

FRANCIS, JOHN OSWALD (1882 - 1956), dramatist

Name: John Oswald Francis
Date of birth: 1882
Date of death: 1956
Parent: Dorothy Francis (née Evans)
Parent: David Francis
Gender: Male
Occupation: dramatist
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Performing Arts
Author: Mary Auronwy James

Born 7 September 1882, son of David Francis, Dowlais, Glamorganshire and Dorothy (née Evans) his wife. He was one of the first pupils at Merthyr Tydfil Intermediate School and graduated at Aberystwyth and the Sorbonne, before becoming a school teacher at Ebbw Vale county school and later at Holborn Estate grammar school, London. After military service during World War I he entered the Civil Service and was an official of the National Savings Movement when he retired c. 1953, having received an M.B.E. for his work. But it is for his notable contribution to the revival of interest in drama in Wales that he is remembered. [R.G. Berry](#) and [David Thomas Davies](#) were contemporary playwrights. About 1910 he started writing plays for the Aberystwyth Old Students' Association. *The Poacher*, which was first staged in Aberystwyth in 1914, was a great achievement, showing his ability to create characters of the Welsh countryside. His comedy *Birds of a feather* had a remarkably successful run at the London Coliseum, 1914-18, and was performed in many parts of the world up to his death. *Howell of Gwent* (1934) was a massive historical piece which was performed in Wales and London by the Welsh National Theatre Company. One of his finest works was *The dark little people* (1922), though his best work was probably the full-length play *Change* (1913), a powerful drama of the industrial scene in Wales which won for him the Howard de Walden prize (see [Scott-Ellis below](#)). Many of his plays were translated into Welsh and he learnt to speak the language in middle-age. His essays were published in *The legend of Wales* (1924) and he wrote a short history of U.C.W., Aberystwyth. He was a distinguished dramatist who could evoke laughter and tears in alternate moments but he was humble about his own gifts and was always surprised that his one-act plays should have won emphatic success on the British stage. The University of Wales conferred on him an honorary M.A. degree.

When he was over 70 years of age he took up the sport of gliding. He died a bachelor on 1 October 1956 at 13 Dingwall Gardens, Golders Green, London, where he lived with one of his sisters.

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

Who's who in Wales, (1921)

Y Ddinas, Cylchgrawn Cymry Llundain, November 1954, November 1956

The Times, 2 October 1956, 10

The Liverpool Daily Post, 2 October 1956

Additional Links

VIAF: [91582068](#)

Wikidata: [Q18535623](#)

Published date: 2001

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

to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

