

REV J. TOWYN JONES 1942-2019

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

J. Towyn Jones was born at his mother's home of Blaenpistyll, Bwlch-y-groes near Boncath on 29 May 1942, only child of Thomas Emrys and Annie Mary Jones. His parents farmed 'Y Lan', on the upland border of Pen-boyr and Cilrhedyn parishes where his father's family had lived for several generations, and where Towyn was brought up. Amongst his forebears were 'the bards of Cwm-du' in Ceredigion who can be traced back to the 15th century, and some of whom were connected with the early Baptist cause at Rhydwylym and in eighteenth century America. An ancestor, Abel Morgan, compiled the first Welsh concordance *Cydgordiad Egwyddorawl o'r Scrythurau* in 1730, which was amongst the first Welsh books published in America. Towyn's nom-de-plume as member of the Eisteddfod Gorsedd Circle was 'Towyn o'r Cwm-du.'

Two first cousins of Towyn's grandmother were prominent in British politics: Sir John T Davies, K.C.B., C.V.O (1887-1938) was Lloyd George's Private Secretary, and his namesake, the Reverend J. Towyn Jones (1858-1925) was Liberal M.P. for East Carmarthenshire 1912-18, Llanelli 1918-22 and Junior Lord of the Treasury. Although not a George by name or pedigree this connection with Lloyd George made Towyn a valued member of The George Name Society rising to become its Chairman, a post he held at the time of his death. A fellow member is his cousin Brigadier Glynne R. Jones also a long-standing member of The Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and both shared their researches into their own family connections and ancestry.

After primary school at Pen-waun and afterwards Llandysul Grammar School, Towyn pursued his artistic talent by enrolling at Carmarthen School of Art, but then became a theological student at Swansea Memorial College in order to train for the Congregationalist ministry. He was ordained minister of Hebron and Nebo chapels on the Carmarthenshire-Pembrokeshire border in 1964, and in 1974 moved to Carmarthen to take up ministry at Heol Awst, adding Smyrna, Llan-gain to his duties in 1976 and Elim, Ffynnon-ddrain in 1998. He retired in 2015. He once said that he was amazed that he had been a minister for 50 years, for his first love was art, ever since his days at Llandysul Grammar School, where his history teacher was

Leslie Baker-Jones. Towyn's artistic talents were put to good use in Heol Awst's annual Christmas performances, all scripted, produced and directed by Towyn, who was also instrumental in building and painting the set. Our member, Jill Davies, remembers attending Plygain services at Heol Awst being met at the door by a chapel member with a torch at 5.45 am and shown to her seat in a packed room all in total darkness. At the appointed hour suddenly the figure of Towyn Jones rose up from the sedd fawr (where he had been sitting all the time) a few lights came on and the service began. In their funeral appreciations of their father, Towyn's daughters Catrin and Orinda, stressed their father's love of Christmas traditions and festivities – and snow. This went back to his childhood memories of the heavy snowfalls of



1947, when his parents extended hospitality to two stranded visitors and their captivating tales of winter.

A Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts since 10 April 1972, Towyn was an accomplished artist and calligrapher: his oil painting of Tre-wern-house, Nevern is striking in its atmospheric, moonlit quality; Towyn had been enthralled by the stories of the old house, especially the account of finding the 'Tre-wern golden effigy' in a secret room above the porch. His depiction of 'Jack Rhydgaled and Tim' was exhibited at the Carmarthen National Eisteddfod of 1974 and his portrait of the Reverend Professor D. P. Roberts MA., BD., painted in 1964, is housed in the National Library of Wales. Towyn's copperplate calligraphy was employed for many years by the National Eisteddfod to adorn winners' certificates.

His published books reflect his love of local history and interest in the supernatural. *Ar Lwybr Llofrudd* (1970) is an account of an unsolved Victorian Carmarthenshire murder; *Ysgol Pen-waun: Cofnodion Canrif* (1981) charts the history of Pen-waun primary school at its centenary; *Borley Cymru* (2001) relates supernatural occurrences in 1894/5 at St Paul's Vicarage, Llanelli; *Rhag Ofn Ysbrydion* (2008) is a quest for the truth about ghost stories; *John Penryryn Llundain 1563-93* (2011) is an account of Wales' prominent Protestant martyr and *Ble Arswyda Angylion* (un-published) relates and discusses ghostly occurrences. He had also researched the history of Llan-deilo Bridge, a study of the ghosts and traditions of Aberglasney, the Mail

Coach in Carmarthen-shire and the life of Lady Elizabeth Hills-Johnes of Dolaucothi, all with a view to probable publication.

Towyn valued the Presidency of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society very highly; he was in-stalled as President of CAS in the 1996 AGM at Pontyberem, having been recommended to Council by retiring President Major Kemmis Buckley. He had of course been a member for many years. He was a regular attender at Society field days and lectures and his after dinner talks at the annual Christmas Lunch became a tradition. He was always concerned that the event should take place at or near to the location of the 'ghost story' which he related. Another honour which Towyn held in high regard was his membership of the Ghost Club and his elevation to Honorary Life Member in 2013. Founded in 1862, the Club is the oldest organization in the world devoted to research into the paranormal. An added attraction for Towyn was the fact that its meetings were held in suitably atmospheric locations in London. Your editor remembers a conversation with Towyn last year about a recent club meeting when members were addressed by The Raven Master of the Tower of London, and members' plans to seek an overnight stay at the Tower. He was also a Life Member of the Constitutional Monarchy Association, the

Society of King Charles the Martyr and the Society of Nativists.

Above all, Towyn was a warm and caring family man, as testified by Catrin and Orinda's tributes. His partner 'Mags' (Margaret Edwards) shared many of his artistic and cultural interests and from her house in London, they were regular visitors to the many exhibitions and events in the capital. He was a keen supporter of many local and national societies, and encouraged research and publication in order to further knowledge and understanding. He was a cultured and avid student of history: murders, country houses and their attendant ghosts were favourite topics; his abiding interest in the supernatural was from a sociological standpoint and as an aspect of folk belief.

Often an intriguing mix of apparent contradictions, Towyn was proud of his rural upland upbringing yet passionate about fine art and its history; a lifelong radical nonconformist who was also a royalist and monarchist. Amongst his sober-suited colleagues he stood out in more than one way. He regarded his calling to the Christian ministry as wholly consistent with his fascination with the supernatural: both were two sides of the same coin, and facets which enriched his character as a polymath in the tradition of the Morisses of Anglesey and the 'literary parsons' of the early nineteenth century.

EURIG DAVIES

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The untimely loss of our late President Towyn Jones is hard for us all to bear. His genial character, infectious communication skills and boundless enthusiasm for the curious byways of our local history made him a perfect leader of our Society and a friend to all, and no one feels that more keenly than I do, having been elected by your Council to step so unexpectedly into his shoes.

Adding hugely to this new responsibility has been the pressure brought upon us by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has thrown the whole world out of kilter this year and possibly for longer. Our meetings have been cancelled and the ties of friendship which hold us all together as a happy group loosened by the enforced isolation. I urge you therefore to stay loyal to the Society. As soon as it is permitted, we will be back in action again with our programme of talks and visits.

Traditional societies like ours have found the age of the computer a mixed blessing. Younger people interested in local history can find most of what they need to know on-line. Traditional field trips and formal lectures have less appeal to them with very busy lives. Membership of many local societies such as ours has therefore been diminishing,

not yet disastrously but worryingly, given that costs rise inexorably. Mailshots to members in the post used to be the key to keeping regularly connected. Now the cost makes this alarmingly expensive but some of our loyal members are not on e-mail and so we must ensure that everyone is kept equally well informed in the traditional way. Printing costs of *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary* are rising; lecturers these days quite fairly expect proper fees and travel costs; we have had to put subscriptions up. it is harder than it used to be.

So please, all of you, do all you can to help this distinguished old society keep going in the cheerful way it always has. Encourage your wider family and your friends to join us. You will all have enjoyed happy outings to little known places in the county with fascinating stories to tell. Speakers work hard to prepare for these events or to give talks in winter. So please give them your full support again when meetings are allowed and please help our membership numbers to stay healthy and therefore our running costs in balance.

Diolch yn fawr.
THOMAS LLOYD