JONES, ELEN ROGER (1908-1999), actress and teacher

Name: Elen Roger Jones
Date of birth: 1908
Date of death: 1999
Spouse: Gwilym Roger Jones
Child: Meri Rhiannon Ellis (née Jones)
Child: Wiliam Roger Jones
Parent: Mary Griffith (née Williams)
Parent: William Griffith
Gender: Female
Occupation: actress and teacher
Area of activity: Education; Performing Arts
Author: Gwen Saunders Jones

Elen Roger Jones was born on 27 August 1908 in Marian-Glas, Anglesey, the daughter of William Griffith (1873-1935), the Anglesey Education Committee Secretary, and his wife Mary (née Williams, died 1961). Elen was William's first child and Mary's second, as she had a son with her previous husband, a captain who died in a storm whilst travelling on a ship a few months before the birth of their child, who was named Thomas in memory of his father. Within two years of Elen's birth her sister Siarlot (1910-1993) was born, followed two years later by her brother Hugh Griffith (1912-1980), the world famous actor who won an Oscar for his performance in *Ben Hur*.

Elen was educated at Llanallgo School, three quarters of a mile from her home, Angorfa, Marian-Glas, and then had the opportunity to sit the scholarship exam to continue her education at Llangefni County School. From a class of approximately 26 children, it was Elen and one other pupil who were considered worthy of this opportunity, a boy called Gwilym, the minister's son, who would become her husband in years to come.

It was in her home village that her love of drama began, after a performance of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the first play she ever saw, left a lasting impression on her. It was performed in a building called the Old School; a building which hosted concerts, plays and competitive meetings, and which continues to be a focal point of the village today. On the wall of this Old School also is a plaque commemorating her brother.

As well as drama, one of Elen's other interests which lasted for the rest of her life was music; significant emphasis was placed on this medium in her household, after her parents bought a piano for the home. Capel Paradwys, Llanallgo, also provided the opportunity for Elen to practice her singing, as she attended the Tonic Sol-fa class on Sundays.

Elen was a teacher by trade, and it was as a teacher that she considered herself primarily. Some time after winning the advanced certificate, she applied to study for two years at the Bangor Normal College, after spending a year as a pupil-teacher in the infants' class of her old primary school in Llanallgo. Elen arrived in Bangor in 1926, joining the University's Music Club as well as the College Choral Society. At twenty years old, she succeeded in her final examinations, and gained a teaching post at Llanbedr-goch School. She then moved to Amlwch Elementary School, returning to her former primary school, Llanallgo, in 1930.

In 1938 she married Gwilym Roger Jones (1907-1988), a banker who had just been appointed to a post in Ruthin. Elen worked only as a supply teacher after her marriage. Just over a year after moving to Ruthin, Elen gave birth to a girl, Meri Rhiannon, and before the end of World War II their son was born, William Roger.

Elen and Gwilym joined Capel Bethania, and contributed significantly to its activities, with the strong drama tradition of this chapel benefiting from their contribution, Elen producing and performing, and her husband in the role of secretary or treasurer. The Rev. William I. Davies, who served the chapel at the time, stated that Elen was the main driver behind establishing the Ruthin Drama Society in 1950. In the Vale of Clwyd she had many opportunities to develop and refine her talent as a performer, and these continued when she moved to Bala in 1954 because of her husband's work. This was an area completely immersed in the Welsh performing tradition, and Elen was in her element competing in eisteddfodau that occurred frequently here. During this period she began judging acting and recital competitions in eisteddfodau, and subsequently becoming a judge at the National Eisteddfod. Just two years after they moved to Bala, Elen and her family spent time living in Abersoch and Amlwch, before coming back to Marian-Glas to live.

Elen Roger Jones was most widely known as an actress in radio, stage and television plays in Wales, and institutions such as Theatr Fach in Llangefni were extremely important to her. One of her first performances there was in 1960, and she remained true to the theatre for forty years, performing in plays such as *Pryd o Ddail*, *Awel Gref* and *Cartref*. In the early seventies, she was able to roam theatres all over Wales, when she was invited to act in some of the Welsh Theatre Company's productions.

She slipped into television work, to use her terms. She played her first screen part in a programme on Daniel Owen, with Wilbert Lloyd Roberts (1925-1996) producing, a part she would play again seven years later in a Welsh Theatre Company production. Over the next decade, she appeared in productions such as *Byd a Betws* and *Gwyliwr*. She received widespread recognition for her performances of Saunders Lewis's work, *Dwy Briodas Ann* late in 1973, and *Merch Gwern Hywel* in 1976. After her seventieth birthday, she became a more regular face on television, acting the part of Miss Brooks in *Joni Jones* and Ann Robaits, Heidden Sur in *Hufen a Moch Bach*. She also performed in two series that became very popular on S4C, *Gwely a Brecwast* and *Minafon*, an adaptation of a novel by Eigra Lewis Roberts, *Mis o Fehefin*, where she became well known as the character 'Hannah Hallelujah'.

But Elen could turn her hand to any genre, and in 1983 she played the part of Lady Grey in the film *Owain Glyndwr* on S4C. She also starred in English series, including *District Nurse*, with the actress Nerys Hughes. Nerys was very generous in her praise towards Elen, noting her professionalism instantly, and the fact that she never forgot her lines. She was described by John Hefin Evans as a 'one take' actress. One thing that is common in the variety of roles she played is that they were very strong and bold

women.

As well as continuing to perform in the autumn of her life, this period was one of Elen's busiest, as she filmed, gave talks, wrote for community newspapers and magazines, held classes for Welsh learners and continued to adjudicate in eisteddfodau. She also founded the Marian Club with her husband, a club for pensioners in the Old School, and belonged to several other groups in the area, such as Merched y Wawr and the Bro Dyfnan choir. Elen was also a collector of costumes from different eras, including the women and men's costumes of the Victorian era, and shawls and clogs, and she used these as a focal point for shows or talks.

Her various contributions did not go unnoticed. In the Caernarfon National Eisteddfod in 1979, Elen was accepted as a member of the Gorsedd and honoured with the white robe, and when the Eisteddfod came to Anglesey in 1983 she was presented with the Garmon prize and recognized as the Best Actress of the year. Religion was an unwavering influence on her life, and for her loyalty to the Sunday School she was awarded the Gee Medal.

Elen Roger Jones died on 15 April 1999, at the age of 90, and her grave is at Llaneugrad Church.

Author

Gwen Saunders Jones

Sources

Harri Parri, *Elen Roger: portread* (2000)

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: Elen Roger Jones

Additional Links

Wikidata: Q27553597

Published date: 2016-10-25

Article Copyright: http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/

PDF Print Cite

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our sponsorship page.

Donate

APA Citation

Jones, G. S., (2016). JONES, ELEN ROGER (1908-1999), actress and teacher. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 4 Oct 2024, from https://biography.wales/article/s11-JONE-ROG-1908

Copy to Clipboard

Privacy & Cookies
Copyright
The Project
Help
Contact

LLYFRGELL
THE NATIO