

## TIM HUGHES, THE MILL-WRIGHT OF LLANLLWNI

*Reproduced from a book entitled, 'In Search of News' by Gareth Jones, published by The Western Mail in 1938*

Gareth Jones (1905-1935), who wrote the following portrait of the millwright Timothy Hughes, was regarded as one of the most talented journalists of his generation. Born in Barry in the Vale of Glamorgan, Jones graduated from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1926 with a first class degree in French, and from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1929 with a first class honours degree in French, German, and Russian. In January 1930, he began work as Foreign Affairs Advisor to former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and that summer made his first brief visit to Yuzovka/Hughesovska, in the Ukraine (named after its Welsh founder the steel industrialist John Hughes, but by then renamed Stalino. Its name would later be changed again, to Donetsk). He wrote for *The Western Mail*, *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *New York Times*. He secured the journalistic scoop of his career in February 1933 when he flew with the newly-appointed German Chancellor Adolf Hitler in his private plane to Frankfurt during his election campaign. Jones was also responsible for trying to draw the world's attention to the widespread famine in the Ukraine that had resulted from Stalin's enforced agricultural policies - a famine that is estimated to have claimed more than 7.5 million lives between 1932-33. It has been suggested that he may have had links with British Intelligence at this time. Whatever the truth, two years later he was murdered in unexplained circumstances while travelling in Inner Mongolia. There were strong suspicions that Jones' murder was engineered by the Soviet NKVD, as revenge for the embarrassment he had previously caused the Soviet regime.

But what about the links between the reporter and the millwright? Well, in 1933, two years before his death, and following his return from Germany, he wrote a series of articles for *The Western Mail* about rural craftsmen in Wales. One of them was written following a visit to Llanllwni in north Carmarthenshire near the border with Ceredigion, and concerns the local millwright, Timothy (Tim) Hughes.

Returning from the hayfields, with his hayfork over his shoulder, can an elderly man with a long white beard, and with sharp, twinkling eyes.

Greeting him, I asked: “Chwi yw Mr. Tim Hughes?” It was he.

I had long looked for him in the scattered clean cottages of Llanllwni, in the Teify [sic] Valley, on that warm July evening, when all Cardiganshire seemed to be hard at work in the fields.

He was known to all, for was he not the master craftsman, famed for over 50 years among all those who had links with the old woollen mills and factories in South Wales?

In the last century he was often seen tramping across the mountains with 60lbs. of tools on his back to repair an old mill or to build a new one. A little later, when the young millwright apprentice had become the respected master-craftsman, he was regarded with awe and amazement and often with amusement, as he rushed along on his penny-farthing bicycle, one of the first to be introduced in the district.

But now the days of the millwright are over, the craft is dying out, the woollen mills silent. No longer does the millwright tramp across the mountains with his tools, and as for the penny-farthing bicycle, it is rusted and dusty in the shed.

“What a contrast it would be” says Mr. Tim Hughes in Welsh, as we walk along the Llandyssul-Lampeter road towards his cottage, “if I went on my old bike now to Pendine and stood with it side by side by the Mollisons’ aeroplane.”

That remark by my fine old companion was symbolic. Just as the rapid aeroplane has taken the place of the penny-farthing bicycle, so the vast machines of the modern factory have ousted the woollen mills of Cardiganshire, and so the twentieth century is rapidly thrusting the old crafts into the limbo of forgotten things.



PLATE 1 Mr Timothy Hughes

But when Mr. Tim Hughes talks of the old craft the nineteenth century lives again, and with his vivid gift of portrayal and with his enthusiasm for his calling he imparts a glamour to the scenes of old Wales.

“I am a millwright,” he says with pride as we chat in his cottage, “and I learned my craft from my uncle, Enoch Morgan Jones, who built the mills in Abergorlech and Brecon. But he died about forty years ago, at the age of 67, and I have the craft after him.

“What kind of man was your uncle?” I asked, and the millwright’s face lit up.

“He was a great humorist, ‘neilltuol o ddoniol,’” he replied. “He loved laughing and he loved making others laugh, too. He was short in stature and a great character. I remember vividly the first time I set out with him, with my tools on my back, to Llandilo [sic] and then on to Rhydyfro. I was only nineteen at the time and he was teaching me the craft. Let me see – that must have been in 1879. At that time I helped to re-build the Rhydyfro Mill. “One of our walks used to be to Pandy, Pontardulais, where I usually went every two years to do the re-lining of the mill and to see Mr. W.J.Jones, who is still living. Mrs. W.J.Jones, by the way, is a cousin to Daniel Rhydderch, Abergorlech.”

There must be few men who know Wales as well as Mr. Tim Hughes. He used to cover on foot or on his penny-farthing seven different counties, and his craft carried him as far north as Talybont, Cardiganshire, as far south as Pontardulais, as far east as Llanover, Monmouthshire, and as far west as Glandwronest, Pembrokeshire. Within this district there is hardly a woollen mill which he has not built, re-built, or repaired.

“I built a mill, Gwentffrwd Factory, for Lady Llanover in Llanover in 1894, and a mill in Llanfihangel-Rhydithon in 1896. I remember clearly in Llanfihangel how the carpenter and I went out to the wood to choose our timber.”

The break in the life of Wales caused by the War was well illustrated by Mr. Tim Hughes’s account of the Login Pandy, near Whitland, a story which has the elements of pathos, “The factory and fulling mill,” said Mr. Hughes, “were working until the War. Then the boys went away to the front, leaving the mill. Four years passed, and when the sons returned the roof had fallen in, and the mill has been idle ever since.”

When I asked him how many mills there were in Wales he gave me a wealth of information: “There is a ‘fuller’ working all the time in Llanwenog, and the shirt I am now wearing comes from that town; it was spun in Maes-y-felin factory. In Penbontygafael, Pembroke, the fuller and tucking mill, which I built 35 years ago, are still working. There was a tucking mill in Llanfair-clydogau, but it was substituted by a fulling mill.”

In Cwmpengraig, Henllan, he tells me, there were two tucking mills working together in charge of Mr. David Davies. There are mills in Llanddewibrefi, Llanrhystyd and Talybont, and in the two latter Mr. Tim Hughes once worked.

Felin Cwmpandy, Aberayron, was noted for its “coch scarlet” cloth, and King Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, wore sporting suits from Felin Cwmpandy and also from Brecon. In Cwmcafan, Talsarn, and in Glandwronest, Pembrokeshire, there were also fulling mills.

Mr. Tim Hughes then brought out a fine piece of thick grey cloth. “This was made in Brecon,” he explained as he felt it with the fingers of an expert. “But Brecon is no longer working. One by one the mills of the past have closed down, and the day of the millwright is over.”

Although he may tend no more mills Mr. Tim Hughes will remain the type of great craftsman which was the pride of Wales, the craftsman who laid stress also on spiritual and mental qualities, for Mr. Tim Hughes’s children have distinguished themselves in the academic life of Wales.

When I bade farewell to Mr. Tim Hughes, who waved to us from the cottage door, I felt I was leaving behind some of the best traditions of old Wales.

