

SKEEL, CAROLINE ANNE JAMES (1872 - 1951), historian

Name: Caroline Anne James Skeel
Date of birth: 1872
Date of death: 1951
Parent: Anne Skeel (née James)
Parent: William James Skeel
Gender: Female
Occupation: historian
Area of activity: Education; History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Bertie George Charles

Born 9 February 1872 in Hampstead, where her family resided at 45 Downshire Hill, the sixth of the seven children of William James Skeel (1822 - 1899) and Anne, his wife (1831 - 1895). Her father, the son of Henry Skeel (died 1847), a farmer, was born at Castle Hill in the parish of Haycastle, Pembrokeshire, and became a successful London merchant with offices in Finsbury Chambers in the city and a director of the South Australian Land Mortgage and Agency Co. Ltd. Her mother, a first cousin of her husband, was the daughter of Thomas and Martha James of Clarbeston, Pembrokeshire. Caroline was educated at a private school, then at the South Hampstead High School (c. 1884-87), the Notting Hill High School (1887-90), and Girton College, Cambridge (1891-95). She was a St. Dunstan's Exhibitioner and took a double first in classics (1894) and history (1895). She was awarded the Agnata Butler Prize in 1893 and 1894, and the Thérèsa Montefiore Memorial Prize in 1895. She was appointed to the staff of the history department of Westfield College, London, in 1895, was a lecturer there, 1895-1907, and after a period of absence because of ill-health became Head of Department 1911-19, Reader and Head of Department 1919-25 and University Professor of history 1925-29. She was a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society 1914-28, serving on the Council and the Publications Committee 1921-27, and a member of the Cymmrodorion Society, the Classical Association and the Historical Association. She was awarded the Henry Hutchison Medal, 1914, and the degree of M.A. (Cantab.) 1926, and was Hon. Yarrow Research Fellow, Girton College, 1914-17.

Her first published work was *Travel in the first century A.D.* (Cambridge, 1901) originally written for the Gibson Prize in Girton College in 1898. She turned her attention to Welsh historical studies with the publication of her major work *The Council in the Marches of Wales: a study in local government in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1904), her dissertation for the degree of D.Litt. in the University of London in 1903 where she was an internal student, 1901-03. This was supplemented by a number of articles and reviews in *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, *Archæologia Cambrensis* *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, *History*, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, most of which deal with the history of Wales and the Marches. Her second article on the Welsh woollen industry (*Archæologia Cambrensis*, 1924) was both praised and criticised by A.H. Dodd which drew rejoinders from the author who was at the time hoping to produce a book on the Welsh woollen industry. She contributed a chap. on Wales under **Henry VII** to *Tudor Studies*, ed. R.W. Seton-Watson (1924), and to T. Auden, *Memorials of Old Shropshire* (1908). She gained the Gamble Prize in 1914 for an essay on the influence of the writings of Sir John Fortesque. She was also one of the editors of the S.P.C.K. texts for students and arranged the *Selections from Giraldus Cambrensis* and the *Selections from Matthew Paris*, Nos. 2-3 in that series (London 1918).

The importance of Caroline Skeel's contributions to Welsh historical studies is obvious from her publications and is still widely recognised, although some of the authority of her work has been eroded by later scholars. She broke much new ground in the fields of Welsh social and economic history at a time when these subjects were largely neglected. She was one of the first Welsh women to hold a university chair. Moreover, her services to her college and the University of London, both as a brilliant teacher whose lectures were famous for their humour and scholarship and as a member of university boards and committees, were readily acknowledged by her colleagues and students. After her retirement in 1929 she moved from Hampstead to 34 Heald Crescent, Hendon, where she lived modestly, almost frugally, dressed rather shabbily and quibbled with the tradesmen over pennies. Her neighbours looked upon her as a refined little lady who had known better times. She was in fact very wealthy. The only surviving member of her family (the others all died unmarried), she inherited the large fortunes left by her father and brother William Henry Skeel (died 1925, leaving over £305,000). She died on 25 February 1951 and was cremated at Golders Green. Her estate was valued at £269,386 gross. In her will she bequeathed large sums to Church charities and the residue, amounting to over £50,000 net, to Westfield College, where the fine new library bears her name. After her death it was revealed that she had anonymously given away in her lifetime about £30,000 to poor families and charities.

Author

Dr Bertie George Charles, (1908 - 2000)

Sources

The Times, 23 March 1899, 13 October 1925, 3 March 1951. 26 May 1951

The Daily Mirror, 26 May 1951

Girton College register, 1869-1946 (1948)

parish registers

private papers of Miss Dorothy Skeel Meyler and Major Francis Jones

archives of Westfield College per Dr. J. Sondheimer

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Caroline Skeel](#)

Additional Links

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Published date: 2001

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APA Citation



Charles, B. G., (2001). SKEEL, CAROLINE ANNE JAMES (1872 - 1951), historian. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s2-SKEE-JAM-1872>

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