

**John Jones Jenkins, first Baron Glantawe – *Barry Evans* (January 2019)**



John Jones Jenkins was introduced by our speaker as ‘Swansea’s optimist’ and one of Swansea’s forgotten people, in that he was connected with a great many projects in the town during his time and believed that everything would turn out all right in the end, but that his name is now all but forgotten in general circles (as is evidenced by the very cursory treatment he receives in Wikipedia).

JJJ was born in Clydach in 1835. His father was landlord of a pub in Morriston and also worked in the Upper Forest tinplate works. Jenkins started work himself in Upper Forest at the age of 15 (rather late for the period) and he rapidly moved up to become outdoor manager in 1858 and eventually to chief partner in the company. At the same time, in 1859, at the age of 24, he established his own tinplate company at the Beaufort works. Upper Forest was later absorbed by the Worcester tinplate works, founded by his contemporary, another Morriston man, William Williams, in 1868.

Jenkins married twice. By his first wife, whom he married in 1854, he had two sons who sadly both predeceased him. Following her death he married again in 1864 and by his second wife he had two daughters who both survived.

Jenkins was elected to Swansea Council in 1865 and was Mayor on three occasions, 1869, 1879 and 1880. He was also a JP and on two occasions the Liberal MP for Carmarthen (1882–86 and 1895–1900). He resigned in 1886 because he disagreed with the party line adopted by Gladstone concerning home rule for Ireland.

Among his various industrial interests were the Swansea Harbour Trust (of which he was chairman for many years), the Swansea Improvements & Tramways Co and the Mumbles Railway. His company built Mumbles Pier and extended the original Swansea & Oystermouth Railway. He was also part owner of the Cwmfelin tinplate works and of two collieries, Cefngyfelach and Tirdonkin, which were opened to serve it with coal. He was also chairman and one of the promoters of the Rhondda & Swansea Bay Railway.

Jenkins was an active member of Libanus chapel in Morriston where he was a deacon. He was regarded as a benevolent employer and was keen to promote education and libraries. He was among the local group that attempted to bring the University College of South Wales to Swansea in 1880, although in the end it went to Cardiff. He laid out a great deal of money himself to benefit the town and encouraged others among his contemporaries to do the same.

His name can still be seen on the foundation stone of many buildings in and around Swansea in recognition of the financial support which he had provided towards their construction.

Jenkins was knighted in 1882 and raised to the peerage as the first (and only) Baron Glantawe in 1906. He would have liked the title of Baron Swansea but that had already been pre-empted by the Vivians. In his latter years he lived in The Grange, a home he built for himself at West Cross. Here he entertained many distinguished visitors including royalty and Madame Patti. He died in 1915 and the title died with him.