



HISTORICAL SW&S PORTRAITS OF  
IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL LEADERS IN SOCIAL WORK

**Robin Huws Jones C.B. E., UK, President of IASSW, 1976- 1980**

*Katherine A. Kendall, ACSW*



Robin Huws Jones, President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work from 1976 to 1980, lived a life of challenge and change. Born in Wales in 1909, he often remarked that learning to speak Welsh at age two was such a challenge that he didn't bother to learn English until he was six. The death of his mother when he was three led to the first of many changes in a life that was not easy in the formative years. Robin remained in the care of his father while his sister became the ward of two aunts. With his father, a draper's assistant, he left Wales to live in a crowded boarding house in Liverpool.

Learning English did indeed pose a challenge. He managed the spoken language, but his efforts to apply the very different phonetic principles of the Welsh language to English spelling led to his undoing at age 15

when the time came to be considered for education beyond the required minimum. His Headmaster would not let him sit as a candidate, far less take the examination leading to higher education. However, a job in the library of the Central YMCA in Liverpool fortunately gave him the opportunity to read widely and begin a successful program of self-education. It was in this position, too, that he began to display the talents and temperament characteristic of his life work in forging social policy and promoting social action. He organized discussion groups and summer camps for unemployed young dock workers who turned up at the library, and befriended the homeless old men who came to get warm and read the newspapers, often visiting them when they ended, ill and alone in hospitals.

**Academic Achievements**

Omnivorous reading in his idle hours at the library finally prepared him to take examinations that led to a bachelor of science external degree from the University of London. This was just the beginning of his self-directed academic achievements. With the encouragement of the Director of Statistics at Liverpool University, who recognized his potential, he embarked on a three year course leading to a master's degree in social science, while maintaining himself through part-time teaching at the University.

His master's thesis on the nutrition of North Country schoolboys revealed a shocking discrepancy in the medical assessments of malnutrition that were used to establish eligibility for free school meals. The painstaking care of his research and its surprising results created a

sensation. He was invited to read a paper on its findings before the Royal Statistical Society, which awarded him its Francis Wood Memorial Prize. At age 27, the little Welsh boy who at age 15 was not regarded as eligible for higher education was elected the youngest fellow of the prestigious Royal Statistical Society. His research made possible the development and use of scientific standards for measuring childhood malnutrition

After several years on the research staff of Liverpool University, where he lectured in the social science department, he was invited by Oxford University to serve as an extra-mural tutor in eastern and northern England. In addition to teaching adult education courses, he was involved in organizing cultural activities in the communities he visited. During World War II he went to the airfields surrounding his base in Lincoln to hold discussions with young pilots in training from many countries. He particularly enjoyed talking about social policy proposals for the post-war world, particularly the Beveridge Report with its recommendations for a national health service. His interest in social policy and social reform became linked to education for social work when, in 1949, he accepted the position of Director of the Social Studies Department of the University of Wales in Swansea.

### **The Swansea Experience**

University courses in social studies and social administration in this period served as an academic base, both for further professional education or immediate employment in social work. Each university made its own decision as to the content, within a generally accepted framework, but most often the curriculum included social administration, economics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. While there was no agreed upon content relevant to social work, social administration courses usually provided an introduction to the various branches of the profession and required some form of practice experience.

It was at Swansea that Robin displayed a singular quality already suggested in the struggles of his early years and distinctly evident later throughout his career. No obstacle was too great to be overcome. If there was an unmet need, something must be done about it. The Swansea experience illustrates the way in which he responded to a need in social work education and a challenge in social reform.

It was also at Swansea that he formed a partnership with Dame Eileen Younghusand, whose friendship had a significant impact on his career. He invited Dame Eileen, who was involved with the Social Affairs Department of the United Nations, to serve as an external examiner for the Swansea course. She told him of the urgent need for qualified faculty for the emerging programs of social work education in the developing world and for leadership of newly established social welfare programs.

Huws Jones responded with the first and only course in the early 1950s devoted entirely to the further training of social work teachers, practitioners, and social welfare administrators from third world countries. With only one additional staff member but with considerable help from other university departments in Swansea and staff support from the University of Wales at Cardiff, he launched a highly successful program. By the time it ended, some 60 countries had participated, ranging from Portugal and Greece in Europe to countries in the Middle and Far East, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Upon hearing about the course, Julia Henderson, Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs of the United Nations, was sufficiently interested to visit Swansea personally to check it out for possible use in their technical assistance program. A significant United Nations activity of

that period consisted of fellowships to produce teachers, trainers, and practitioners in social work and social welfare programs. Her positive impression of his leadership and the content of the international course resulted in U.N. support of many of the overseas students. Challenged by the educational and cultural diversity in each new class, Huws Jones made a special effort to broaden the training beyond academic study. The students not only interacted as a group but learned to appreciate difference through a brief period of living with families in Welsh villages. They also participated in local community events, ranging from political meetings to attendance at soccer matches or, if so inclined, at the chapels that gave religion a special Welsh flavor. A brief period in London was arranged to observe new developments in the social services, and to visit the Houses of Parliament, where they sometimes had discussions with political luminaries. Dame Eileen Younghusband proved extremely helpful in the conduct of the international course and indirectly contributed to Robin's second notable achievement in Swansea.

In 1955, Robin Huws Jones was named vice-chairman of a prestigious working party established by the Ministry of Health to make recommendations for the staffing of the welfare services provided by local authorities. As it was chaired by Dame Eileen, it became known as the Younghusband Committee. On his frequent trips to London for Committee meetings, Robin became more and more aware of the appalling scenes of industrial devastation in the lower Swansea Valley. He described it in these words:

*There were great hillocks of toxic waste, poisoning the earth and the atmosphere so that not a blade of grass or even moss grew. This grim landscape was strewn with the ruins of industrial buildings. A lifeless river wound through the valley (Billups 2002, p.137).*

Despite the failure of earlier attempts to revive the area, Robin took on the challenge of restoring the Valley to its former beauty and he succeeded. His faith in the positive outcomes of research took the form of a proposal to the University College to sponsor an interdisciplinary study of the Valley with a view to finding a means to its rehabilitation. With significant backing by the University, including eight of its departments, and financial support from government, foundations and industry, an ambitious program of research, social action, and public education was launched.

Although Robin did not remain in Swansea to complete the lengthy and complicated process of restoring the Valley, he left the project in capable hands with committees representing a broad range of interest and support, including the University, national and local government, industry, and the press. The final report produced a host of recommendations that led, some 20 years later, to the transformation of what was a toxic desert into a parkland of trees with a clear river and green meadows. Some slag heaps remaining as a symbolic reminder of former industrial devastation highlighted the contrast with new industry that brought in modern factories and contributed socially as well as economically to the surrounding community.

While credit for this positive outcome can be spread in many directions, it was Robin who saw the need and acted to meet a seemingly impossible challenge. His role as the creator of the project was fittingly recognized by the University of Wales when it conferred upon him in 1984 the honorary degree of Doctor of Law. His work with overseas students was also deemed highly successful. In a letter recommending Robin Huws Jones for an IASSW award, Julia Henderson wrote:

*At the United Nations, we were impressed by the results of this course as seen in the successful careers of our fellows upon their return to their home country (Personal Correspondence, Henderson 1995).*

With a grant from the Ford Foundation in 1958, Robin visited former students in Burma, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Middle East to assess the outcome of their educational experience. It was a gratifying relief to find that most of them had become leaders in social welfare and social work education in their countries. He remained in touch with a number of his former students throughout the rest of his life. The Huws Jones 1996 Christmas letter described his attendance at the International Congress of Schools of Social Work in Hong Kong which was followed by a visit to one of the former Swansea students in Malaysia. He said: “ ... then to Kuala Lumpur we found the same warm friendship and astonishing hospitality as eight years ago. We got to know Penang even better than last time” (Huws Jones 1996). Robin added to a natural talent for making friends a special gift as a correspondent whose newsy letters kept friendships warmly alive.

### **National Institute of Social Work Training**

Robin Huws Jones next challenge came in 1961 when he was asked to serve as the Principal of the newly established National Institute of Social Work Training (NISWT) in London. Britain had long been shackled by a fragmented approach to the training of social workers. Basic social studies courses in universities and specialized training for specific fields of practice did not begin to meet the need for the vast majority of social workers required for burgeoning health and welfare services throughout the United Kingdom. To remedy what was called a crisis in the staffing of those services, the Working Party established by the Ministry of Health produced a series of innovative recommendations that strongly affected the structure and content of British social work education.

The Younghusband Report, named for Dame Eileen who chaired the Working Party, proposed two avenues to the preparation of qualified social workers, plus systematic in-service training for welfare assistants. Courses in universities would be continued, to provide professional education, but additional two year courses related to but outside the universities would be established to provide a general training for more competent service in the local branches of health and welfare programs. With later developments, the apparent distinction between professional and general social work training disappeared. At the time, however, the two-year courses were launched as pilot programs in colleges of further education.

The daunting problems involved in starting and staffing the new educational venture were to a degree resolved by another recommendation that created the National Institute of Social Work Training, informally described as a “staff college”. Robin Huws Jones refused the first invitation to head the Institute. Besides being heavily involved with the international training course and the Swansea Project, he did not think he had the right academic qualifications to lead a social work organization. Others disagreed and prodded by foundations interested in funding the new organization, he finally was persuaded to serve as the first Principal of NISWT.

This new challenge took him and his family to Tavistock Place in London, where, thanks to purchase by the Nuffield Foundation, the Institute was centrally located in the Mary Ward House, the former residence of a well-known Settlement. The Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust also contributed with the Nuffield Foundation in underwriting support for the first ten years. Robin noted the importance of assured financing in giving NISWT “a degree of

independence, the chance to experiment, the opportunity to respond quickly, the feeling that one didn't always have to play safe" (Huws Jones 1971, p. 95).

He enthusiastically embarked on this view venture with his wife, Enid, an important partner in all his activities, and their three children. The family was installed in a flat on the top floor of the Institute. With the warm hospitality that emanated from that household and the myriad activities underway throughout the building, NISWT soon became a haven for international visitors and a center for the exploration of new ideas. In fact, a key objective was stated as "progressively becoming a centre of information, for research, and for meetings, discussions and conferences between senior administrators, social workers, academics and members of other professions" (Younghusband 1978, p. 87).

Two major objectives were given immediate attention. The terms of reference for NISWT called for pioneering the new two-year courses in colleges of further education and organizing a course within the Institute to prepare social work faculty for those courses. Eileen Younghusband signed on as a consultant with development of the educational programs of the Institute as a major responsibility. The partnership they developed as a team requires a brief description of Eileen's contribution to the NISWT program. With her expert knowledge of social work education and his skill in dealing with broad issues involving challenges and change, the two were ideally suited to the launching of a new and possibly controversial endeavor.

As a first order of business, consultation visits were scheduled throughout the United Kingdom to educate the profession and health and welfare officials in the local social services on the benefits of the new approach to social work training. As noted, Robin excelled at this kind of activity. Radiating commitment and enthusiasm, he had a way of making any project seem exciting and achievable with everyone involved in it highly valued as a participant. Sir Peter Barclay portrayed well this characteristic in the obituary published in the *Guardian*. He noted Robin's strong commitment to "citizen participation" and described his tenure at the Institute in these words:

*From 1961 to 1972, as principal, Robin was at the height of his influence, a smiling quietly-spoken manipulator, whose energy, charm, and persuasiveness it was hard to resist (Barclay 2001).*

For Dame Eileen, setting up the courses was a golden opportunity to put into practice her ideas on the differing levels and content of social work education as presented in *Training for Social Work: Third International Survey* (United Nations 1958). This landmark study, which she conducted for the United Nations, outlined the rationale for several levels of social work preparation in developed as well as developing countries and described in great detail the basic body of knowledge, and skills to be incorporated in educational programs, regardless of the academic level. The different courses developed within the Institute as well as the two-year courses in the colleges of further education all reflected her guidance on essential content, teaching methods, patterns of learning, field practice, use of supervision, and relations with students. It is not surprising that the NISWT training offered by the colleges became known as the "Younghusband Courses".

Robin's interest in research guaranteed a strong emphasis on enquiries into a wide range of topics bearing not only on questions of education, but on fields of practice, the effectiveness of social policies, the organization and administration of services, and much more.

Throughout his career, Robin complained about the lack of objective evidence of the positive outcomes of social work practice. His commitment to objective and systematic studies also attracted highly skilled staff members who undertook action-research projects to demonstrate the value of new methods of social work practice. In every research project, emphasis was placed on using and testing the findings in social work education and practice.

Group work and community work as social work methods, for example, were not well-developed in British social work education. Robin saw the need and found the resources to demonstrate their value through an action-research project involving services for old people in the London Borough of Southwark. The interest generated and the results achieved led to the employment of community workers with salaries paid from funds raised for that specific purpose. Publication of the findings of NISWT projects had the desired result of focusing more attention on research in the programs of professional social work education.

Given Huws Jones' experience with the Swansea course for overseas students and Younghusband's global connections, the Institute inevitably became a vibrant international center. Visitors, students, and scholars came from every continent, but senior Fulbright teachers and researchers may have been the most deeply involved in NISWT programs. Robin and Eileen had both visited the United States and found certain aspects of American social work education worthy of adoption. The two-year courses developed for the colleges of further education and the special courses for potential teachers both reflected approaches to curriculum building and teaching methods that Eileen, in particular, found useful. The Fulbright scholars had the privilege of teaching in the new courses while gaining new insights from a different educational experience. The international atmosphere at the Institute contributed to Robin's involvement with the International Association of Schools of Social Work. (IASSW)

### **The IASSW Experience**

Robin attended his first International Congress of Schools of Social Work in 1956 while still at Swansea. On a personal note, I must describe our first meeting in which he revealed many of the qualities that foretold future leadership. As the recently elected Secretary with responsibility as a volunteer for administering the Association, I found the task of organizing my first International Congress rather overwhelming. The German schools, purged of Nazi staff and content, had been readmitted to membership in the IASSW. Although not overtly stated, holding the Congress in Munich carried a message of reconciliation. Awareness of the ambivalent feelings of some of the European delegates called for diplomatic handling of certain group activities. Robin, with his greater knowledge of European educators, took charge as I struggled with different combinations of leaders, secretaries, and participants to ensure harmonious teamwork in the workshops following plenary sessions. He helped to organize the groups, ushered the participants to their appointed places, and, in general, saved the reputation of the new and inexperienced Secretary.

His influence at that meeting helped to bring about the postwar restoration of the IASSW after World War II as a fully functioning international organization. It also marked him clearly for future leadership roles. At the General Assembly of school representatives, he spoke from the floor with such enthusiastic conviction about the need for a strong and effective international voice for social work education that the delegates unanimously accepted a series of Board proposals. Important changes included a revision of the By-laws, a substantial increase in dues, and a membership campaign. His appointment as chairman of an international membership committee followed almost immediately. In 1970, he was elected Treasurer,

which he wryly noted was probably due to his reputation as a “beggar with charitable foundations” (Billups 2002, p.139). His major contributions to the IASSW, however, came during his tenure as President from 1976 to 1980.

All of the presidents with whom I worked from 1954 to 1978 were immensely talented, but Robin Huws Jones excelled at chairing meetings and encouraging the kind of discussion that ends in consensus. Personal qualities of charm, decency, and a ready wit had much to do with his performance but most important were his understanding of the issues under discussion and a genuine desire to hear and consider all points of view. To arrive at what was best for all concerned, which was always his goal, every voice must be heard. He also knew when to set limits to keep discussions from becoming gabfests.

During his tenure, he faced a serious problem that divided the Board and derailed his usual push for consensus. Even his special talent in handling controversial subjects could not produce general agreement on how to deal with the issue of apartheid in social work education in South Africa. The schools of social work had a long history of membership, having joined through their national association shortly after the founding of the IASSW. In the 1960s and 1970s, abhorrence of apartheid and all forms of racism led to an examination of membership criteria.

Herman Stein, who preceded Robin as President, obtained first-hand information in a visit to South Africa on positive efforts by certain schools and educators in outflanking discriminatory policies and working toward abolition of the system. The Board had to decide whether to expel all South African schools from membership or find a way to work with those that were struggling against heavy odds to rid their country of a national evil. A majority vote establishing a probationary status with conditions to be monitored through regular reports of progress kept the IASSW connected with the forces for change. However, that did not satisfy certain Scandinavian countries, whose representatives demanded that all the South African schools be excluded from membership. The issue remained contentious until the end of apartheid. Robin dealt with other serious controversies during his four years as IASSW president, but this was the only one that jolted his equanimity.

Robin excelled as an administrator and made substantial contributions as an educator, but he always regarded social policy as his major area of expertise. This made his involvement in a population and family planning project directed by the IASSW a source of tremendous personal interest and satisfaction. From 1972 to 1978 he served as the chairman of an Interdisciplinary Resource Group consisting of 25 outstanding experts in all aspects of population policy and its implementation. With representation from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the U.N. Commission for Social Development, International Planned Parenthood (IPPF), other leading non-governmental organizations in the population field, and a variety of disciplines, the meetings demanded a high level of skill in the chair. The Secretary-General of IPPF voiced the general opinion when she described his performance as “brilliant”.

Designed to prepare qualified social work manpower for a more effective contribution to population and family planning activities, the project involved a close working relationship with pilot schools in 13 developing countries and a less formal connection with cooperating schools in seven countries. In addition to serving as chairman of the Resource Group, Robin played an active role, particularly in Asia, in monitoring progress and evaluating results. His visits to participating countries usually followed the provision of consultation by

interdisciplinary teams on curriculum building. He was in his element, helping to establish new working relationship with health services and organizations concerned with social and economic development. At its final meeting in 1977, the Resource Group judged the results, especially in Asia, as highly successful. Robin's belief in the program, his skill in relating school programs to community needs, along with his enthusiasm and talents as an advocate, made a major contribution to the positive outcome.

It was during Robin Huws Jones tenure as President that I retired and the IASSW was faced with the necessity of vacating its long-time base in the United States. Invitations from Belgium and Austria set in motion a complicated series of negotiations involving site visits and discussions with possible sponsors. With substantial help from the Austrian representative on the IASSW Board and Robin's skill in working out a mutually satisfying agreement, the Secretariat moved to Vienna in 1978. The lengthy process involved frequent visits to Vienna to meet with industrialists, possible financial backers, and officials at the highest level of government. It also involved linking the work of the IASSW to the mission of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian and Social Affairs that had been relocated from New York to the newly established United Nations City in Vienna. Robin Huws Jones' ability to inspire confidence in the worth of the IASSW as an international force in promoting social justice was a major factor in the successful relocation of the Secretariat. He often referred with delight of his pleasure in signing the agreement with the Austrian government in the famous room with seven doors where the celebrated Treaty of Vienna had been signed.

### **Relations with Foundations & Ministerial Committees**

The personal qualities that made Robin Huws Jones so effective as a chairman and advocate led to his appointment to a number of power-packed committees appointed by various ministries concerned with the structure and staffing of the social services. The Younghusband Committee appointed by the Ministry of Health, which produced the National Institute on Social Work Training, was the most important in terms of his career. From 1965 to 1968 he served on the equally prestigious Seebohm Committee, which was likened to the Beveridge Committee for the breadth of its vision in promoting social well-being.

Appointed by four ministries to review the organization and responsibilities of the social services provided by local authorities, the Committee produced a landmark report that led to revolutionary change in meeting the social needs of individuals, families and communities. The Local Authority Social Services Act passed in 1970 authorized the establishment of new social service departments to provide unified community based and family oriented service to be available to all. Robin's message on citizen participation and the need for research with interdisciplinary involvement if services are to be effective came through clearly in the Seebohm Report. The Guardian obituary described his major role in these words:

*It was Robin who briefed the chairman, held the ring, negotiated, supported and acted as advocate to ensure a good outcome (Barclay 2001).*

His pioneering work at NISWT and in Swansea together with his leadership in the two national committees that reorganized social work and social work education led to his nomination for a C.B.E. (Commander of the British Empire), an honor awarded by Queen Elizabeth in 1969.

The pioneering work that marked Robin's career could not have been undertaken and carried through to success without private as well as public financial support. The Swansea initiative



early earned him a reputation for visionary leadership that appealed to foundations and other donors with social causes. Indeed, it was pressure from the Nuffield and Rowntree Foundations that persuaded him to change his mind about accepting the position as Principal of NISWT. The many research, demonstration, and other projects launched by the Institute were financed by grants that Robin was able to obtain from governmental and non-governmental sources.

The Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust became a major source of help throughout Robin's career and a close association continued to the end of his life. He joined their staff as Associate Director when he left NISWT in 1972 and was retained as a consultant upon his retirement in 1978. Much of his work as President of the IASSW from 1976 to 1980 was made possible with help from the Trust which also brought to fruition a visionary plan he and Dame Eileen had shared about how to live happily in retirement.

### **The Retirement Years**

Moving from the noisy bustle of London to the quiet beauty of the Lake Country introduced Robin and Enid to a new life of rural pleasures. Their retirement house had all the charm of a centuries' old cottage but with the added conveniences of the modern age. Robin became an avid gardener, producing an amazing assortment of vegetables, fruits, and flowers. The considerable bounty was shared with neighbors, who also looked forward to the strawberry festival that became a Huws Jones annual tradition.

Although cultivating a garden and exploring the hills and valleys of new surroundings offered an enjoyable experience, Robin continued in retirement to pursue a busy schedule of activities. This was the period when, as President of the IASSW, he traveled extensively for the population project and exploration of a new home for the Secretariat. He also continued to serve on committees, national and local, with some major assignments, such as membership on the Chief Scientist's Committee of the Department of Health and Social Security.

This was also the period when he had time to work on a proposal, initiated originally by Dame Eileen, for a new type of retirement community. On several visits to the United States, they both had occasion to visit with retired friends in continuing care retirement communities, a model of supportive living very different from traditional homes for the aged. Designed for independent living with an abundance of amenities, they also offered the security of health care to the end of life. For Robin and Eileen a special virtue lay in the contribution to positive ageing made through social interaction with fellow residents, involvement in every type of learning activity, attention to physical fitness, and participation in communal events.

Robin faced his final challenge in this effort to launch a British version of the American model he and Eileen so much admired. He again found a sympathetic response in the Rowntree Memorial Trust, which with his help established the Hartrigg Oaks Continuing Care Retirement Community in York, the first of its kind in Britain. Robin and Enid Huws Jones promptly entered the new community that, to their delight, lived up to expectations. And that is where their long and productive lives both came to an end in 2001.

### **Final Word**

Robin Huws Jones will long be remembered for his able and inspiring leadership in a period of transition for the International Association of Schools of Social Work. His endearing personal qualities along with his ability to work with change as a positive force and his dedication to the highest values of the social work profession enabled the Association to

advance social work education world-wide, to introduce innovative approaches, and to promote social justice. Those talents, so abundantly shared, were recognized by the IASSW at its Congress in Hong Kong in 1999 when he received the Katherine A. Kendall Award for a lifetime of outstanding achievement and distinguished international service to social work education.

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## Note:

**In addition to the sources cited, material for this portrait has come from my personal files of correspondence and IASSW documents.**

### Author's Address:

Ph.D Katherine A. Kendall

ACSW

Former Executive Director, CSWE

Retired Secretary-General, IASSW

Email: k.kend@erols.com

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