

## JARMAN, ALFRED OWEN HUGHES (1911-1998), Welsh scholar

**Name:** Alfred Owen Hughes Jarman  
**Date of birth:** 1911  
**Date of death:** 1998  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Welsh scholar  
**Area of activity:** Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Brynley Francis Roberts

Alfred (Fred) Jarman was born in Bangor 8 October 1911, the eldest of the three children of Thomas Jarman, a shop keeper from Newtown, Montgomeryshire, and his wife Flora. He was educated at Cae Top primary school and Friars' Grammar School Bangor, and then at the University College of North Wales, Bangor where he graduated with first-class honours in Welsh in 1932 and in English the following year. He had learned Welsh partly in the Sunday school and services at Twrgwyn chapel though the family (Thomas Jarman was not a Welsh-speaker) were members at Prince's Road English chapel. Fred Jarman completed a teacher training course in 1934 and then embarked on an ambitious research project, a study of the Welsh Myrddin poetry, mainly in the **Black Book of Carmarthen**, which gained him his M.A. in 1936. He was an extra-mural tutor on a year by year contract in Bangor between 1936 and 1946 when he was appointed lecturer in the Welsh department of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff. He was subsequently promoted to Senior Lecturer and in 1957 he was appointed to the chair of Welsh and Head of department in succession to **G. J. Williams**. He was Dean of the Faculty of Arts 1961-63 and in 1967 he persuaded the college to establish the Welsh Language Research Unit to study Welsh dialectology with Dr Ceinwen Thomas, who was already a member of the department's staff, as Lecturer and then as Director. Over the years the Unit carried out important pioneering work in Welsh dialectology and trained many active researchers. He was an Honorary President of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society and one of the International Vice-presidents; he also served as a permanent member of the Eugène Vinaver Trust. He was Sir John Rhys Fellow at Jesus College Oxford in 1975-76. He retired from his Chair in 1979 and was awarded a Leverhulme Scholarship in 1979-81.

A.O.H. Jarman's main fields of research were the Myrddin/Merlin legend, the origins and development of which he traced in a series of important articles and lectures (including the British Academy Sir John Rhys Lecture in 1985), medieval Welsh tales, and the Welsh Arthurian legends in particular, and early Welsh poetry. He published a standard edition of the Black Book of Carmarthen in 1982 and an English translation of 'Y Gododdin' with a full critical commentary in 1988, 1990. He also worked in other areas, **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, eighteenth-century scholarship, the **Morris** brothers of Anglesey, and he contributed a chapter, 'Wales as part of England, 1485-1800' to *The Historical Basis of Welsh Nationalism*, ed. **D. Myrddin Lloyd** (1950). He was the editor of *Llên Cymru* from 1961 to 1986 and of *Y Ddraig Goch* from 1941 to 1946. All his work is characterised by a keen intellect, attention to detail and clarity of expression. There is a bibliography of his publications to 1991 in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol 18* (1992), together with an essay by **J. E. Caerwyn Williams** and a photograph. Fred Jarman was a committed nationalist and a supporter of **Saunders Lewis** since his college days. He was a conscientious objector on nationalist grounds during World War 2 and spent periods in Walton and Stafford prisons. He was a man of strong convictions who was respected for his unflinching principles. Never an easy conversationalist, he was, nevertheless, good company when he was able to relax with friends, an authority on good food and wines and a regular visitor to France.

Fred Jarman married **Eldra Roberts** in 1943 and they had two daughters. Eldra Jarman, who was proud of her gypsy lineage, was an accomplished harpist and co-author with her husband of *Y Sipsiwn Cymreig: teulu Abram Wood* (1979), revised and expanded English version, *The Welsh gypsies: the children of Abram Wood* (1991). Fred Jarman died in Cardiff Royal Infirmary 26 October 1998 and was cremated at Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff, 30 October. Eldra Jarman died aged 83 in 2001.

### Author

**Dr Brynley Francis Roberts**

### Sources

*Ysgrifau Beirniadol 18* (1992)

*Y Cymro*, 13 May 1992

*Y Traethodydd*, 1999, 69-79

*Taliesin* 104, 63-5

*The Independent*, 29 October 1998

*Y Dinesydd Cymreig*, November 1998

### Further Reading

Meic Stephens, 'Obituary: Professor A. O. H. Jarman', *The Independent*

### Additional Links

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