

Professor Emrys Jones, FBA (1920-2006)

Emrys Jones was born in Aberdare 1920 and from his upbringing there, and like many of his contemporaries of the south Wales valleys of the depression years, inherited a tradition of total commitment to Wales, its language and culture and to political and social radicalism. That tradition was to condition his subsequent academic work.

From Aberdare Grammar School he went up to what was then the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth to read Geography. There he came under the academic tradition which had been established by H. J. Fleure and carried on by C. Daryll Forde and Emrys Bowen. The Department was then entitled 'Geography and Anthropology' and although there was little formal teaching of anthropology the nature of the geography taught was strongly influenced by it. The later appointment of Alwyn D. Rees in 1946 was to have a strong confirming influence on the nature both of teaching and research. It was against this background that Emrys Jones's postgraduate research was developed, especially his doctoral thesis on Tregaron. That work led to several publications but the most significant was 'Tregaron. The Sociology of a Market Town in Central Cardiganshire' in *Welsh Rural Communities* (1960), a volume edited by Elwyn Davies and Alwyn Rees. Both the title and the context are worthy of note. It was unambiguously called 'the sociology of' and appeared along a set of essays which were on rural communities by authors native to the areas on which they wrote. In contrast, that by Emrys was on a town, however small, and by a researcher from a somewhat different background.

Emrys spent a post-doctoral year in the USA with a Rockefeller Scholarship specifically in social science where he investigated the Americanisation of Welsh communities in upper New York State. His first academic post on his return to the U.K. was an assistant lectureship in the Department of Geography at University College London. However, that was not followed by promotion to a full lectureship since the then Head of Department considered his work to be in the field of sociology and therefore inappropriate for his department. This incident reflected the marked differences in the concept of what constituted the legitimate field of geography at the time, and especially the conflict between the interpretation current at Aberystwyth and that of the more conventional and traditional mainstream. That mainstream convention decreed that the subject should rest on, and begin with, the physical environment and should proceed to the interpretation of its impact upon human activity, indeed at the extreme of its determinant impact. But true to his Aberystwyth inheritance, Emrys believed in the primacy of social, political and economic forces in the creation of those spatial patterns which were the

core of geographical study. Moreover, the visual landscape had been moulded by long periods of human activity and the nature of that activity, the historical background, was also of paramount import, for little in the visual landscape could be considered as 'natural' rather than man made. These conflicting views of the nature of the discipline dominated much of geographical dogma of the time, expressed in the two themes of environmental determinism on the one hand and what was called 'positivism' on the other, where in the phrase of the day man was master of the possibilities offered by the environment and the judge of their use so that man and not the physical condition was the proper point of departure. Geography, therefore, began with culture and not with the physical environment. As a response to a paper expounding of the necessity of environmental foundations Emrys published an essay in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in 1956 entitled 'Cause and effect in Human Geography', setting out the 'possibilist' case. Throughout his subsequent writings it was culture or way of life which was the basis of his investigations. It is not difficult to see in this the strong awareness from his youth of how so much of the character of the south Wales coalfield had been determined by the rapine of the coal owners and iron masters. It was in the character of those people, as it was derived from contemporary *mores*, that geographical interpretation needed to begin, at least as far as human geography was concerned.

In 1950 he had been appointed to a lectureship at Queen's University, Belfast, where the Head was Emyr Estyn Evans, himself a graduate from the Geography Department at Aberystwyth and a pupil of Fleure. This provided a working context much more in line with Emrys's philosophy of geography and it was while at Belfast that he more fully developed the two themes which were to dominate his subsequent career. The first was subsequently epitomised in a book published, jointly with John Eyles, in 1977 and entitled *An Introduction to Social Geography*. This laid down the firm conviction of the fundamental need for the understanding of social processes in any interpretation of the character of the earth surface. Manifestly such an approach became paramount in the understanding of the internal structure of cities and devoting himself to the examination of Belfast he produced a pioneering work in the emerging specialism of urban geography, *A Social Geography of Belfast* which was published by the Oxford University Press in 1960. Urban geography was the second theme on which he worked. Put together these two themes, the social geography of cities, established his dominant contribution in human geography.

By the time of the publication of his book on Belfast, Emrys had moved to

London as Reader in Social Geography at the London School of Economics. There he transferred his urban work from Belfast to London and began a series of publications devoted to the capital including *An Atlas of London and its Region* in 1968. This confirmed the movement of his more general investigations from the smallest of towns where he had begun to the very largest. He became an acknowledged specialist on the world's metropolises. A more general book, *Towns and Cities* of 1968, was followed by *Metropolis. The World's Largest Cities*, in 1990.

He became Head of Department at LSE and in that post he was instrumental in the furthering of the status of human geography. When it was established the Social Science Research Council did not include geography as one of its disciplines. It was largely due to the efforts of Emrys that this was rectified and a Human Geography Subject Committee was established in 1967 on which he served in its initial years. This was just one of the areas in which he exerted a prime influence in the promotion of geography as a social science. It is also worth noting that one of Emrys's first loves was architecture, indeed it was only financial problems that meant he studied geography rather than architecture. He kept that interest in the built environment through his life and at LSE developed links with the Bartlett School of Architecture which led to an involvement in town planning, Milton Keynes being one of the areas with which he was concerned.

Although living in London, Emrys maintained his total commitment to Wales and things Welsh. He published articles on the Welsh language and a more general paper, 'The changing distribution of the Celtic languages in the British Isles', in the *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* for 1967. Subsequently he became a driving force in this Society and was its President from 1989 to 2001. That commitment to matters Welsh was best demonstrated in the book he edited and published in 2001 on *The Welsh in London. 1500-2000*, produced partly as a celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Cymmrodorion. It is significant that he wrote much of the book himself. But it is more notable for forsaking the hackneyed approach of narrating the lives of London Welsh people and seeking a more general overview of the role the Welsh had played in the evolution of the city. One other example of his links with Wales was the invitation to present its Llandovery Lecture by the Aberystwyth Old Students Association. He called it 'Where was Wales?' and it was published in the *Cymmrodorion Transactions* for 1994. It was highly appropriate that in 2001 he was presented with the Cymmrodorion Medal by the Prince of Wales as part of the anniversary celebrations.

Emrys's work as a geographer was celebrated by a number of awards. He was a Vice-President of the Royal Geographical Society in 1978-9 and was awarded its Victoria Medal in 1976. He was given honorary doctorates by the University of Belfast and the Open University and was made a Fellow of the University of Wales Aberystwyth. He was made a Fellow of the British Academy in 2003. He was also inducted as a member of the Gorsedd of Bards of the National Eisteddfod in 2005.

Over the period of his life as a geographer the subject underwent a series of paradigm shifts. Secure in his own philosophy, he never actively opposed the approach of others. Over the latter part of his career geography became dominated by logical positivism and consequently the complex statistical analysis of large data sets which went along with it. In such procedures he had little interest. He maintained his basic position that his analysis of the earth's surface began with cultural character and the associated societal structures. There was also a strong remnant of the personal participation basis of Alwyn Rees's work on rural Wales. Ironically, perhaps, his approach was in part determined by his own environment. Living in and working on the spatial patterns of London, his starting point was inevitably the human condition. How else, for example, could the great residential squares of west London, built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, be interpreted other than through the cultural inheritance from the grand *piazas* and the *grandes places* of Europe, and the political condition, the social structures and the distribution of wealth that enabled their building? But in his presentation of what human geography meant to him he made a distinctive contribution which resonated through the world of academic geography and still has its role in contemporary studies.

Harold Carter