

## ROBERTS, GWYNETH PARUL (1910 - 2007), doctor and missionary

**Name:** Gwyneth Parul Roberts  
**Date of birth:** 1910  
**Date of death:** 2007  
**Parent:** John William Roberts  
**Parent:** Ethel Griffith Roberts (née Jones)  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** doctor and missionary  
**Area of activity:** Medicine; Religion  
**Author:** D. Ben Rees

Gwyneth Roberts was born on 1 November 1910 in Sylhet, India, the second child of the Reverend John William Roberts (1880-1969), a member of a Liverpool Welsh family and Ethel Griffith Roberts (née Jones, 1879-1972), born in Manchester. Her parents had gone as missionaries to Sylhet in 1907, and were based there for almost forty years. They had three children: the first died in childhood, and a son, Hywel Griffith Roberts, became a surgeon in south Wales. The family returned to Britain on furlough in 1914 and the parents had to leave the two children with family members in Rhyl. Gwyneth Roberts was educated in Christchurch School and Rhyl County School, and at the University of Wales Colleges of Bangor and Cardiff, and worked as a doctor in hospitals in Cardiff, Wolverhampton, Manchester and Craig y Nos in the Swansea Valley. She also studied at the London School of Tropical Medicine after deciding to follow in her parents' footsteps. She gained the degrees of BSc, MB and BCh.

She was accepted into the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in June 1938, and arrived at Durtlang Welsh Missionary Hospital on the outskirts of the town of Aizawl, the capital of Lushai state (now Mizoram) in November. The hospital was located in the old theological college since 1928 on a mountain ridge 4,600 feet high, surrounded by thick forest and deep valleys. She was the only doctor in a region the size of Wales. Medicines were sent 500 miles from Calcutta, and other necessities 130 miles from Silchar, difficult journeys that took several days of travel.

Dr Roberts was responsible for all the administration of Durtlang Hospital. She worked tirelessly from 5:30 in the morning until 10 in the evening, often responding to emergencies during the night. When treating patients she had to administer anesthetics herself. She insisted on travelling to villages far and wide to hold clinics. She was a missionary like her parents first and foremost, and took a prominent part in the activities on Sundays.

In 1940 she received money towards the hospital from the Mission's Centenary Collection. She supervised the construction of a ward for tuberculosis patients and bought the first X-ray machine in 1958, assembling the equipment herself. She taught local people how to build sewage tanks and to make reinforced concrete. She only came home twice during the first seventeen years. During the second furlough in 1955, she was very busy addressing meetings to raise money to build an extension block.

Her arrival in Aizawl was an important milestone, encouraging women in particular to follow her example and train to work in hospitals and schools. In 1944, the hospital was among the first in the region to be recognized as a Training School for Nurses. This meant a huge amount of work for her and Nurse Gwladys M. Evans (1905-1963) from Aberbargoed who, like Dr Roberts, was gifted with extraordinary energy. They both prepared textbooks and translated questions and answers for each exam. They were assisted with the diagrams of the textbooks by the missionary [Gwen Rees Roberts](#) who arrived in Aizawl in December 1944.

She firmly believed that the Welsh Mission should be handed over to the religious leaders of north-east India. It was she, as representative of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, who signed the document in February 1958 transferring the hospital and its equipment to the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the Mizo and Assam region. For her pioneering contribution, she was honored by the Government of India with the Kaisar-i-Hind medal. Her work had so endeared her to the local people that she became known as Pi Puii ('the beloved').

Gwyneth Roberts left India in March 1961 and returned to care for her parents in Prestatyn. But she could not remain idle, and took up a post as consultant anesthetist at Rhyl and North Wales Hospitals. She was one of seven who founded the Housing Society of Clwyd Alyn, she chaired the Prestatyn Advice Centre and was on the Rhyl Samaritans Panel. She was devoted to the Rehoboth Welsh Chapel, Prestatyn and was Secretary of the town's Council of Churches for fifteen years. There was a great demand for her service as a lay preacher in north Wales. She was invited back to Mizoram for the Diamond Jubilee in 1988 when a new hospital was opened, and she was also present, by invitation, at the Centenary celebration in 1994. She received the MBE for her social service in Wales in 1996.

Gwyneth Roberts died on 29 January 2007 aged 96, and her funeral was held at Rehoboth Chapel and Colwyn Bay Crematorium.

## Author

D. Ben Rees

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## Images

Synod Hospital, Durtlang: [Pi Puii \(Dr Gwyneth Parul Roberts, MBBCh\)](#)

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