JONES, JOHN WILLIAM (1868-1945), builder

Name: John William Jones
Date of birth: 1868
Date of death: 1945
Gender: Male
Occupation: builder
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Engineering, Construction, Naval Architecture and Surveying
Author: D. Ben Rees

John William Jones was born 16 March 1868 in Cae'r Hafod, Cyfylliog near Rhuthin, and he moved in 1886 to work as a joiner with David Roberts (1806-1886) and his son, John Roberts (1835-1894), later the Member of Parliament for the Flint Borough, 1878-92. He attended evening classes and technical school to further his knowledge and within 8 years he set himself up as a builder. J. W. Jones received sub-contracts for joinery work from other builders on both sides of the Mersey.

In 1895 he married Sarah Catherine Owens, a native of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. She gave him great support and became a mother to four sons and one daughter. Each one of the sons, Rowland Owen Jones (1898-1964), William Glyn Jones (1900-1986), John Trefor Jones (1902-2001) and Howell Vaughan Jones (1913-1979), joined the company as directors, and the daughter Gwladys Elinor was always supportive of the building firm.

In the early period, JW as he was popularly known, came to know some of the most successful Liverpool Welsh builders such as John Jones, Calderstones, John Hughes, Allerton and E. R. Jones, Aigburth, from whom he received encouragement and support. By 1900 he had established his own building company, with an office and a yard in Trentham Avenue, near to the Railway Station of Sefton Park. He persuaded Richard Jones, Allerton (1874-1923) to join him as a director. The partnership lasted until the death of Richard Jones, and by then three of his sons were ready to become partners. From 1900 until the First World War the company built a variety of houses around Sefton Park, in Allerton, Childwall, Wavertree, Calderstones and Anfield, and offered a range of services related to the building industry, such as repairs and decorating. During the First World War, when building ceased, his firm succeeded because he could offer such a varied programme. This kept them occupied, and by 1919 they were among the first firms to start building on a large scale. By 1923 J. W. Jones and Sons had become a limited company with brand new offices in the heart of Allerton Road, at no. 158.

The building firm became well known throughout the city, and J. W. Jones was keen to employ Welsh-speaking craftsmen as bricklayers and joiners. Dozens of young men responded from North Wales, settling in Allerton, and spending the rest of their lives till retirement in the employment of J. W. Jones & Sons Ltd. Thousands upon thousands of houses, shops, flats and large housing estates were built by the firm for the Liverpool Corporation, such as the Springwood Estate, part of the huge Speke estate, Larkhill and Lisburn in West Derby as well as smaller estates in Bootle and Huyton. The local authorities trusted his firm completely. They also built private houses in Wavertree, Mossley Hill, Woolton and Allerton. It was he who built Garth Drive in Allerton where he lived for years with his family at no. 10, a house that he called Hiraethog. He built a road connecting Garth Drive and called it Tanat Drive as a tribute to his wife who hailed from the valley of that name in Montgomeryshire.

His firm was given the contract in 1923 to repair and maintain all the public buildings in Liverpool under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works, which it did until 1938. J. W. Jones undertook other important contracts, such as building the Head Post Office in Widnes, several telephone exchanges and alterations to the Ministry of Pensions Hospital and maintenance works at Croxteth Hall and Spike Hall, two popular tourist attractions. The building firm was invited in 1938 with a few other leading firms to be responsible for the important Liverpool buildings if a war broke out with Germany. During the Second World War they repaired hundreds of houses destroyed by the bombing of the city.

J. W. Jones had a strong social conscience and a great love of Liverpool. He was a Conservative councillor for Allerton 1932-38, serving on committees relating to housing, water, cemeteries and public assistance. He also gave of his time and energy to the Presbyterian Church of Wales. On two occasions he served as Chairman of the Elders' Committee of the North Wales Association and he was also involved on the Executive of the Foreign Mission and the Forward Movement General Assembly Committees. The Welsh chapels of Fitzclarence, Everton, Liscard Road, Seacombe and Webster Road were well served. He was elected an Elder at Webster Road in 1911, and was of great assistance as Chairman of the Building Committee when they decided to move to Penny Lane and build a large Welsh Presbyterian Chapel in Heathfield Road (1925-26). He and his whole family, including the Welsh maid, were immensely generous to the project.

In 1933 he was elected Moderator of the Liverpool Welsh Presbytery and in 1938 he adapted to the Welsh language an English pageant produced by James Broadbent and Sons, Leeds, under the title '*Building the Church*'. The purpose of the pageant was to convey to the young and the adults the main needs of the local church as well as the emerging churches of India, that is, hope, courage, service and care. The stones were made of blocks of light wood, which fitted perfectly. J. W. Jones ordered two sets for the local church and he arranged for the blocks to be sent to those communities that were keen to stage the pageant, which lasted an hour and a half.

J. W. Jones was an excellent ambassador for the Welsh people in Liverpool and his passing was a huge loss to the communities of South Liverpool. He died on 24 August 1945, and was laid to rest in the family grave at Allerton Cemetry.

Author

D. Ben Rees

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