

PUGH, WILLIAM JOHN (1892-1974), Director of Geological Survey of Great Britain

Name: William John Pugh
Date of birth: 1892
Date of death: 1974
Gender: Male
Occupation: Director of Geological Survey of Great Britain
Area of activity: Education; Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics
Author: Mary Auronwy James

William (Bill) Pugh was born 28 July 1892 in Westbury, Shropshire, son of John Pugh (a master wheelwright, later coal merchant and well-known lay preacher) and his second wife, Harriet. He went to Westbury village school, and won a scholarship to Welshpool County School, Montgomeryshire. In 1910 he gained entry to University College of Wales (UCW), Aberystwyth, where he graduated BA (Geography, 1914). He attended an ancillary course in geology under **Professor O. T. Jones**, and helped with the completion of a detailed geological map of the district of Aberystwyth and part of the Dyfi estuary.

He then served in the Great War with the Royal Welch Fusiliers, being attached to the General Staff of the 2nd and 4th Army Headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force in France, and General Headquarters of the British Army of the Rhine. He was appointed OBE and awarded the French Croix de Guerre, having been mentioned twice in despatches. He was demobbed a major.

He returned to UCW, Aberystwyth, and became Professor of Geology (1919-31) as successor to **O. T. Jones**. He was Dean of the Faculty of Science from 1929 to 1931. In addition to administration and building up the Geology Department by appointing two lecturers to help him with teaching, he conducted field studies to map the chronostratigraphy in the ancient Ordovician-Silurian rocks of Corris and Bala district. His results were striking and in advance of their time, refuting the conclusions made for some of the districts by earlier investigators. He gained a DSc degree of the University of Wales in 1928 for work done in the districts of Corris, Aberllefenni, Dinas Mawddwy, Llanymawddwy, Llanuwchllyn and (earlier, as a student, in conjunction with **O. T. Jones**) around Machynlleth and Llyfnant Valley. Relevant papers were published in the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London* between 1916 and 1929.

In 1931 he again succeeded **O. T. Jones**, this time as Professor of Geology and Director of the Geological Laboratories in the University of Manchester (1931-50). He served as chairman of the University Joint Recruiting Board (1935-47), and as Dean of the Faculty of Science (1939-41), Pro-Vice Chancellor (1941-43) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (1943-50). He was a member of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies for four years and went to Malaya in 1947 with the Commission on Higher Education to advise on university development there. He served several other institutions, including being president of Section C (Geology) of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1948-49).

Despite these commitments, he continued his mapping of the Ordovician-Silurian boundary in north Wales. However, he is best known for his detailed field observations, in partnership with **O. T. Jones** (at that time Professor of Geology at Cambridge), to revise existing field maps of the Ordovician rocks formed 500-400 million years ago in the Builth-Llandrindod area. They made a startling discovery at Builth of a fossilised shore line of approximately 450 million years ago, complete with beach, sea stacks and sea cliffs. About ten joint papers on this work appeared in geological journals.

In 1951 he was made Emeritus Professor when he resigned to become Director of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and of the Museum of Practical Geology (1951-60) to produce a geological map of the country (which would take decades to complete). This post included responsibility for the Water Department and the Atomic Energy Division. The new or enlarged activities of this expanding institution included the undertaking of field studies in six other countries across the world for the Atomic Energy Division; the mounting of an aeromagnetic survey of England and Wales; surveying the Cheshire salt fields; mapping of coalfields, resulting in the discovery of Coal Measures within 1000 feet of the ground surface in Oxfordshire, and much advisory work for the National Coal Board, the Scottish Hydro-electric Board and the Ministry of Housing. He published many papers in scientific journals reporting on the progress of this work.

He received the Murchison Medal of the Geological Society of London in 1952 for researches on the stratigraphy and tectonics of the lower Palaeozoic Rocks of Wales. He also received an Honorary DSc of the University of Nottingham and Honorary LLD of the University of Wales. He retired in 1960 and for his contributions to the advancement, teaching and organization of geological sciences he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 1951, and knighted in 1956.

He married in London during summer 1919 Manon Clayton Davies Bryan (died 1973), second daughter of **Joseph Davies Bryan**, Alexandria, Egypt; they had four sons. He died 18 March 1974 at 171 Oakwood Court, Kensington, London.

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

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