WILLIAMS, JAC LEWIS (1918-1977), educationalist, author

Name: Jac Lewis Williams
Date of birth: 1918
Date of death: 1977
Gender: Male
Occupation: educationalist, author
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing
Author: Robert (Bobi) Maynard Jones

Born 20 July 1918 the son of John and Sarah Ellen Williams, Aber-arth, Ceredigion. He was born in Lôn Llanddewi, Aber-arth at his mother's home (his parents, farmers in Tynbedw, Ciliau Aeron, had married in Llanddewi in the May of that year). When Jac was four years old, the family moved to Gaebislan, Aber-arth, not far from his birthplace. Jac's father, who was born in Dolau Aeron, Llangeitho, brought up in a cultured family, was a local poet and Sunday school teacher who spent most of his life farming Tynbedw, Ciliau Aeron and Caebislan, Aber-arth. John Williams was a staunch churchman (as was his son) and three of his brothers were clergymen. The fourth brother, Gwilym Aeron, was a London businessman and also a well-known poet. John Williams's reminiscences were published in *Fferm a Ffair a Phentre* (with a photograph of John Williams), Cardiganshire Book Society, 1958. His mother, Ellen Williams, raised eight children whom she taught to sing together in a family octet that competed at local eisteddfodau and she also instructed her five sons who all became able strict-metre poets. But John, the son who stayed at home to farm, was the only one of them to raise his own children in Welsh. John and Sarah Ellen had two children, Jac and his sister Joan. Another girl, born between them, died shortly after birth. Joan married Rev. David John Davies, who was a minister at Chwilog and then at Pen-y-groes, Caernarfon. It was said that baby Jac was a weakling who would not have survived, had not the maid treated him as she would a lamb, giving him an occasional spoonful of brandy. When he was a young man, Jac suffered from a severe illness which affected his spine. He underwent radio-therapy to aid his recovery but his back was crooked for the rest of his life and his height was also affected (as a young man he was over six feet tall). With a round face and thick black eyebrows (like his father), Jac had remarkably dark hair and eyes, accounted for locally by the claim that he was descended from the 'family of birds', the descendants of a Spanish soldier who had deserted Napoleon's army and had hidden in the fields of the Aeron valley. Partly for health reasons, he rode a bicycle daily and he was fond of gardening. Always good company, he composed poetry when he was a lad, winning many prizes during his youth. He published *Straeon y Meirw* in 1947 and a collection of articles, *Trioedd*, in 1973.

Jac L. Williams was educated at Aber-arth primary school, Aberaeron grammar school and the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he read Welsh, Latin and Greek. He gained a First-Class Honours degree in Welsh in 1939. He worked in an industrial laboratory in England before returning to Glamorgan to teach. He lectured in economics and commerce in Monmouthshire Technical College and gained an external degree in economics and a Diploma in Public Administration. In addition, he was awarded a doctorate by the University of London for a study of the sociology of a rural community in Wales. In 1945 he was appointed lecturer in Welsh and Bilingual Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen, where he stayed for over ten years. In 1956 he was appointed lecturer and advisory officer to the Faculty of Education in the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and some four years later, in 1960, he succeeded Professor Idwal Jones as Professor and Dean of the Faculty. In 1976 he became Vice-Principal of the college. He became a national figure after being appointed to the chair of education in Aberystwyth. Dr W. Gareth Evans said of him: 'Never before had a Professor of Education in the University of Wales achieved such a high profile in the educational, cultural and political life of Wales' and he described him as 'one of the few real pioneers in education in the twentieth century.' He interpreted his position as a professor of Education as being that of a 'mover and shaker' rather than a researcher, although he did carry out considerable authoritative research work. But above all, he was a leader and reformer of practical education, rather than a pure academic. That was his bequest that had an enduring influence on education in Wales. He quickly involved himself in a major debate, querying traditional practices and those of the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, usually a sector well-regarded for its innovative enlightenment in the twentieth century, but which favoured not introducing Welsh (nor English) as a second language to children until they were seven-years old. Collecting a mass of evidence, including that of Wilder Penfield (Jac wrote an appreciation of him at the time of his death in 1976), and with his knowledge of the linguistic situation worldwide, Jac L. Williams finally won the argument in favour of the early learning of a second language.

He was the chairman of the Welsh Books Committee of the Welsh Joint Education Committee, responsible in only a few years for the publication of 700 books. He was also one of the supporters of the National Union of Teachers of Wales (UCAC) during its formative years and he worked closely with the Nursery Schools' movement; for a time he was its chief propagandist. A staunch Churchman, he was an active member of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales. Before he accepted the post of Vice-Principal of the College at Aberystwyth he was a member of about fifty committees and the chairman of a dozen of them. Under his leadership the Education department at Aberystwyth became, statistically, one of the most successful in Britain, a department that was growing when many other Education departments were in decline. This was a department in the van of British universities striving to ensure the recognition of Education as a degree subject. He developed many diploma courses and an M.Ed. course. In the field of bilingualism he led Wales away from the emphasis on measuring the 'effects' of bilingualism, research that at the time was non-productive and too simplistic, because it ignored key learning factors such as contact hours, the age of the introduction of the language, the complexity of teaching methods, the availability of resources, etc. Jac stimulated a move towards preparing materials and methods to improve and to make bilingualism professionally more effective. As a consequence of establishing Education as an academic subject, taught through the medium of Welsh, he set about preparing and editing a series of books to service this development, *Ysgrifau ar Addysg*, *Welsh Studies in Education*, *Cyfres y Dysgwyr*, *Cyfres yr Ysgol a'r Aelwyd*, *Pamffledi Llenyddol Cyfadran Addysg*. By the time of his death there were over one hundred students in the Department, who undertook at least part of their work through the medium of Welsh. For many years he arranged fortnightly meetings to draw up lists of terms for use in teaching all school and college subjects through the medium of Welsh. He forwarded them on to the Terminology Committee of the University Faculty, a collection which led ultimately to the publication of *Geiriadur Termau* (Dictionary of Terms). Had this task not been undertaken, Welsh medium education in Wales could not have been really effective.

Jac L. Williams married Frances Gwyneth Watkins on 7 August 1946, at Windsor Road Presbyterian Chapel, Caerffili. At the time, Gwyneth, who was born in Caerffili, did not speak Welsh. She was a Latin teacher and they met when Gwyneth attended an evening class to learn Welsh, where Jac was the teacher. Her father who came from Talgarth in Breconshire, had gone to Caerffili as a young man to work as a shoe-maker. Her mother, from a non Welsh-speaking family from Cwm Hir Abbey area and Herefordshire, was a seamstress in Caerffili. Jac and Gwyneth had two daughters. Jac died suddenly of a heart attack on 27 May 1977 in Newport railway station, when he was on his way to a meeting in London. His funeral service at Llanbadarn Fawr church was followed by internment in Llanddewi Aber-arth cemetery 31 May.

Author

Professor Robert (Bobi) Maynard Jones

Sources

Information from Rhiannon S. Evans

Bob Morris Jones and Paul Avtar Singh Ghuman, eds, *Bilingualism, Education and Identity essays in honour of Jac L. Williams* (1995) (with a photograph and select bibliography), 1995

M. J. Jones and Gareth Miles, (eds), *Cyfrol deyrnged i Evan John Jones, Victor Hampson Jones a Jac L. Williams tri o arloeswyr Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru* (1977), [1977]

Barn, 173, Mehefin 1977

Barn, 174/175, Gorffennaf/Awst 1977, 213-236; this includes an incomplete bibliography of Jac L. Williams's work, e.g. it does not contain the very many contributions that he made to the *Sociology of Education Abstracts*

Jac L. Williams collection of papers in the National Library of Wales

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VIAF: 23629842

Wikidata: Q20568728

Published date: 2008-08-01

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APA Citation

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Jones, R. (. M., (2008). WILLIAMS, JAC LEWIS (1918-1977), educationalist, author. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 4 Oct 2024, from https://biography.wales/article/s6-WILL-LEW-1918

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