

STAPLEDON, Sir REGINALD GEORGE (1882 - 1960), agricultural scientist

Name: Reginald George Stapledon
Date of birth: 1882
Date of death: 1960
Spouse: Doris Stapledon (née Wood Bourne)
Parent: Mary Stapledon (née Clibbert)
Parent: William Stapledon
Gender: Male
Occupation: agricultural scientist
Area of activity: Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics
Author: Llywelyn Phillips

Born 22 September 1882 in Northam, Devon, youngest son of William and Mary Stapledon. He was educated at the United Services College, Westward Ho, and Emmanuel College, Cambridge, receiving his M.A. in botany in 1904. After working in the family's commercial office in Cairo for about two years he spent a year as a student on a large fruit farm in Kent. In 1908 he returned to Cambridge to follow a diploma course in agriculture, and this was the turning-point which led to his life's work into the study of grassland. From 1909-12 he was Prof. of Agricultural Botany in the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, and in this period his exceptional interest in grassland ecology became evident, particularly in relation to the impact of the dry summer of 1911 on the natural pastures of the Cotswolds.

In 1912 he was appointed advisor in agricultural botany to the counties in the Aberystwyth college area (under the Agriculture and Fisheries Board), and this was the start of his long association with agriculture in Wales. One of his tasks during his first two years in that office was to undertake a review of the grassland of north Cardiganshire as a part of the comprehensive review of agriculture, geology and botany by C. Bryner Jones, O.T. Jones and R.A. Yapp respectively. From 1916-18 he was director of the Official Seed Testing Station established during that period in London. Then, in 1919, he was appointed as the first director of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station and head of the Agricultural Botany department established in that period in University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

It was in the Plant Breeding Station between 1919 and 1942, in association with committed colleagues of his own choosing, that Stapledon accomplished his life's major work - work which enormously influenced the art, science and indeed the principles of grassland management throughout the world. The Agricultural Bureaux of the Empire (later the Commonwealth) were established in this period with Stapledon as director of the one for Grassland and Field Crops founded in Aberystwyth in 1927. In addition he was also the director of the Cahn Hill Improvement Scheme set up in 1933 to convert the results of minor experiments to improve the uplands of the hill-country of Cardiganshire into a large-scale practical project located on part of the Hafod Uchtryd estate in Cwm Ystwyth. In 1942 he left Aberystwyth to concentrate on his new post as director of the Grassland Improvement Station established in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1940. On retirement from this office in 1945 he was consultant and one of the directors of Dunn's Farm Seeds at Salisbury until overtaken by frailty and profound deafness in his later years.

Without doubt, in his time Stapledon was the most eminent agricultural scientist in the world as well as the foremost authority on grassland. Under his inspired leadership, the Welsh Plant Breeding Station at Aberystwyth became the most prestigious research establishment in Britain and abroad for grassland and plant breeding studies. He was honoured with a C.B.E. in 1932; in 1939 he was knighted and also became a Fellow of the Royal Society; he received an honorary D.Sc. from the Universities of Wales and Nottingham. He was awarded the gold medal of the Royal Agricultural Society for England, and was the president of the Fourth International Grassland Conference held in Aberystwyth in 1937.

He published numerous scientific and agricultural articles and edited volumes on grassland and land improvement. His publications include: *Grassland, its improvement and management* (with J.A. Hanley, 1927); *A tour in Australia and New Zealand: Grassland and other studies* (1928); *The hill lands of Britain: development or decay?* (1937); *The plough-up: policy and ley farming* (1941); *Make fruitful the land: a policy for agriculture* (1941); *The way of the land* (1943); *Disraeli and the new age* (1943). But, without doubt, his masterpiece was his book *The land now and tomorrow* (1935).

He married Doris Wood Bourne in 1913, but they had no children. He died in Bath 16 September 1960, and a memorial service was held in the Plant Breeding Station near Aberystwyth. The Stapledon Memorial Trust was established to enable young agricultural scientists from both England and Wales to undertake research in another Commonwealth country.

Author

Llywelyn Phillips, (1914 - 1981)

Sources

Personal knowledge

Who's who?

Journal of the British Grassland Society, 15 April 1960

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, 7, 1961

Robert Waller, *Prophet of the New Age. The life and thought of Sir George Stapledon, F.R.S.* (London 1962)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [George Stapledon](#)

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Published date: 2001

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APA Citation



Phillips, Ll., (2001). STAPLEDON, Sir REGINALD GEORGE (1882 - 1960), agricultural scientist. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 15 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s2-STAP-GEO-1882>

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