

CASSON, LEWIS (1875 - 1969), actor and theatrical producer

Name: Lewis Casson
Date of birth: 1875
Date of death: 1969
Spouse: Agnes Sibyl Casson (née Thorndike)
Parent: Laura Ann Casson (née Holland-Thomas)
Parent: Thomas Casson
Gender: Male
Occupation: actor and theatrical producer
Area of activity: Performing Arts
Author: Mary Auronwy James

Born in Birkenhead, Cheshire, 26 October 1875, son of Thomas Casson of Ffestiniog, Meirionnydd, and Laura Ann (née Holland-Thomas) his wife. After leaving Ruthin Grammar School he helped his father build organs, attending the Central Technical College, South Kensington, for a while, and subsequently entering S. Mark's College, Chelsea, to become a teacher. In 1903 he appeared as a professional actor at the Court Theatre, in *Man and Superman* and other plays. His career took a decisive turn when he joined Miss Horniman's repertory company at the Gaiety, Manchester, in 1907, for there he began directing, and he also met Sibyl Thorndike, whom he married 22 December 1908 in Aylesford, Kent. They had four children.

During World War I he served as a sergeant in the Army Service Corps (1914-15) and major in the Royal Engineers (1916-19); he was wounded, and awarded the M.C. Having resumed his career in London, he directed jointly with the author, G.B. Shaw, the original production of *St. Joan* (1924), his wife playing the leading role. He and his wife toured South Africa in 1928, and the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand in 1932. In 1938 he produced *Henry V* at Drury Lane for Ivor Novello, and also resumed his association with the Old Vic, directing Laurence Olivier in *Coriolanus*, and John Gielgud in *King Lear* (1940). That year he and his wife toured Wales in *Macbeth*, and subsequently by *King John*, *Candida*, *Medea* and *St. Joan*. They collaborated after the war, not only in London, where Lewis Casson came into his own as the leading man in J.B. Priestley's *The Linden tree*, but also at festivals in Edinburgh and New York, and on four tours comprising dramatic recitals and contemporary plays in the Middle and Far East, India, Australasia and Africa. They celebrated the jubilee of their wedding by appearing in Clemence Dane's play, specially written for them, *Eighty in the shade* (1959). Lewis Casson had a rich, powerful bass voice, and was a versatile character actor as well as a celebrated producer. He played some hundreds of parts and continued to work until 1968.

As a dedicated member of his profession he was for many years one of its leaders, having built up the actors' trade union movement. He spoke fearlessly on the theatre and was elected president of the British Actors' Equity (1941-45), as well as drama director to the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (1942-44). In 1945 he was knighted, and he also received honorary degrees from the universities of Glasgow (1954), Wales (1959) and Oxford (1966). He lived at 98 Swan Court, London, but stayed occasionally at his inherited property, Bron-y-garth, Porthmadog, before it was sold in 1949. He died 16 May 1969.

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

Who was who?

John Casson, *Lewis and Sibyl a memoir* (1972) (1972)

The Times, 17 May 1969

Y Genhinen, 27, 1977, 26-7

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Lewis Casson](#)

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