

## JOHN, JAMES MANSEL (1910-1975), Baptist minister and college professor

**Name:** James Mansel John  
**Date of birth:** 1910  
**Date of death:** 1975  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Baptist minister and college professor  
**Area of activity:** Education; Religion  
**Author:** D. Hugh Matthews

J. Mansel John was born in Trecynon, Aberdare, on 22 April 1910. He was the eldest of the three children of Thomas David John and his wife, Jennet (née George). Beryl was the second of their three children and Esmor the third. His father was an overman in a local colliery. The family were faithful and active members of the Baptist church meeting in Heol-y-felin and it was there that Mansel John was baptised by the minister, the Reverend Cynog Williams. He was educated in Aberdare Primary School before moving to the Boys' Grammar School in the town, from where he was accepted in 1929 to read History in the South Wales and Monmouthshire University College, Cardiff. He graduated in 1933 and was awarded the Charles Morgan University Prize in Welsh History. In 1934, with the help of the James Neobard Scholarship endowed in 1926 to help Baptist students to study in Mansfield College, he went to Oxford to read theology. However, because he missed most of his final year's study through illness, he was unable to complete his study in Mansfield and left in 1937 without graduating. In spite of this he was offered the opportunity of proceeding to a B.Litt. and was due to write a thesis on William Erbury under the supervision of Dr Claude Jenkins when he received a call to pastor Alfred Place English Baptist church in Aberystwyth. He accepted the call and was ordained there in 1937, with Principals Wheeler Robinson and Nathaniel Micklem from Oxford preaching the charges to the new minister and to the church. While a minister in Aberystwyth, Mansel John also lectured in the extra-mural department of the University. It was in Aberystwyth that he met and married Margaret Parry from Machynlleth, an organizer with Urdd Gobaith Cymru (the 'Welsh League of Youth'). They had two children, David (born 1945) and Janet (born 1947).

In 1946 Mansel John accepted an appointment as History and Sociology tutor at the residential college for adult education in Harlech. He spent a year there before returning to the pastoral ministry in Bethlehem, Newport, Pembrokeshire (1947-52). He moved again in 1952 to be minister of Ebenezer, Aberafan, and there he stayed until he was invited by the college authorities in Cardiff to apply for the post of Church History tutor in the Baptist College, following the departure of **Mervyn Himbury** to Australia. He commenced his work at the College in January 1959.

His wife had died in 1955 while he was minister in Aberafan, and in August 1959 he married Dorothy Penhale, a Port Talbot schoolmistress. They had one son, Rhys (born 1963).

Mansel John had an enduring interest in rugby and while a pupil in Aberdare Boys' Grammar School he was given a trial for the Welsh schoolboys' team. He served on the executive committees of Undeb Cymru Fydd and the Welsh Association of Youth Clubs. He was also an able musician. He played both the piano and the organ, and while a student in Cardiff he played in a quartet that broadcast regularly on Welsh B.B.C. programmes. As a minister, he contributed articles regularly to *Seren Cymru* (sometimes using the nom-de-plume 'Selnam'), *Y Goleuad*, *Y Faner*, *Y Dysgedydd*, *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes y Bedyddwyr* and *Seren Gomer*. He contributed an historical essay to the volume *Sylfeini'r Fydd Ddoe a Heddiw* (1942) which was published by the S.C.M. press in London under the editorship of J. E. Daniel. His name is also seen among the contributors to the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (1959). When he died he had just finished editing a volume of essays *Welsh Baptist Studies* which appeared in June 1976. This was intended to be the first volume of a series published by the Baptist College in Cardiff. Mansel John, himself, was the prime mover in the venture, and without his guiding hand, the project was abandoned after the publication of the first volume. During his years in Cardiff, he was seen and heard regularly in Welsh programmes such as '*Gwybod y Gair*' and '*Gair yn ei Le*', while he also contributed to English broadcast programmes such as '*Lift up your Hearts*' and the *Epilogue*.

Mansel John died suddenly on 19 January 1975 at his home, 21 Egremont Road, Cardiff, and his funeral was held in Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff, 22 January.

### Author

**D. Hugh Matthews**, (1936 - 2020)

### Sources

*South Wales Baptist College Records*

*The Baptist Union of Wales Handbook and Diary* (1976)

*The Baptist Union directory* (1976-77)

*Seren Cymru* 28 February 1975

additional information from the family

### Additional Links

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