

Shadrach and Mary Jones:

Beautiful in good work

Jill Morgan

Before my parents were baptized as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints¹ in 1962, someone loaned my father a copy of *A Century of 'Mormonism' in Great Britain* by Richard L. Evans. In the appendix my father was intrigued to find reference to a missionary who had died in Swansea in 1883. Our family lived in Swansea, but apparently no one then knew exactly where this missionary was buried. He was a Shadrach Jones, and over the ensuing years, with

his local knowledge and love of a mystery, my father was able to track down the grave to Calfaria Baptist chapel in Fforestfach. The headstone reads:

*In Memory of Elder Sadrach Jones,
Missionary from Willard City, Utah, U.S.A.,
died at Fforest Fach June 24 1883.
Beautiful in good work he died at his post.*

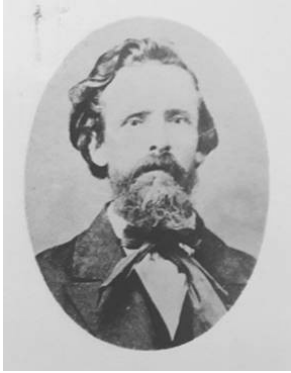
Shadrach Jones was born in Llanelly, Breconshire, in 1832, the son of David and Ann (nee Lawrence) Jones. The records of the Wesleyan Circuit for Glamorgan, Brecon and Monmouth show that he was christened in December of that year. And in the 1841 census the family are listed in Cwmcelyn, Aberstruyth, Monmouthshire: David and Ann, with sons John, Shadrach and Eleazar. Theirs was a mining family, although David had been born in rural Cardiganshire, as had Ann's parents. But like many others, they had migrated to the industrial areas around Monmouthshire, seeking higher wages and more consistent work. No doubt Shadrach followed his father down the mine from a fairly young age.

In the late 1840s, father David left to work in America, promising to send money for his family to join him as soon as possible. And indeed in 1849 he wrote to say he had saved enough money for their fare. But David never did send the money, and the family later learned that he had died in a mining accident in the U.S. in 1850. Ann is listed as a widow in the 1851 census. Meanwhile, Shadrach and his brother John had met the 'Mormon' missionaries, and had been baptised into the LDS church in Nantyglo on June 9 1849.

¹ Often referred to as 'Mormons' or 'Latter Day Saints' (LDS)

In July 1853, Shadrach married Mary Spencer Williams, likewise a convert to the LDS faith. Shadrach's brother John noted the event in his journal:²

[1853 July] 9 Saturday we, Mary and Adelaide and I, went to Blinia [Blaina] to the wedding of Shadrach my brother and Mary Williams. And there we had a comfortable welcome.



Shadrach's occupation is listed on his marriage certificate as *Collier*, and he is likewise listed as a *Coal Miner* when he and Mary emigrate in November 1856 aboard the *Columbia*, from Liverpool to New York. They must have spent a cold and stormy Christmas on board ship, but fortunately the voyage was not delayed, as Shadrach was apparently a poor sailor. It would be two and a half years before they continued their journey west, presumably stopping to work



and acquire the necessary funds to continue. Shadrach is listed with one of the LDS Church's freight trains which left Nebraska in June 1859, carrying supplies and equipment to Utah Territory. Mary's name does not appear in the company, but presumably she travelled with him.

Shadrach's brother John and his family emigrated in 1854, their brother Eleazar and mother Ann in 1869, so they had obviously also been converted to this new faith. Because they remained in the Midwest for some time before crossing the plains, John and his family arrived in Salt Lake City just two weeks after Shadrach and Mary. John settled in Provo to the south, where he also bought a house for their mother; Eleazar settled in St John, Arizona. But Shadrach and Mary headed north on arriving in the Salt Lake Valley - to Willard, some fifty miles north, where Mary's brother Meshach was living with his young family. Her brother Abednego would also emigrate, but not until 1881.

Interestingly none of the Jones brothers chose to settle in the coal mining areas of Utah Territory and take up their former occupation. And all three of them engaged in building and stone masonry for their livelihoods in America. Shadrach and Mary acquired land in Willard, and there they eventually built a house at what is now 101 West, Second South.



² Available on <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> under John's record in the *Immigrants* database

In his book *The Founders of Utah*, Levi Edgar Young states:

The most beautiful old homes possibly of early days were rock homes. It is said that the best and oldest of those are at Willard. There was a humble old Welshman in early days who used to build rock houses. His name was Shadrach Jones. One writer tells us that one of the walls is two feet thick and the stones were laid in lime mortar.

Several sources note that Shadrach Jones was a stone mason from Wales, and he did become very well known for the stone houses he built, in a style which can be found in and around Llanely, Breconshire. Those in Willard were built of the granite found in abundance in local canyons. Many of them are on the Historic Register – the equivalent of our Listed Buildings - and the majority are still occupied. But there is no evidence that he received training in working with stone, certainly not before leaving Wales. In the 1860 U.S. census where he and Mary are listed in Willard, his occupation is given as *Laborer*. But by the 1870 and 1880 U.S. censuses he is listed as a *Stone Mason*, and indeed by 1880 he had built all or part of at least seven stone houses in Willard. He had also assisted fellow Monmouthshire convert and coal miner Daniel Tovey to build in Cherry Creek, Idaho, and was working on the LDS temple in Logan, Utah. Frank Arnold, in his article *The Stone Age in Northern Utah*³, puts it this way:

...during his life in Willard he developed from a Welsh coal digger into a builder of “dry walls,”⁴ got a cow in payment for his first “dry wall,” and then became a famous architect and builder of rock houses and finally helped in building the Logan temple, thus reaching the highest pinnacle of fame for the stone masons of the seventies in northern Utah.



The early days in Willard could not have been easy, particularly in the bitter winters of northern Utah.

Shadrach and Mary would have had to work hard for their living – as they would have in Wales. But their efforts were rewarded to a far greater extent in terms of financial and temporal security, than if they had remained in Wales. From being a landless coal miner renting his home and prey to the fluctuations of local industry, Shadrach became the owner of a smallholding, self-sufficient, and with a fine reputation in a respected and important trade. His estate papers include an inventory of their possessions, and show that his land was valued at almost \$1800, fenced and planted with 66 fruit trees, and providing for a small number of cows

³ published in the *Young Woman's Journal*

⁴ walls with no mortar but so carefully constructed that they are strong and durable

and pigs. His house and outbuildings were valued at over \$700, the home well furnished and carpeted, adorned with pictures and photographs, with beds and space to spare. Twenty-five years of determination and hard work had reaped its rewards.

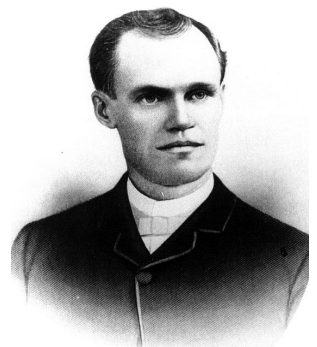
What they did not have was children to fill that space and occupy the extra beds. But they evidently did offer their home to others who needed it. In the 1880 census, their 16 year-old niece Caroline Williams is living with them. She was the daughter of Mary's brother Meshach, and may have moved in with her aunt and uncle to ease her parents' rather crowded household. They had fourteen children, ten of whom survived into adulthood. The relationship between Aunt, Uncle and niece must have been strong, because in his will Shadrach refers to Caroline as his *adopted daughter*.



A descendant of Mary's sister Margaret also claims that *Aunt Mary was pretty much everyone's aunt*, and practically raised Margaret's grandchildren, Eliza and Luther Jones. Their father had died, leaving their mother a young widow with four children in Tennessee.



Dagmar Williams, the daughter of Mary's brother Abednego also lived at Shadrach and Mary's home as a young woman. Shadrach and Mary had apparently assisted Abednego in financing his emigration from Wales.



And Evans Stephens, who would later become the first paid conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, lived in the Jones' home for two years as a young man, working as a hod-carrier for Shadrach. Reputedly when they rested from their work he and Shadrach would talk about Welsh musical traditions and composers such as Handel. The two sang together in the local choir. And being fond of dancing themselves, Mary and Shadrach would open their home for local dances, the upper storey of their house being a single, large room.

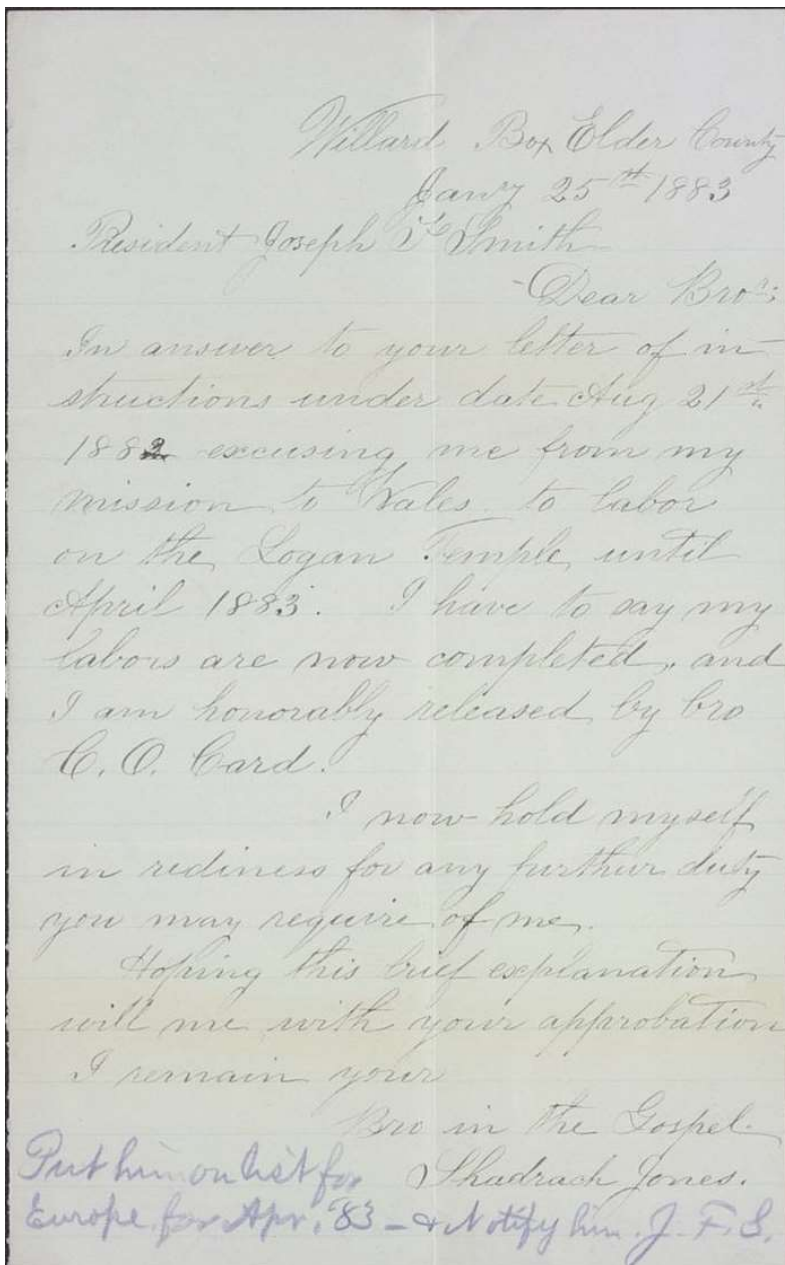
But Shadrach and Mary Jones were not simply people who were generous with their worldly goods. They were people of faith. Among their belongings were copies of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants – all considered holy scriptures in the LDS faith. Pictures of LDS church leaders adorned their walls. Shadrach's will included the bequeathing of his property to the church on Mary's death – although this did not happen as the church apparently could not accept such bequests. The *Millennial Star* - the LDS Church's weekly publication in the British Isles – would later refer to Shadrach as *a firm adherent to and earnest advocate of the principles of the gospel*. And in 1882 he was called to serve a mission for the church. Unfortunately he had to decline because of ill health. And the second time the call was extended, Charles Card, supervisor of the Logan temple construction, wrote to say that Shadrach was engaged in pointing the temple stonework, and he *wouldn't*

know what to do without him.

But by January 1883, Shadrach was able to confirm his availability and willingness, in this letter to church leader Joseph F. Smith.

Of course willingness to leave on his part implies willingness on Mary's part to manage their smallholding and keep the faith in his absence. Thus in April 1883 Shadrach returned to Wales. Samuel McKay, a fellow missionary who left Salt Lake City at the same time, got to know the sea-sick Shadrach as he helped to look after him on the voyage. He reported to the *Star*:

He would tell us of his labors on the temple as well as other works that he had done for the work of God and in speaking of his Mission to Great Britain he was proud to have the honor of being



called to go to his native country to preach the gospel, and in talking of leaving his home, his wife was very fearful that he would take sick and die.

Sadly Mary's worst fears were realized and although the *Star* reported that Shadrach *displayed considerable energy in seeking to spread a knowledge of the Gospel*, just two months later it announced his brief illness and death in Swansea. He reportedly took cold through sleeping in a damp bed, and died of pneumonia. There is also a theory that he may have blown out the gas lamps, not realizing that he should also turn off the gas. So although pneumonia was listed as the official cause of death, it would not have been helped by high levels of gas in the room.



John Jenkins was Shadrach's missionary companion, and cared for him during his illness. He recorded in his personal history:

My companion, Shadrack Jones, passed away and was buried there in a grave of water. I brought his things home to his wife.

The phrase *a grave of water* is an interesting one, and may refer to the *inclement weather* reported on the day of Shadrach's burial, despite it being June. But as Swansea is one of the wettest cities in the UK, the high humidity levels of the local climate could also partly account for Shadrach's declining health. The dry climate of Utah would have better suited a man with a somewhat weak chest. In a letter to LDS church President John Taylor, the widowed Mary acknowledges her husband's compromised state of health:

I wanted him to tell you of his ailment but he wouldn't do so because he was so determined and so ambitious to fulfil and do all in his power towards the building of the kingdom of God.

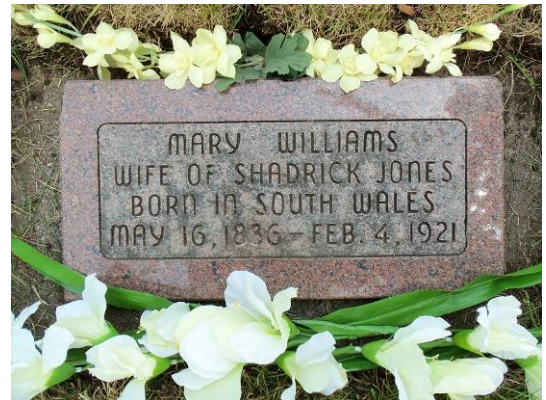
She added:

I am in deep deep sorrow but not as one without hope to meet in the Morn of the first resurrection.

Mary's purpose in writing to President Taylor was to petition for his help in having her husband's body returned to her. For whatever reason, this did not happen, and so he was buried in Calfaria Baptist chapel graveyard. Daniel Mander, husband to Mary's niece Rhoda, registered the death, and two Mander children who died in infancy were later buried with their 'uncle Shadrach.' His funeral was attended by a goodly crowd of local church members, as well as several other missionaries and church leaders.

Shadrach Jones is one of few known members of the LDS church in Wales whose gravestone uses the title *Elder* – denoting one who holds priesthood leadership authority.⁵ The stone itself has remained in good order, although the cemetery has been very overgrown, plagued by Japanese Knotweed. After the location of the grave had been identified, the area was cleared, and this has had to be repeated more than once in the intervening years.

And what of Mary? Although Shadrach was described as a *humble old Welshman*, in reality he was only fifty when he died. Mary would survive him by thirty-eight years, longer a widow than a wife. She continued to live in their Willard home, and some of those who shared that home did so after Shadrach's death, so she was not necessarily alone. The deeds for their property show that Mary sold off some of her land in the early 1900s. But she was well provided for and undoubtedly quite self-sufficient on her ample acreage. She died 4 February 1921 at her niece Caroline's home after just one day of illness, although she had been blind for about a year. She was almost eighty-seven, and was buried in Willard.



As is so often the case with wives and daughters, Mary's life is much less well documented than Shadrach's. But both in their own way were *beautiful in good work*.

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⁵ others in Wales being Elder Abel Evans, buried in Cefn Coed cemetery near Merthyr Tydfil, and Evan Morgan whose gravestone in Brechfa gives him the title of *Henuriad*, the Welsh for *Elder*.