

JONES, JACK (1884 - 1970), author and playwright

Name: Jack Jones
Date of birth: 1884
Date of death: 1970
Spouse: Gladys Jones (née Morgan)
Spouse: Laura Grimes Jones (née Evans)
Child: David Jones
Child: Lawrence Jones
Parent: Sarah Ann Jones
Parent: David Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: author and playwright
Area of activity: Literature and Writing
Author: Keri Edwards

Born 24 November 1884, at Tai Harry Blawd, Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorganshire, the eldest of nine who survived of the fifteen children born to his mother, Sarah Ann, and his father, David, a miner. Educated at St. David's elementary school, Merthyr Tydfil, he left school at the age of twelve to work with his father at the coal-face. From 1902 to 1906, he was a regular soldier, serving in South Africa and India before resuming work as a miner at Merthyr Tydfil. In 1908, he married (1) Laura Grimes Evans of Builth Wells. By the outbreak of war in 1914 he was employed at a colliery near Pontypool because he found that his small wage as a bark-stripper at Builth was insufficient to keep himself, his wife, two sons and a daughter. As a member of the army reserve, he was called up immediately: he was mentioned in dispatches from France and later wounded. By 1921, the birth of two more sons had completed his family. In the same year his Miners' Federation lodge at Pontypool sent him as a delegate to the formation Conference of the British Communist Party held at Manchester : there he was chosen as temporary corresponding secretary for the South Wales coalfield. For months he sought to establish a branch of the Communist Party at Merthyr Tydfil, and in August 1921 he gave active support to the Communist parliamentary candidate for the Caerphilly constituency. When he was appointed full-time secretary-representative of the miners at Blaengarw in 1923 he joined the Labour Party, but criticism of his controversial first article for the press, ' The Need for a Lib-Lab Coalition ', resulted, towards the end of 1927, in his resignation from the post at Blaengarw and he moved from Bridgend to Cardiff. After spending over a year as a member of **Lloyd George's** staff of speakers on the Liberal platform, in 1929 he was defeated in the election as Liberal candidate for Neath. Following a further few months as a speaker for the Liberals and a visit to Geneva as their observer at an International Labour Office conference, by 1930 he was unemployed. During the next five years he strove to earn his living in a number of ways - as a platform-speaker for Mosley's New Party, a salesman, a navy, an assistant cinema-manager, an enumerator, and as a writer.

By 1939, he had become a naturalistic author of note among the Anglo-Welsh school of writers: his works had circulated widely - three novels (*Rhondda Roundabout*, 1934, *Black Parade*, 1935, *Bidden to the Feast*, 1938), a play (*Land of My Fathers*, 1937) and the first volume of his autobiography (*Unfinished Journey*, 1937). A short run of the stage-version of *Rhondda Roundabout* on Shaftesbury Avenue added to his fame. The film, *Proud Valley*, for which he wrote the dialogue and in which he took a small part, also appeared at this time. In Wales he was well-known to many audiences as a radio personality and as a speaker.

Most of his time during World War II was taken up with making speeches - sometimes with a brief introduction in Welsh - on behalf of the Ministry of Information and the National Savings Movement, and in preparing radio-scripts and articles.

He accepted a minor role in another film. Between August 1941 and the end of 1942, he undertook two exhausting lecture-tours in the United States and Canada, and later he visited troops on the European battlefronts, in Belgium and Holland in 1944, in Italy in 1945. He also produced *The Man David* (1944), 'an imaginary presentation, based on fact, of the life of **David Lloyd George** from 1880 to 1914 '. In the general election of 1945 he supported the candidature of Conservative, Sir James Grigg. This was the fifth change in his political allegiance, but throughout his life his philosophy was based on left-wing ideas with a childlike religious faith.

From 1946 to 1951, he again applied himself to authorship with the publication of another two volumes of autobiography (*Me and Mine*, 1946 and *Give Me Back My Heart*, 1950), three new novels (*Off to Philadelphia in the Morning*, 1947, *Some Trust in Chariots*, 1948, and *River out of Eden*, 1951) and a play (*Transatlantic Episode*, 1947). His son, Lawrence, was killed in action in 1942; in 1946, his wife, Laura, died, and in 1948 his son, David. For his services to the community and his achievements in literature, in 1948 he was made a CBE. In the same year he became an adherent of the Moral Re-Armament Movement; he spoke in support of its ideals in Cardiff and at other centres in Wales; and in 1949 he spent three months in the United States promoting the cause.

Compared with much of his earlier work, his five novels of the 1950s *Lily of the Valley* and *Lucky Lear*, 1952, *Time and the Business*, 1953, *Choral Symphony*, 1955 and *Come Night: End Day*, 1956, reveal a sharp decline in literary standards. In 1954, he married (2) Gladys Morgan, a library-assistant in Rhiwbina. He was elected first president of the English section of Yr Academi Gymreig; and, in February 1970, he received an award from the Welsh Arts Council for his distinguished contribution to the literature of Wales. Still prolific in his writing, from 1956 to his death on 7 May, 1970, he continued to produce novels, plays, autobiography, biography; but none was published. The manuscripts are preserved in the National Library. Although his work varied widely in quality, *Black Parade* and *Off to Philadelphia in the Morning* have sufficient merit to make him an author of stature, while *Bidden to the Feast* and *Unfinished Journey* are two of the finest works in the whole of Anglo-Welsh literature.

Author

Dr Keri Edwards

Sources

Keri Edwards, *Jack Jones* (Cardiff 1974)(1974)

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