

NOAKES, GEORGE (1924-2008), Archbishop of Wales

Name: George Noakes
Date of birth: 1924
Date of death: 2008
Gender: Male
Occupation: Archbishop of Wales
Area of activity: Religion
Author: P. Ann Jones

George Noakes was born on September 13 1924 in Penygaer, Bwlchyllan, Cardiganshire, one of the three children of a Welsh-speaking mother, Elizabeth Mary née Lewis and father, David John Noakes, colliery worker and later farmer, from English-speaking south Pembrokeshire. This factor gave him an unforced and natural bilingualism which made him a fluent and attractive preacher in both languages. As a child he attended Nantcwnlle Parish Church in the mornings and Bwlchyllan Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in the evenings. This upbringing meant he avoided the denominational prejudices which have often been a strong factor in Welsh religious life. After education at Bwlchyllan Primary and Tregaron Secondary School he was called up into the R.A.F. and served in the latter stages of the Second World War as a navigator with Bomber Command.

On demobilisation he decided to seek Holy Orders and entered Aberystwyth University College to read Philosophy He graduated in 1948, then continued his training at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. After Ordination he became curate at Lampeter in 1950. He stayed there for six years until his appointment as vicar of Eglwyswrrw and Meline, in Pembrokeshire.

On April 23 1957 he married Jane Margaretta (Jean) Davies. In 1959 he returned to his old school haunts in Cardiganshire, as Vicar of Tregaron, where he was heavily involved with 'Cymry'r Groes' the Church in Wales Youth movement. In 1967 he moved to his only incumbency outside the Diocese of St David's when appointed Vicar of Dewi Sant Church, the Welsh language Anglican church in the centre of Cardiff. He also served as chaplain to Welsh-speaking prisoners in Cardiff prison, at a time when non-violent protests by the Welsh Language Society were at their height. During this time he also developed his considerable skill as a bilingual broadcaster. After nine happy years he returned to St David's diocese as Vicar of Aberystwyth, became canon of St David's Cathedral 1977-79 and became Archdeacon of Cardigan in 1979. He was appointed Vicar of Llanychaearn and Llanddeiniol from 1980-82. In 1982, to the delight of both laity and clergy he was elected Bishop of St David's, the largest diocese in Wales where two thirds of the parishes were Welsh in culture. In 1987 George Noakes was elected Archbishop of Wales. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in divinity by the University of Wales in 1989. In 1991 Archbishop Noakes retired to Rhydargaeau, Carmarthenshire and later moved to Carmarthen.

George Noakes was a keen cricketer, footballer and angler and played for the St David's Diocese team that drew against Sheffield in the Church Times Cricket Cup Final in 1956. Dr Noakes was a down-to-earth pastoral Bishop and Archbishop and a gifted preacher in both English and Welsh who could swap over from one to another effortlessly, holding the attention of his listeners, whatever their mother-tongue, and his approachable manner endeared him to people across society and mixed well with everyone. He played a role in the negotiations that led to the passing of the Welsh Language Act 1967. By nature and inclination he was a moderate evangelical, making an impact by pastoral attentiveness and brilliance in simple, direct, and relevant preaching. When appointed Bishop of St David's in 1982, Bishop Noakes saw this as an extension of his work as a parish priest ministering to a rural diocese. He rose at 5.30am, said his prayers daily, in Welsh, and never retired before 11.00pm. Living in the Bishop's Palace at Abergwili, Carmarthen, some fifty miles from St David's Cathedral was not ideal. He drove over 30,000 miles annually often on rural terrain. The travelling and attending committees took him away from the role he wanted, his desire to 'show Jesus' to the people of West Wales, and his primary concerns were mission and evangelism. A diocesan mission in 1988 culminated in a morale-boosting service at Stradey Park rugby ground, Llanelli.

Under Dr George Noakes' Presidency, The Governing Body of the Church in Wales changed from a legalistic assembly into a family gathering. So capable, respected, and affable, he steered meetings quietly but firmly when the ordination of women priests, remarriage in church after divorce, and the grouping of parishes were on the agenda. The Church in Wales had a long reputation for failing to grasp matters and for back-tracking. The 'Archbishop's state of the church study' was a great project which hatched three significant reports (1990, 1991 and 1993), though with few results. Archbishop Noakes was prominent in the 400th anniversary of Bishop William Morgan's translation of the *Bible* into Welsh (1988), the publication of the new Welsh Bible (1988) and the 1400th anniversary of the death of *St David* in 1989. His deep enthusiasm for ecumenism was reflected in him being appointed first president of the newly formed Churches together in Wales. In his role as Archbishop he was much travelled with visits to Singapore, Cape Town and Cyprus for meetings of primates, together with meetings with the Anglican Consultative Council, whose assembly he hosted in Cardiff in 1990. One of his significant achievements was to persuade a brilliant Welsh theologian, Professor Rowan Williams, to move from academia and allow his name to be submitted for the see of Monmouth.

A spiritual and most humble man, by following the moral instruction of *St David*, 'to do little things' he gave the Church in Wales new confidence and kept it united. In his retirement he continued to be a wise counsellor and friend to many, clergy and laity. A man of such genuine humility, George Noakes will be remembered as one of the best loved Archbishops of Wales since its disestablishment in 1920, a true friend to all.

After failing health George Noakes died at West Wales General Hospital, Carmarthen on July 14 2008. After a funeral service at St Peter's Church, Carmarthen on July 22 2008, he was cremated at Parc Gwyn Crematorium Narberth. His wife Jean died on April 18 2012.

Author

P. Ann Jones

Sources

The Church Times, July 2008

The Independent, July 2008

Glyn Ifans, ed., *A hundred years of secondary education in Tregaron* (1997)

Personal knowledge

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [George Noakes](#)

Additional Links

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