

REES, BOWEN (1857 - 1929), missionary

Name: Bowen Rees
Date of birth: 1857
Date of death: 1929
Spouse: Susannah Wesley Rees (née Davies)
Parent: Margaret Rees (née Bowen)
Parent: Jacob Rees
Gender: Male
Occupation: missionary
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Ioan Bowen Rees

Born 16 March 1857, at Ivy Bush Inn, Llandybie, Carmarthenshire, youngest of the six children of Jacob Rees, stone mason, and his wife Margaret, daughter of the publican Richard Bowen. The family moved to Ystalyfera, Glamorganshire, and he began working in a smithy when he was nine years old. He set his heart on being a missionary after hearing an address by **Thomas Morgan Thomas**, 'Thomas of Africa', in 1879. After attending Bala College (1880-84), he was ordained at Pant-teg (Congl.) chapel, Ystalyfera, 22 May 1884 and was sent by the London Missionary Society to Lake Tanganyika. After a short intensive course at the medical school of the University of Edinburgh, he was transferred to Ndebele-land, and settled at Inyathi during March 1888. Between 1892 and 1918 he and his wife, Susanna Wesley (née Davies, the soprano 'Linos Morgannwg', born Merthyr Tydfil 5 July 1863, daughter of an iron worker; died Swansea 9 April 1933) were the only missionaries there - she too was of Ystalyfera and had been a preacher on a Methodist circuit since she was 22 years old. They married in Cape Town, 9 March 1890: they had seven children but three died young at Inyathi. Since King Lobengula (and his successors) protected their lives when Britain attacked their country in 1893, and spared them from the massacre at the beginning of the 1896 Rebellion, and continued to support them afterwards, their mission flourished over a district the size of Dyfed. Bowen Rees tried to protect the Ndebele from the rapacity of the British South Africa Co.: he provided information for the Quaker John Ellis, M.P., a member of the Committee for Investigation into the Jameson Raid, and gave evidence to the Aborigine Protection Society in a legal case which decided, in 1918, that the company had no right to the land of the Ndebele. He was very broad-minded, allowing the Ndebele to believe in the Gospel and its new teaching without abandoning altogether their old tradition: the fact that the Congregationalists are still in force in their midst is attributed to his and Susanna's attitude, besides their very long service. Bowen Rees was appointed a tutor at the preachers' training college at Tiger Kloof near Vryburg, South Africa, in 1918, but retired to Swansea in 1922, and died there 7 March 1929 and was buried at Oystermouth, Glamorganshire.

Author

Dr Ioan Bowen Rees, (1929 - 1999)

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L.M.S. correspondence at SOAS library, London

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