

WILLIAMS, JOHN JOHN (1884 - 1950), school-teacher, education administrator, producer and drama adjudicator

Name: John John Williams
Date of birth: 1884
Date of death: 1950
Spouse: Elsie May Williams (née Evans)
Parent: Anne Williams (née Jones)
Parent: John Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: school-teacher, education administrator, producer and drama adjudicator
Area of activity: Education; Performing Arts
Author: Gwilym Arthur Jones

Born 12 July 1884, in High Street, Caernarfon, the only child of John Williams and Anne (née Jones). The father was a quarryman. The mother ran a guesthouse for travellers; she died when the child was only eight years of age. He received his early education at the towns Board School and afterwards at Llanrug British School. One of his contemporaries at Caernarfon central school (c. 1896-98) was **Robert Williams Parry** and they remained lifelong friends, J.J. being the poets best man at his wedding. Other contemporaries were H.D. Hughes, minister (CM) and Dr. Arthur Owen. After a period as a pupil-teacher he entered the Normal College, Bangor, in 1905. He was awarded the teacher's certificate (first class) in 1907. The same year he went as an assistant teacher to Granby Street elementary school, Liverpool, and stayed there until his appointment as headmaster of Cefnfaes central school, Bethesda, in 1915 in succession to John Elias Jones. He spent fifteen fruitful years in that post and he threw himself into every aspect of the life of the district, encouraging generations of boys and girls to take an interest in literature, music and fine art. He established the flourishing Clwb Awen a Chân which was addressed by some of the nation's most prominent literati, musicians and historians. **Sir Walford Davies** took great interest in Cefnfaes school children's choir. Concerts of note and performances of operettas and plays were held there. But J.J. was also an excellent teacher, so much so that **J. Glyn Davies** went as far as comparing his method of inspiring children to Sandersons at Oundle. In 1917 he began working on an M.A. thesis for the University of Liverpool under **John Glyn Davies**'s supervision. His subject was ' Political elements in Welsh literature, 1788-1840 '; he was awarded the degree in 1923. He had already turned his attention to the world of drama, immersing himself in the works of playwrights like Ibsen, Galsworthy, Strindberg and Shaw, besides the works of Welsh authors. He studied every aspect of theatre technique and associated himself with the drama company of the University College, Bangor, acting as producer for seven years. He inspired a generation of actors, playwrights and producers (Dr. John Gwilym Jones amongst them) who became in the course of time the leaders of Welsh drama. In the national eisteddfod at Holyhead in 1927 he was the liaison officer of the patron, **Lord Howard de Walden**, when the translation by **J. Glyn Davies** and **D.E. Jenkins** of *Yr Ymhonwyr* (Ibsen) was performed with Theodore Komisarjevsky, a former administrative director and producer of the Opera Theatre and Moscow Ballet, producing. He adjudicated a number of times in the national eisteddfod, and wrote critical articles, mainly on educational subjects, to newspapers of the day. He discussed the works of Ibsen in the Welsh press and the novels of **Daniel Owen** in *Y Drysorfa*. His fervour for every aspect of culture was admired by persons like **J.O. Williams**, Ernest Roberts and **Sir Idris Foster**. He believed steadfastly in the ideals of **Sir O.M. Edwards**, but Wales did not take advantage of the progressive ideas of this exceptional educationist and in 1930 he went as a schools' inspector to Birkenhead. In 1932 he was appointed the town's deputy Director of Education and remained in post until his retirement in 1949. He was responsible for arranging shelter in Merioneth and Montgomeryshire for hundreds of the town's schoolchildren during World War II. He acted on the Royal Commission appointed to review education in rural Wales, 1928-30. One of his closest friends since their student days at the Normal College was Fred Attenborough, Vice-chancellor of the University of Leicester, and father of the actor and film producer Lord Richard Attenborough who has acknowledged that he profited much from the advice given to him by J.J. at the start of his career in the theatre. He contributed articles to *Yr Athro*, *Y Brython*, *Y Genedl Gymreig*, *North Wales Observer* and the *Liverpool Daily Post*. His health was fragile but he had vivacity and humour. He possessed a charming personality, was an interesting conversationalist and an entertaining broadcaster. Amongst his other friends were **William Garmon Jones**, the article by J.J.W.), **E. Morgan Humphreys** and Gwilym R. Jones. He possessed dignity and courtesy. He was described as a Welsh Christian Socialist. He enjoyed wandering in the rural parts of Wales and England. On the recommendation of **Sir Wynn Wheldon** he was interviewed for the post of first regional director for Wales of the B.B.C., but it was **Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris** who was appointed.

He married, 3 July 1937, Elsie May Evans of Llanystumdwy, an English teacher at St. Helens school at the time. There were no children. He died 26 December 1950 at 17 Ashburton Avenue, Claughton, Birkenhead, and was buried at Landican.

Author

Gwilym Arthur Jones, (1925 - 1998)

Sources

Information from his widow, and Ernest Roberts

letters from J. Glyn Davies, Fred Attenborough and Sir Idris Foster

Y Genedl Gymreig, 1920

North Wales Observer, 1920

Y Brython, 1925, 1938, 1939

Y Traethodydd, 1936

Yr Athro, 1951

The Liverpool Daily Post, 29 December 1950

North Wales Times, 1951

Baner ac Amserau Cymru, 3 January 1951

Theodore Komisarjevsky, *Myself and the Theatre* (London 1929)(1929)

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