

Introduction



Gareth with his mother – circa 1911-12.

My Uncle Gareth

Gareth's soul has never been laid to rest and his family speaks of him frequently as if his death only occurred yesterday. His mother considered that her beloved son had been the first victim of World War Two. After Gareth's death she always wore the black of mourning; it was a terrible tragedy for her to bear. She had lived her life through him and it was the stories of her youthful experiences in Russia that gave Gareth the interest in foreign travel. To his father it was the most traumatic event of his entire life.

I remember clearly being told by my father that bandits in China had killed Gareth. I was standing holding onto the banisters three steps from the bottom of the stairs in our London house. I remember the harrowing journey from Paddington to Cardiff by Great Western Railway with his ashes in a casket on the seat directly opposite me. They had been brought back on the *SS Rawalpindi* to be borne to their final resting-place in Barry. It was a cold December day in 1935. There was thick fog, which delayed the train and the journey seemed to take so many, many hours.

Gareth was born in Barry on August 13th 1905. His father was Major Edgar Jones, O.B.E., T.D., M.A., LL.D., for 35 years the headmaster of the Barry County School for boys, respected and loved by the thousands of pupils who passed through his school. He was considered by some to be the "Matthew Arnold" of Wales and that great English headmaster described the loss of a son in these words: "Be think thee for an only son what was that grief". Edgar Jones, known to all as 'The Major', was the noblest of characters. He understood tolerance and imparted to his students an understanding which enabled them to live in harmony with one another. He was modest in nature and a Christian gentleman in the true sense of the word. He had infinite interests and fostered these in the many boys that passed through his school. Many honours were bestowed on him not least that of being made a Freeman of the Borough of Barry. He was active in his support of the League of Nations and was a man of peace.

Gareth's mother, Mrs Annie Gwen Jones was an equally interesting person. As a young girl who had never previously left Wales, she travelled to Russia in 1889 to be the tutor to Arthur Hughes's children, the grandchildren of John Hughes, the steel industrialist who founded the town of Hughesovska, later known as Stalino and now the City of Donetsk. In old age she was a very fine, distinguished lady - a woman with high principles - and so it was difficult to visualise her in her youth riding with the hounds from the Court Estate of Merthyr Tydfil or skating on the lakes in the bitterly cold Russian winters. She was a woman with a strong personality. Early in the century she became a suffragist and the first meeting of the suffragettes in South Wales was held in the family home, Eryl. Crystabel Pankhurst, the daughter of Emily Pankhurst, attended this meeting. The town of Barry held her in high esteem and in her later years she accepted the honour of being made a Justice of the Peace.

The family home was first in the Colcot, Barry and then in 1932, Gareth persuaded his father to buy 'Eryl' in Porth y Castell, Barry. This imposing house commanded a magnificent panoramic view of the Bristol Channel in the distance and nearer Cold Knap and Pebbley Beach, Barry Island and the old Barry Harbour. I have cherished memories of the Sunday afternoon teas when many friends both great and humble gathered in the drawing room for the animated conversation and the warmth of hospitality for which the Jones' family was renowned. Auntie Winnie, Gareth's aunt on his mother's side and affectionately known as Ninnie, was well known for her lively nature and her delicious Welsh teas.

Gareth's early life seems to have been uneventful. His class reports from his father's school were unremarkable. One story remembered is of how he entered the drawing room to the amusement of a number of guests, wearing a top hat on his head and sporting a walking stick announcing he was the Governor of Taganrog. (His mother had acted as hostess to the Governor when Mrs Hughes was away from their home in Hughesovska.) It is strange that though there are very many documents that she saved about her son there is not one letter from her to him despite the fact that it is said she wrote nearly every day. His death affected her very deeply and perhaps that is why there are very few references to his early days.



Gareth with his father, Major Edgar Jones.

It is difficult to do justice to Gareth's brilliance in a short biography, which in itself is merely an introduction to his epic journey to the Far East. He was taught by his mother until the age of seven years. From his father's school he went to the University College, Aberystwyth, the University of Strasbourg and then on to Cambridge

University where he obtained first class honours in German, French and Russian. Therefore including his native English and Welsh, he was able to write and speak fluently in five languages.

He gained top marks in the Civil Service Examination for the Consular Service, which subsequently offered him a posting in China, which he did not accept. In view of his exceptional knowledge of European languages, this offer would have been seen as derogatory and a great disappointment to his family. He was a Barry County Schoolboy from Wales in the era when the possession of public school education was considered of great importance. Gareth travelled widely throughout Europe and the United States. He worked his passage on a dirty French steamer, signed on as a stoker on a Norwegian boat and travelled steerage on small Swedish and German steamers. He was the 1920's version of the back-packer. In 1923, due to the fall in the German Mark he travelled through Germany for the sum of five shillings.

In 1930 he became research advisor in Foreign Affairs to Mr David Lloyd George, the former Liberal Prime Minister, and the following year he became Assistant to Mr Ivy Lee, public relations counsel to Rockefeller, Pennsylvania Railroad, Chrysler and other American business institutions. During this time Mr Lee, who knew Russia well, requested Gareth to accompany Jack Heinz II, grandson of the founder of the Heinz Organisation, on a tour of the USSR.¹ Gareth's sister, Mrs Eirian Lewis told of how she visited them aboard a dilapidated Russian ship, the *SS Rudzutak* in the Port of London before their journey. She vividly recounted that Jack's suitcase

¹ "With a knowledge of Russia and the Russian language, it was possible to get off the beaten path, to talk with grimy workers and rough peasants, as well as such leaders as Lenin's widow and Karl Radek [Secretary of the Communist International]. We visited vast engineering projects and factories, slept on the bug-infested floors of peasants' huts, shared black bread and cabbage soup - in short, got into direct touch with the Russian people in their struggle for existence and were thus able to test their reactions to the Soviet Government's dramatic moves. It was an experience of tremendous interest and value as a study of a land in the grip of a proletarian revolution." Extract from Gareth's Preface to Jack Heinz II's [anonymously written] book *Experiences in Russia – 1931. A Diary.* [N.B. In 1931, the U.S.S.R. was still politically unrecognised as a sovereign state by the U.S.]

bulged with the ‘57’ varieties of Heinz produce [which she presumed were for their future personal sustenance in Russia].²

Gareth only spent a year with Mr Ivy Lee, on account of the Depression in America, before returning to spend a further period in the office of David Lloyd George. The latter assigned him to make enquiries into Mussolini’s relief measures in the Pontine Marshes, attempting to rid Italy of the scourge of malaria. In 1933, he was sent to Eire where he interviewed President De Valera of the Fianna Fail Party. He wrote of the I.R.A. and its hatred of the British. Prior to his ‘Round the World Fact Finding Tour’ Gareth worked for *The Western Mail*. Sir Robert Webber wrote to Gareth enclosing a copy of a letter from John Buchan, the famous author which congratulated him on his articles regarding the current situation in Russia. Sir Robert thought very highly of him and in his tribute to Gareth considered him to be a brilliant writer, a most interesting lecturer and a linguist of extraordinary cleverness fitting him to be a most successful journalist. Sir Robert Webber considered that Gareth’s ambition was to be a foreign correspondent:

He travelled extensively in Europe and America. It was to increase his practical knowledge of world affairs that he decided to travel in Asia. He had a most enquiring mind. He was only satisfied with the most thorough research. The relations between China and Japan profoundly interested him and it was in the pursuit of first-hand knowledge that he made the supreme sacrifice.

As a prolific writer, Gareth left a legacy of articles published in many British newspapers including *The Western Mail*, *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*, in Germany in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and in American newspapers through the International News Service. These articles are a graphic and historic portrayal of the critical events of the early thirties and are worthy of an in-depth study in

² “Mr Zuckerman (Chief of the Supply Department of the Narcomsnab (the People’s Food Commissariat) was kind enough to send us [Gareth and Jack Heinz II] off in an auto with an interpreter, to see the President of the Torgsin stores concerning the purchase of the “57” (varieties) ... I [Jack Heinz II] wanted Mr Jdanoff, of Torgsin, to try some hot beans, and made an appointment to see him in an hour. Just as I arrived, with my hot tins, the rascal drove off in his car.” From: *Experiences in Russia – 1931. A Diary*.

themselves. In 1932 he wrote in *The Western Mail* of his reception by Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in the Commissariat of Education in Moscow. As she was opposed to Stalin's policies they did not discuss politics. It was whispered in Moscow that she and the dictator had had an argument. Stalin had lost his temper with her and shouted: "Look here, old woman, if you do not behave yourself I'll appoint another widow to Lenin!" This woman of great character was enthusiastic about the educational aims of the Communists and the need to raise production. "She mentioned production in the same tone as a Welsh minister might mention God or religion."

The following year in his articles Gareth dared to expose the folly of Communist Russia's Five Year Plan of industrialisation and collectivisation. On his last visit to Russia in 1933, he disregarded an Embassy warning, packed his rucksack with bread, cheese, butter and chocolate and travelled hard-class to the Ukraine. There he wrote:

I walked through the country visiting villages and investigating twelve collective farms. Everywhere I heard the cry: "There is no bread. We are dying!" This cry is rising from all parts of Russia; from the Volga district; from Siberia; from White Russia; from Central Asia and from the Ukraine - "Tell them in England we are starving and we are getting swollen."

Most officials deny that any famine exists, but a few minutes after one such denial in a train I chanced to throw away a stale piece of my bread. Like a shot a peasant dived to the floor, grabbed the crust and devoured it. The same performance was repeated later with an orange peel. Even transport officials and O.G.P.U. [Russian police department] officers warned me against travelling over the countryside at night because of the number of starving desperate men. A foreign expert from Kazakhstan told me that 5,000,000 of the 11,000,000 inhabitants there had died of hunger. After the dictator Josef V. Stalin, the starving Russians most hate George Bernard Shaw for his account of their plentiful food, but there is insufficient food and most peasants are too weak to work on the land.



*Dr Ivy Lee.*³

³ Dr Ivy Lee, America's greatest publicity expert, had a face which the Americans called "dumb pan". Ivy Lee never took a fee that did not run into five figures. Perhaps it was his recognition of his somewhat grandiose ideas that, according to him, Soviet commissars used to entertain him exclusively off gold plate. He was the first person to urge the United States to recognise the Soviets, and paid a visit to Russia twice a year. This did not prevent him, however, from accepting - with his son - \$58,000 a year from the Nazi Government. His connection with the Rockefellers and other magnates is well known and he was proud of his title "family physician to big business". He was said to have kept even millionaires waiting for an appointment. [From a newspaper obituary (Date and source not known).]



*The Right Honourable David Lloyd George.*⁴

⁴ David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1908-1915 introduced in 1911 the National Insurance Act. The Insurance Certificates were known as ‘a Lloyd George’. He was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1916 to 1922 and one of the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

These reports confirmed the grim situation and followed shortly after Malcolm Muggeridge's accounts in the *Manchester Guardian* and, as Muggeridge's biographer mentions, Gareth's stories were incorporated in his book *Winter in Moscow*.

A rebuttal was promptly presented by Walter Durranty, U.S. correspondent - long in the Soviet 'good graces' to which Gareth replied in the *New York Times* reaffirming that starvation was widespread in Russia. Soviet propaganda, fed by the party activists who were imbued with a religious fervour, so impressed foreign visitors and delegates that the outside world was unaware of the catastrophe that had befallen 90% of the Russian people. In a letter to Gareth of April 17th 1933, Muggeridge describes Durranty as "a plain crook, though an amusing little man in his way" and offered to write a letter of protest to the *New York Times* if he had sight of Durranty's piece. Later that year Muggeridge wrote again having seen the Durranty contribution and commented: "He just writes what they tell him". [Letter of September 29th 1933.]

Gareth wrote that the success of Stalin's plan of collectivisation and industrialisation would strengthen the hands of the Communists throughout the world. As early as 1930 he was one of those who predicted that the 20th century would be a struggle between Capitalism and Communism. Now we have reached the new millennium and are able to look back over the history of the twentieth century we can see that his belief was remarkably accurate.

His fluent German greatly facilitated his reporting of German affairs and in 1933 he was the first foreign correspondent to fly with Hitler in his plane, the famous 'Richtofen', the fastest and most powerful aeroplane in Germany at that time. His article starts as follows: "If this aeroplane should crash the whole history of Europe would be changed. For a few feet away sits Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany and leader of the most volcanic nationalist awakening which the world has seen".

He described Hitler as an ordinary-looking man and was mystified how fourteen million people could deify him as 'The Great Dictator'. The flight was from Berlin to Frankfurt-am-Main where



LENIN'S WIDOW



Photo of Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya taken from one of Gareth's articles written at the time and one of Joseph Stalin from a postcard sent to his mother in 1930.



A unique photo taken in 1933 by Gareth of the starving children in the Ukraine. One of the very few pictures that recorded this great tragedy of the Stalin era.



Russian posters found in Gareth's room in Eryl in 1990. Gareth brought them back in 1931 and presented one to David Lloyd George. The right hand one represents the Hoover plan in crisis.



'Tractor is in the field. It is the end of the Will of God' by the artist Cheremnykh.

Hitler was to speak at a rally of Nazi supporters. At the rally Gareth described the people as being “drunk with nationalism”, and that the atmosphere was one of hysteria in the auditorium. 25,000 men rose to their feet, 25,000 arms were raised in salute and 25,000 voices shouted ‘Heil Hitler’. The dictator’s speech completely mesmerised the audience.

Later Gareth met Hitler’s private secretary in a private suite overlooking the Chancellor’s Palace. He confirmed that Germany must look east and unite with East Prussia across the Danzig Corridor. Gareth forecasted then that the dispute between Germany and Poland over the Corridor would bring about the Second World War.



Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany.

Gareth's writings and his radio broadcasts were often illustrated with delightful and amusing anecdotes. "The microphone preserved every iota of his (Gareth's) personality, the enthusiasm and vivacity ... a peculiar impression of intimacy, as of addressing a single person across the fireside." One such tale was circulated among the anti-Nazi Lutherans in Germany of a staunch Nazi priest who, before commencing service, ordered that anyone who was a Jew should leave the church. There was a brief pause and then the figure of Jesus Christ stepped down from the crucifix over the altar and silently went out of the building.



Heading of one of Gareth's articles wrote after he attended the Frankfurt rally.

There was a joke whispered in Germany of a humorist who asked:

Do you know how Hitler is going to put 3,000,000 unemployed to work?" Then he, himself answered: "He will make the first million paint the Black Forest white. The second million will build a one-way road to Jerusalem, and the third million will cover the Polish Corridor with linoleum."

Yet another was that of an airman who was passing over a lonely lake and saw a man struggling in the water and rescued him. When he had done so he found it was Stalin and immediately considered the advisability of dropping him overboard again: "because of what all the other Russians would say for not letting him drown".

Another anecdote that he had heard in Kharkoff was that of a louse and a pig meeting on the frontier of the Soviet Union. The louse was going into Russia while the pig was leaving. “Why are you coming into Russia?” asked the pig. “I am coming” the louse replied, “because in Germany the people are so clean that I cannot find a single place to rest my head. So I am entering the Soviet Union. But why are you leaving Russia?” The pig answered: “In Russia today the people are eating what we pigs used to eat, so there is nothing left for me, and so I am saying goodbye”. Gareth was to see proof of this in the market where a slice of doughy black bread was selling at the exorbitant price of one rouble [(2/-) or equivalent to about 24 loaves of bread in 1933].



The Frankfurt Rally that Gareth attended in 1933.

After Gareth's death, *The Western Mail* paid tribute to him by re-publishing a selection of his articles from their newspaper and the proceeds from the publication of this book, *In Search of News*,⁵ went towards a travel scholarship which was founded in his memory. The title page bears a quotation from the eminent journalist, John Garvin, the editor of *The Observer*, describing Gareth as a journalist who had won every step of his way by personal force. That force is precisely what the book reveals; it is a newspaper's testimony to the achievements of one of its brightest stars and a recollection of the kind of brilliant informative writing he had contributed over the years. The little book - published over half a century ago, but still quoted as a record of Welsh life in the 30s and of Welsh awareness beyond Wales - is a wonderful example of Gareth's powers of description and evocation. His articles describing Wales excite the imagination, setting the scene with the sounds and sights of the countryside. He describes local characters whose trades have long since fallen into obscurity and recalls such characters of folklore and legend, telling the story of Bob, the Raven of Brechfa, or the legend of the Lady of the Lake, the Mystic Maid of Llyn y Fan Fach. One only needs to read that lovely recollection of an evening in a Welsh farmhouse to see his passionate love and appreciation of his Welsh heritage. Turning to the pieces in the *Eisteddfod* is to see him feeling that love for historical investigation and observation of the continuing influence of that tradition. Even the articles on his foreign topics - Lenin's widow and the Seven Japanese Virtues reveal a journalist who was essentially a Welshman abroad.

It was Gareth's ambition to *Search for News* that eventually led him to explore further afield. Although he had already travelled extensively in Europe and the United States, the Far East remained unknown territory to him, and, wishing to investigate its growing political problems, it was to this turbulent region that he was next to turn his attention. Over several months, his work took him throughout Asia, before bringing him, on July 4th, 1935, to Peking (Beijing). It was from here, a week later, that he was to embark on a journey into

⁵ Please refer to the website: www.colley.co.uk/garethjones for a full transcription of these articles by Gareth.

Inner Mongolia, a journey which would prove, tragically, to be his last.

The following pages take up the story after his arrival in Peking. It consists of a letter that Gareth wrote to his parents in the form of a narrative, in which he also incorporates extracts from his diary. It was to be the last letter that Gareth ever wrote.



Gareth at the Eisteddfod.