wells, he built up a large opera following in Wales, persuading the Arts Council to increase its grant tenfold and convincing businessmen and almost 60 local authorities to support the company. He was awarded the C.B.E. in 1953 for his services to music and an honorary LL.D. degree by the University of Wales in 1961. Shortly before he died on 9 June 1968 he was appointed the first president of the opera company. He married Elsie Allan in 1924.

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

Who was who?

The Biographical Index of W. W. Price, Aberdŵr

Welsh Music, the journal of the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music, 3, no.3 (1968), 3-4

The Times and Western Mail, 10 June 1968

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