

JONES, SAMUEL (1898-1974), journalist, broadcaster and Head of the BBC in Bangor

Name: Samuel Jones

Date of birth: 1898

Date of death: 1974

Spouse: Maud Ann Jones (née Griffith)

Child: Dafydd Gruffydd Jones

Parent: Mary Ann Jones (née Jones)

Parent: Samuel Cornelius Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: journalist, broadcaster and Head of the BBC in Bangor

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Performing Arts; Printing and Publishing

Author: R. Alun Evans

Sam Jones was born in Clydach in the Swansea Valley on 30 November, 1898, the ninth child born to Samuel Cornelius Jones (1865-1939), tinsplate worker, and Mary Ann Jones (1866-1921). She gave birth to fifteen children, but only eight survived infancy - David Robert (born 1887); Hannah Mary (born 1889); Cornelius (born 1890); Ifor (born 1892); Annie (born 1896); Garfield (born 1897); Samuel (born 1898) and Gwenhwyfar (born 1905). This was a faithful family of Baptists who worshipped at Calfarfa Chapel, Clydach.

Affectionately known as 'Sammy bach', Sam Jones was educated at the local primary school and then in 1910/11 at the Ystalyfera County Intermediate School. In 1912 the school was relocated to Pontardawe and called Pontardawe Higher Elementary School. On 3 September, 1917 Sam Jones enlisted in the Royal Navy and spent nearly two years as 'Ordinary Signaller.' He left the Navy on 10 February, 1919. In the autumn of 1919 he resumed his formal education at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. He played for the College Rugby club and, later, the Hockey club. He won his Education Certificate - second class - in his third year 1922-23. He graduated the following year, 1924, in Welsh and History.

As a student at Bangor he met Maud Ann Griffith. They were married on 2 September 1933 at the Welsh Wesleyan chapel in Cardiff. Their only child, Dafydd Gruffydd Jones, financial consultant, was born on 4 May 1942. Mrs Maud Jones died on 3 January 1974.

On 8 September, 1924 Sam Jones began his teaching career at Harrington Road School, Liverpool. He left Liverpool for Cardiff in February 1927 and became a journalist with *The Western Mail*. While a student, and then a teacher, he had written many articles for the *Liverpool Daily Post*. 1927 was also the year when the British Broadcasting Company became the British Broadcasting Corporation. In November 1932 Sam Jones was drawn, on a part-time basis, to the BBC as 'Welsh Assistant.' His aim was to strengthen the Welsh language output of radio broadcasting. He left *The Western Mail* permanently in 1933.

In 1935 the post of Programmes Director, BBC Welsh Region, was advertised. It was assumed, as he had already carried out those duties, that Sam Jones would be selected. It was not to be. He was bitterly disappointed at being overlooked in favour of William Hughes Jones (Elidir Sais). Sam Jones was offered the post of North Wales Representative at a radio station that did not exist (until later in 1935) and at a location far removed from Cardiff - at Bangor. Friends consoled him by reminding him of the happy days he had spent in Bangor as a student, and of the views such as the Menai Straits. He responded "I hate the bloody ditch!" He overcame the setback. He started work as head of the new radio station in Bangor on 1 November, 1935. He was soon discovering talents for script-writing, performing, composing music, singing and acting.

The Second World War curtailed his duties. For a short period, from September 1939 to January 1940, he was seconded to London to translate news bulletins into Welsh. By the end of 1940 there were rumours that the BBC's Variety Department was to be transferred from London to Bristol, and then to the relative safety of North Wales. The Variety Department was sent to Bangor and remained there until August 1943. Three orchestras were located at Bangor - the BBC Dance Orchestra, the BBC Revue Orchestra and the BBC Variety Orchestra. Among the four hundred artistes based at Bangor were Tommy Handley (of *ITMA* fame), Jack Train, Fred Yule, Dorothy Summers, Maurice Denham, Sam Costa and Charlie Chester.

Sam Jones learnt a lot about radio entertainment from the Londoners. He was also aware of the danger of copying the English. When they left he set about producing Welsh entertainment. Among his successes were '*Noson Lawen*' (traditional entertainment) that combined the talents of students - Triawd y Coleg [The College Trio: [Meredydd Evans](#), Cledwyn Jones, Robin Williams] - with Charles Williams as Presenter and the voices of quarrymen and farmers (the Dyffryn Nantlle Male Voice Choir and [Bob Roberts](#), folk singer). His other popular programmes were '*Ymryson y Beirdd*' (a contest between poets), '*Wedi'r Oedfa*' (Talks for Sunday evenings), '*Ymryson Areithio*' (college debates) and '*Pawb yn ei Dro*' (village talents). By the end of his career television was a growing threat to a dedicated radio man like Sam Jones.

He retired from the BBC on 30 November, 1963. On 11 July 1963, the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature [D.Litt] was bestowed on him by the University of Wales at a ceremony in the Kings Hall, Aberystwyth. He was also honoured by the National Eisteddfod of Wales as Day President at Ebbw Vale in 1958.

Sam Jones died on 5 September 1974. The funeral was at Bangor Crematorium on 9 September. A Commemoration service was conducted at Penuel Baptist Chapel, where he was a member, on 20 September 1974. Owen Edwards, Controller of BBC Wales, said that Sam Jones had the gift of working on three key wavelengths - being on the same wavelength as his audience, the same wavelength as the talents he'd discovered and as the staff he led.

He laid the foundations of radio development during his time in Cardiff by tapping into a culture which was already widespread in Nonconformist Wales. These were his heroic days. It was also his most difficult period. While understanding the obligations of failure, Sam Jones also acknowledged the opportunity to succeed. He tasted success at Bangor. Many of the talents he discovered testified that the effort they put in was for Sam not the BBC. They took pride in working for a person not for an institution. He was the right man, in the right place at the right time. The secret of his success was his unflinching energy and his infectious enthusiasm.

Author

R. Alun Evans

Sources

R. Alun Evans, *Stand by!: bywyd a gwaith Sam Jones* (Llandysul 1998)

Images

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