

Jackie Chips' Wars: Gallipoli, Palestine and Harlech

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This paper investigated the experience and impact of the wars of the twentieth century from the perspective of a single individual with very different experiences of the First and Second World Wars.

John Morris Williams (1892-1952) was born in Liverpool but his father's roots were in Harlech the family moved back there when Jackie was a teenager. Before the war he was a merchant seaman, sailing across the Atlantic frequently from Liverpool. In the war he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and served in Gallipoli. His unpublished memoir provides a vivid account of the conditions he encountered there. He went on to serve in Egypt and Palestine but was badly wounded at the First Battle of Gaza in March 1917. He spent almost a year in hospital before returning to Harlech to a hero's welcome.

In Harlech he eventually became custodian of the castle and opened the town's first fish and chip shop in 1925. Older people in the town remember him as Jackie Chips. In the late 1920s, after a prolonged period of reflection and reading he came to reject his patriotic approach to the war and became a pacifist. He gives a detailed account of this process in his memoir. He was influenced deeply by his late friend Ianto Humphreys who had saved his life on the battlefield and who, on his deathbed, had urged Jackie to warn the youth of the town to reject war because its immorality to which they could testify because of the experiences which they had shared.

Jackie became an activist in the Peace Pledge Union and used discussions in his shop to spread the word amongst local young men, some of whom became conscientious objectors in WW2. His memoir of the war is a homage to Ianto and draws deeply on his personal experience of war. He judged war to be wanting when held against drew on his Christian (Scotch Baptist) anti-imperialist and socialist beliefs to condemn war; his short book is a kind of political pamphlet as well as a chronicle of his life.

He encountered a good deal of hostility in the town during the Second World War and at one point the windows of the shop were daubed with the words, 'Conchie Coward', a particularly inappropriate epithet for someone who had suffered so much in his previous war service. His health had never recovered from the previous war. He said to his daughter Olwen that because of this he would be 'lucky to make sixty.' He celebrated his 60th birthday in February 1952 but died two months later in April,

The paper drew on Jackie's memoir, on interviews with his surviving daughter, Olwen Vaughan Wright, and on the contemporary press. It was illustrated with photographs from Olwen's collection as well as with maps, photographs and paintings of the campaigns in which Jackie was involved.

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