

MOSS, GWENFRON (1898-1991), missionary in China and India

Name: Gwenfron Moss
Date of birth: 1898
Date of death: 1991
Gender: Female
Occupation: missionary in China and India
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

She was born July 27, 1898, in Coed-poeth, the daughter of Samuel and Margaret Moss, and it was at Salem, Coed-poeth, that she was brought up during the ministry of Reverend T.E. Thomas. She was educated and trained at the Grove Park School for Girls, Wrexham, and at the School for Pharmacy of the Pharmacy Society in London. During her time in the capital, she used to worship regularly at the Welsh Congregational Church at the Tabernacl, King's Cross, where 'Elfed' (Reverend H. Elfet Lewis) was minister. She was unsuccessful in her attempt to find employment in Wales, as she wished, but she found employment at Castleford, and afterwards in Huddersfield. She found great joy in those places, and she often testified that Yorkshire people were very much like the Welsh in many respects. She also testified to her debt to the Church at Hillhouse, and to the English Congregationalists meeting there in Huddersfield. She kept her church membership there throughout the years until she finally returned to Wales following her retirement.

In 1921, the London Missionary Society appointed Gwynne Beynon, originally from Bynea, near Llanelli, to be a missionary pharmacist in Shanghai, China. It appears that Gwenfron Moss, according to her own testimony, had applied for that post. As a young woman, she felt called to be a missionary and she obviously felt the call to China. She attended the Swanwick Missionary Conference in the summer of 1925, and it was there that she became convinced that she wanted to serve as a missionary. She immediately contacted the London Missionary Society offering her service. She spent two years in training at Carey Hall, Birmingham, before being appointed to Northern China in 1928. Her Dedication Service was held at Hillhouse Church, Huddersfield, on June 27, and another at Salem, Coed-poeth, on August 15, and her old minister, who by then had retired and was living in Old Colwyn, presiding.

She sailed to China on August 23, 1928. Having reached Tianjin, (Tiensin), she found there an enthusiastic welcome awaiting her from another lady, whose roots were, like hers, at Coed-poeth, namely the wife of the Reverend Dr. William Hopcyn Rees, the Welsh missionary from Cwmafan, in Glamorgan. After mastering the language at Beijing (Peking), the capital, she was appointed to work as a pharmacist in the Mackensie Memorial Hospital in Tianjin. She was there during the official opening of the Hospital in May 1930. It was a five-storey building with three hundred beds. She worked there until 1938, when she had to return to Wales to care for her aged parents. Following her parents' death, she was free to return once more to China. But World War II made that impossible. She decided to leave Coed-poeth and to live with her adopted sister, Miss Hetty Edwards, in Cardiff. For a time, she found work with the Young Women's Christian Organization. At the end of the war, however, the opportunity came to return to China. She sailed in May 1946 from Liverpool to India, and travelled onwards by plane to China, arriving at Tianjin in August of the same year. She was to work at the Roberts Memorial Hospital in Tsangchow, which had been since 1947 in an area governed by the Communists. She had to face very difficult conditions there, prior to the closing of China's door against all Christian missionaries, which eventually compelled them all to leave China. At Gwenfron's funeral service at Minny Street chapel, Cardiff, on Monday, August 19, 1991, another missionary who served in China, Dr. Geoffrey Milledge, widower of the Welsh missionary, Mrs. Miriam Milledge, spoke about some of those difficulties that Gwenfron Moss and her fellow missionaries had been obliged to face.

She returned to Wales in February 1951, to live in Cardiff once more with her sister, Hetty Edwards. That was not the end of Gwenfron Moss's missionary career, however. In 1953, she was appointed as a missionary to India, and was entrusted with the work of being an Inspector to the Travancore Industrial Board belonging to the Kerala Episcopal Council of the Church of South India. Her new responsibilities involved being in charge of those women who were skilled in embroidery, lace making, and crochet. She succeeded in finding a market for their products, and several parcels from India came to women church fellowships in Wales during that period. She retired from her work in India in 1964, but did not return directly to Wales. On her way home through southern Africa, she decided to spend four months working amongst the leprosy sufferers at the Kawimbe Centre in Zambia. She remained there until January 1965, when she returned to Cardiff where she lived with her sister. She was made a deacon at the Welsh Congregational Church at Minny Street. She was involved in all aspects of church life but was grieved at the decline in Christian witness in Wales, especially amongst the young.

Gwen Moss died at the age of 93 on 10 August, 1991, her funeral was held on 19 August. Hetty Edwards, her sister, died a fortnight later.

Author

Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

Sources

Personal research

Blwyddiadur yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg (Welsh Congregationalists Year Book), 1992

Further Reading

People's Collection Wales: *Cyfarfod Croeso Gwenfron Moss ar ei dychweliad gartref o China*, 8 Awst 1934

People's Collection Wales: *The Farewell of Miss Gwenfron Moss, M.P.S., on her return to China*, 12 September 1935

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