

## RANKIN, SUSANNAH JANE (1897-1989), minister (Cong.) and missionary in Papua

**Name:** Susannah Jane Rankin  
**Date of birth:** 1897  
**Date of death:** 1989  
**Spouse:** Robert Rankin  
**Parent:** Jane Ellis  
**Parent:** Frank Ellis  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** minister (Cong.) and missionary in Papua  
**Area of activity:** Religion  
**Author:** Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

Susannah Jane, born 26 November 1897, was the fourth of the nine children born to Frank and Jane Ellis at Pengorffwysfa farm, not far from the town of Llanfyllin, Montgomeryshire, and it was at Pendref Chapel that she was accepted into membership.

From Llanfyllin Grammar School, she went to the University College, Bangor, where she remained from 1918 to 1922, gaining her B.A., with Honours in History and Philosophy. In October 1922, she became a student at Bala-Bangor Theological College, gaining her B.D. in 1925, the first woman to gain that degree in the University of Wales. She was ordained in her home church in Llanfyllin, in October 1925, prior to being appointed a missionary by the London Missionary Society, and she sailed for Papua the following year.

For her first two years as a missionary, she lectured in English at Lawes Theological College. Gradually, she learnt the Motu language. In 1928 she and another lady missionary, physically frail like herself, undertook pioneering evangelistic work in the mountainous district of Boku Kapakapa. When her friend got married, Sue Ellis was left to continue the work on her own. In 1931 she moved to undertake similar work in Saroa, the primitive area of the skull hunters where the Gospel had never been preached before. The same year, she married the Reverend Robert Rankin and they continued the work together for 26 years establishing new churches and bringing thousands of the mountain people to know Jesus Christ, turning them from their lives as cannibals. In 1957, when the Chalmers Memorial Theological College was opened, the husband and wife missionaries were appointed Principal and Professor at the new College, even though it was four to five hundred miles west of Saroa where they had been serving previously. Whilst on a short leave in Australia in 1960, the Reverend Robert Rankin died. Mrs. Rankin, however, returned to her responsibilities at the College, continuing as Principal until her retirement in 1964, when the London Missionary Society succeeded in finding a successor.

She returned to live with her sister in Australia. But Sue Rankin could not retire and she was in Australia only for a very brief period. She returned to Papua to serve the new Church that had been established, in the role of Director of Courses for ministers and to train new missionaries. Over a period of three years, she accomplished notable service in that post, before retiring for a second time to Australia. But before retiring, she heard that new pioneering evangelical work was commencing amongst the most savage of people. She decided to join the work, even though that meant that she had to learn yet another language.

During her time in Saroa she translated many works from Welsh and English to the Motu language, one of the 14 main languages spoken in Papua, and the country's official language after independence. Sue Rankin was also prominent in the work of revising the New Testament in that language. The University of Wales acknowledged the value of Mrs. Rankin's contribution by conferring on her an Honorary M.A. degree in 1973. In presenting her for that degree, [Alun Davies](#), professor of History at Swansea, referred to her 'not only as a preacher and religious educator, but ... also a linguist and translator.' She returned to Wales on numerous occasions over the years, visiting the different churches in turn, but it was sad to hear her say in 1973 that it was going to be her last visit to Wales – the Wales that meant so much to her.

Sue Rankin died in Australia on 24 July 1989. A service of thanksgiving for her life was held at Pendref Chapel, Llanfyllin, on November 25, 1989.

### Author

Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

### Sources

Personal research

*Y Tyst* 18 August 1989

*Blwyddiadur yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg* (Welsh Congregationalists Year Book) 1990

Laurel Gray, *Sinabada woman among warriors a biography of the Rev. Sue Rankin* (Australia 1988)

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Susannah Jane Rankin](#)

## Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q20751827](#)

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