

The Story of Minnie James and the Temple's 'Mothers of Peace'

AUGUST 9, 2019 CRAIG OWEN

Drafted by WCIA Volunteer Peter Garwood, for WCIA's 'Women War & Peace' exhibition at the Senedd, Aug-Sept 2017; edited by Craig Owen and republished on WCIA Voices for future reference.

- View abridged version on [WCIA Women War & Peace exhibition website](#)
- View on [Merthyr History Society 'Melting Pot' Blog](#)



In November 1938 Minnie James from Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil, was thrust into the limelight when [Lord David Davies, founder of Wales' Temple of Peace](#), decided that he would like to have a Welsh mother who had lost sons in the Great War to open the Welsh National Temple of Peace and Health – on behalf of all mothers who had lost sons.

She was the lead figure among 24 war-bereaved mothers from across the UK and Empire, who were invited following a publicity campaign through British Legion branches that the press sensationalised as the 'search for our most tragic mothers' – but fostered a nationwide recognition that despite the 'men and military' focus traditionally associated with remembrance, that women disproportionately bore the brunt of the impacts of war, and as leaders in peace making.

Who was Minnie James?

Minnie James was born as Minnie Annie Elizabeth Watkins on 3rd October 1866 at Merthyr Tydfil.

Minnie Watkins married William James, a bachelor, age 23 on 1st January 1891, at the Parish Church in the Parish of Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan.

The 1911 census shows the family living in a seven roomed house, 8 Cross Francis Street, Dowlais. William is working as a Clerk, Minnie has no listed occupation. The parents have been married for 20 years and have had eight children, six of whom are still alive. David is 19 and single and working as a Draughtsman, John is age 16, single and working as a Apprentice Fitter, Thomas is still in school. There are two new children: Winifred James age 7 born Merthyr and William James, age 1 born Dowlais. The family are sufficiently well off to have a General Servant, one Elizabeth A. Murphy, age 22, a single woman, born Dowlais. Two children had died:

- Elizabeth age 2 months who died and was buried 28th September 1901 at Merthyr Tydfil Council Cemetery Section.
- Gwladys age 7, who died and was buried 6th March 1907 at Merthyr Tydfil Council Cemetery Section.

The impact of WW1 on the James family

In 1914 the Great War broke out and men were quick to enlist. Minnie's first son, **David James** joined the Welsh Guards, enlisting at Merthyr. He entered the theatre of war on 17th August 1915 in France.

He had served in the Guards Division as part of the 3rd Guards Brigade, which was made up of 1st Battalion, South Wales Borderers, 4th Battalion, Grenadier Guards, 2nd Battalion Scotch Guards and 1st Battalion Welsh Guards. He took part in the **Battle of Flers–Courselette** – part of the 5-month **Battle of the Somme** – but was killed in action on 25th September 1916, age 24.

WESTERN MAIL. FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1916.

WELSH HEROES OF THE WAR.

HEROES OF THE RANK & FILE

KILLED:
Private Harry H. Pitt, 10th Dragoon Guards, and before his death had been transferred to the London Regiment. He was the only son of Mr. H. Pitt, insurance agent, Dowlais.

Subaltern Stanley H. S. Egton, 10th Dragoon Guards, only son of Mr. and Mrs. Egton, 40, Llandarrog Street, Cardiff. Engaged to the daughter of Mr. J. J. Jones, 10, Dowlais.

Private David James, Welsh Guards, was the eldest son of Mr. William James, 8, Cross Francis Street, Dowlais. He was engaged to the daughter of Mr. J. J. Jones, 10, Dowlais. He was engaged to the daughter of Mr. J. J. Jones, 10, Dowlais.

Private Thomas Rice, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Rice, 11, Merthyr Road, Merthyr Tydfil. Engaged to the daughter of Mr. J. J. Jones, 10, Dowlais.



Pte. David James, Welsh Guards, killed. Son of Mr. and Mrs. William James, 8, Cross Francis Street, Dowlais. Engaged to the daughter of Mr. J. J. Jones, 10, Dowlais. Colliery drawing office.

WELSH GUARDS

Pte. John Hayes Flint	Pte. Augustus James Aberclare
Pte. Harry Heath Ystrad	Pte. Cyrus James Tonypre
Pte. William George Hecks Cardiff	L.Cpl. David James Penybont, Pem.
L.Cpl. William Eduard Henderson Merthyr	Pte. David James Dowlais
Pte. William Thos. Henuwood Ystalyfera	Pte. George James Haverfordwest
Pte. Thomas George Hill Cardiff	L.Cpl. James George James Prendergast
Pte. Henry Harold Hobday Pontyclun	Pte. Samuel James Pembryn

Western Mail article on the death of Private David James from Dowlais; and his entry in Wales' WW1 Book of Remembrance.

Like many men who died in the conflict of 1914-1918, his body was never identified and he is named on the **Thiepval Memorial**. He was awarded the **British Victory and War medal** along with the **1915 Star**. His death was reported in the Western Mail on 13th October 1916 (see aside). The war ended in November 1918, but her second son **Thomas James** had joined the 13th Welsh Regiment and had been wounded in France – dying from his wounds, age 21, on Christmas Day 1918. He was also awarded the **British Victory and War medal**.

Her third son **James**, (known as **Jack James**) had joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers and entered the theatre of war on 1st December 1915. He was wounded during the war, and awarded the British Victory and War medal along with the 1915 Star and the Silver War Badge for wounds. He was discharged on 28th January 1919.

However, he died on 23rd June 1920 at 8 Cross Francis Street, age 24 with his father present, eighteen months after his brother Thomas. His death certificate records the fact that he was “Ex-Private Royal Welch Fusiliers (Mining Engineers Pupil)”, and that the cause of death was “**General Tuberculosis**”. He was buried on 26th June 1920 at Merthyr Tydfil Council Cemetery, Pant.

All three sons who died in the Great War are listed in the **Welsh WW1 Book of Remembrance** held in the Crypt at Wales’ Temple of Peace to this day; and commemorated by the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**.

Minnie’s husband **William James** died at the age of 68; he had served as a Special Constable in the Great War and was buried on 20th November 1936 at **Merthyr Tydfil Council Cemetery**, Pant.

Minnie as the ‘Mother of Wales’

In November 1938 Minnie was thrust into the limelight when Lord David Davies had decided that he would like a Welsh mother who had lost sons in the Great War to be the one to open the Welsh National Temple of Peace and Health – on behalf of all mothers who had lost sons.

Minnie James was invited to see the Temple of Peace for a personal visit by Lord Davies on 10th November 1938. This was to give her an idea of what was expected, and to provide a news item to give extra publicity to the opening a few weeks away.

Interviewed by the press she explained that she had a “*drawer of secrets*”, at home in which she kept mementoes of her three sons who gave their lives for their country. This was their school certificates, fading letters from the front, little presents given to her by the boys when home on leave, and their medals. She stated that these items would be buried with her when she dies – that they were hers and belonged to no-one else.



She was taken down into the crypt where the Welsh book of remembrance would be placed. She told the press that she thought it was lovely. She thought her sons would be: *“so proud of me – I am happy to be chosen for their sake.”* She explained how her boys had served and died. She explained that on each Armistice Day she stays at home and during the two minutes silence goes to her sons bedroom alone but for the memory. She told the press that

“all who come into this building must feel strongly for peace. It will be lovely for the young people to come here. They will be so impressed. And the mothers and fathers, too, for the sake of their children must come here.”

She explained that her three sons had worked at the **Dowlais Works**, where a tablet recorded their sacrifice. As she left the Temple she turned for a moment to look at it again She said:

“I feel so happy for my sons. I shall feel them near me when I come back to open this beautiful building.”

A NEW MECCA



An Account of the Opening Ceremony
of the
WELSH NATIONAL TEMPLE
OF PEACE AND HEALTH

Cathays Park, Cardiff
Wednesday, 23rd November, 1938

A MOTHER OF WALES WILL UNLOCK THE TEMPLE DOOR

GOODWILL MESSAGES FROM MOTHERS OF THE WORLD

THE Temple of Peace and Health will be opened at 11.45 this morning by Mrs. Minnie James, of 8, Cross Francis-street, Dowlais. Mrs. James, who is 72, lost her three sons in the Great War, and she has been chosen by Lord Davies, as representing the mothers of Wales, to perform this ceremony.

Accompanying Mrs. James will be representative mothers from all

parts of the British Isles and from foreign countries. These are:—

NORTHERN IRELAND: Mrs. Nixon, of Portrush, Co. Antrim. Four of her five sons served in the War. Three were killed in action, the fourth died from injuries received on active service. Her husband served with Lord Roberts at Kandahar. Mrs. Nixon wears 20 medals.

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS: Mrs. Mary Lamont, of Pitlochry (the home town of Lady Davies). Eldest son killed at Hazebrock, August, 1918, at the age of 19.

CENTRAL SCOTLAND: Mrs. Ball, of Edinburgh. Three sons served, one killed, one discharged wounded, one son still serving in India.

NORTH-EAST ENGLAND: Mrs. R. Gibson, of Newcastle-on-Tyne. Two sons, both killed. Husband was with relief force sent for Gen. Gordon, re-enlisted in Great War.

NORTH-WEST ENGLAND: Mrs. R. Houlgrave, of Liverpool. Lost four sons in the War, one dying a prisoner in Turkey, another dying after discharge. A fifth son served and survived.

MIDLANDS: Mrs. G. Henson, of Colgrave, Notts. Lost one of two sons. Daughter served in the W.A.A.C.

EAST ANGLIA: Mrs. E. Lower, of Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Lost her only son in the first Territorial unit to go into action, 1914.

LONDON: Mrs. M. A. Sawyer, of Battersea. Daughter of a Crimean veteran. Had three sons serving. One killed, one subsequently died, and one incapacitated.

SOUTH OF ENGLAND: Mrs. S. Wooden, of Portsmouth. Only son killed, aged 21, on the Western Front.

WEST OF ENGLAND: Mrs. T. G. Floyd, of Devonport. Son, an artificer in the Royal Navy, killed at Jutland. The only mother who represents a Naval loss.

From Overseas

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA: Mrs. R. Struben, from London. Had no son serving in the War, but her son, the only South African to win the Sword of Honour on leaving Cranwell, was killed at the Empire Day air demonstration at Hawkinge two years ago.

CANADA AND BRITISH COLUMBIA: Mrs. Mortimer Appleby, of British Columbia and London. Her only son was killed on the Western Front.

NEWFOUNDLAND: Lady Reid, from London. Daughter-in-law of the late Sir Robert Reid, railway pioneer. Lost her son on the Western Front while he was serving in the Newfoundland Regiment.

DENMARK: Mrs. O. Michelsen. Wife of the President of the Danish Club in London.

FRANCE: Name not to hand.

GREECE: Mrs. Argenti, of the Greek Legation, London.

HUNGARY: Mrs. Ferenczi, A Hun-

garian living in London.

LATVIA: Madame G. living in London.

NORWAY: Mrs. And. diff. Matron of the S. men's Home, Cardiff.

POLAND: Madame P. of an attaché at the Po

SPAIN: Mrs. A. Or. London. Selected by

SWEDEN: Mrs. Ced. the rector of the S. Church, Rotherhithe.

U.S.A.: Mrs. Moller, of Beets. Four sons served. Mrs. Moller came from

Order of Pr

Opening Ceremony. 1
Introductory Address
Sir Charles H. Bird, C
of the Board of Trustees
Presentation of the K
lect, Mr. Percy Thom
P.P.R.I.B.A.

Mrs. M. James, of
morgan, representing
Wales, will unlock the
the building open.

Service of Dedication
Introit by the Ch
Cathedral.

Hymn: "O God, Dr
Past."

The Dean of Llandaf
from the Scripture
Dedication Prayers
his Grace the Archbishop
Rev. Dr. Robert Bond
Jerovitch.

Address by the Rev.
The New Commonwe
The Benediction will
by his Grace the Arch
The Choir.

Representatives of th
World will offer mess
Address by the R
Coat of Chelwood, P.
The Welsh National
The National Anthem



Mrs. Minnie James, aged 72, of Dowlais, who will open The Temple to-day. Her three sons laid down their lives in the Great War.

These Built and Equipped the Temple

Hammond Organ

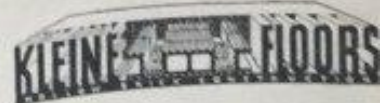
Thousands of Hammond organs have been installed in places of worship, opera houses, concert halls, private houses, etc. throughout the world and, because of its richness of tone, its

lation and hot water supply equipment work are J. G. Proger and Sons, Ltd., of 17, St. Andrew's-crescent, Cardiff.

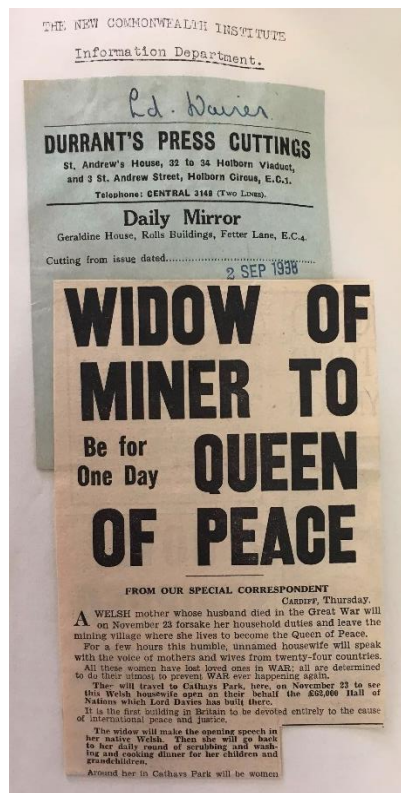
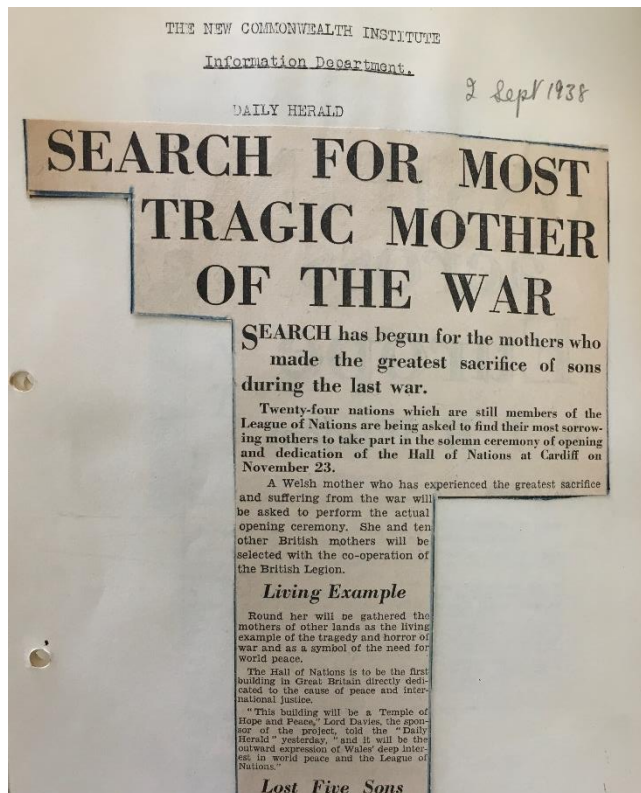
Terrazzo Work

The Marble Mosaic Company, Ltd., of Wade-street, St. Jude's, Bristol 2, were entrusted with the terrazzo work for the lavatories, partitions, wall-linings and staircases. The company are specialists of work of this kind.

incorporating



Hearts & Minds: 'Tragic Mothers' and 'Queens of Peace'



The idea to ask an ordinary mother to be Wales' 'Queen of Peace' originated in a rejection from a quite different kind of Queen. In 1937, whilst the Temple of Peace was under construction, Lord Davies had written to Buckingham Palace requesting the whether the young Princess Elizabeth, future monarch, might symbolically open the building. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, responded to the effect that the family had already done a **Royal tour of South Wales (in July 1937)** and to return so soon may be perceived as favouritism.

Lord Davies was unimpressed at this perceived snub, stating curtly in a memo... *"I am minded to ask the poorest wife of an Ocean (Colliery) workman to perform the task in their (majesties) place."*

His colleagues responded to say they thought the idea was quite outstanding... If this was to be a 'Temple of the People', then a woman – a mother - who was a representative of the Welsh people and the losses they had suffered through war, could be far more symbolic. A PR company, Andrew Reid of London, was retained to run a campaign through the press, sensationalised in the British media as the 'search for the nation's most tragic mothers'.

It captured the public imagination and was a runaway success with the press, generating months and months of publicity from Scotland to South Africa and New Zealand, for the opening of a public building in Cardiff that might otherwise have received little more than regional coverage. Local and regional branches of the British Legion were instrumental in bringing to the fore, stories of the **impact of war upon women and families** worldwide.

The Temple of Peace became more than just a building... true to Lord Davies' vision, it came to represent an idea, an outlook, a desire to bring people together to focus on building a better world –even as the clouds of World War 2 were gathering on the horizon.

Mothers of the World



Lord Davies invited a total of 24 mothers from all over the United Kingdom and allied countries to the opening, laying on a special train from London.

- Mrs R Struben from the **Union of South Africa**, spoke on behalf of the British Commonwealth mothers.
- Mrs Cederlund of Sweden represented mothers of the **Scandinavian countries**
- Mrs Moller spoke for the women of the **United States of America**
- Madame Dumontier from **France** spoke for mothers of the **European countries**.

Mothers of the United Kingdom

- Representing **Northern Ireland** was Mrs Nixon of Portrush, Co. Antrim. Four out of five sons served and died in the Great War. Three were killed in action, one died from wounds received on active service. Her husband had served with Lord Roberts at Kandahar. Mrs Nixon wore 20 medals at the opening ceremony.
- Representing the **Scottish Highlands** was Mrs Mary Lamont of Pitlochry (The home town of Lady Davies). Three sons served, one killed, one discharged, one wounded, one son still serving in India. I have identified one as 52268 Rifleman John Henry Lamont, who served with the 16th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. He died on 24th August 1918, age 19, and was buried at Bertenacre Military, Flertre. Cemetery. He was listed as the son of George and Mary Lunn Lamont, of Fonab stables, Pitlochry, Perthshire.
- Representing **North-East England** was Mrs R. Gibson, of Newcastle on Tyne. Two sons served, both killed. Husband was with relief force sent for General Gordon, re-enlisted in the Great War. I have identified one as M2/104574 Serjeant Charles Thomas Gibson, M.M. Royal Army Service Corps. He died on 10th August 1918. age 35 and was buried in Gosforth (St. Nicholas) churchyard, Northumberland. He was listed as the son of the late Robert and Jane Gibson, of Brandling Village, Newcastle-on-Tyne; husband of Isabell Gibson, of Council Chambers, High St., Gosforth.

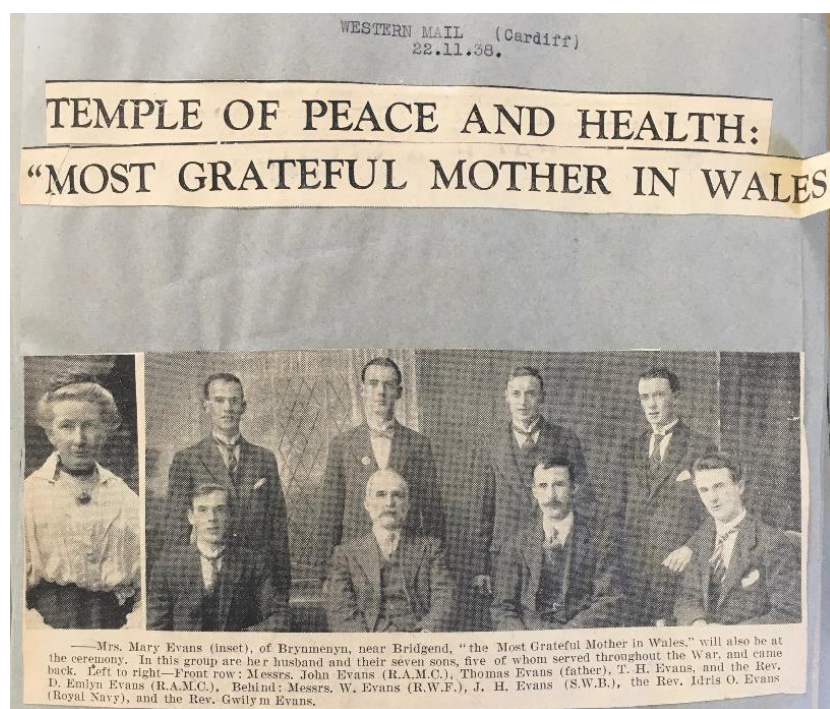
- Representing **North-West England** was Mrs Rachael Houlgrave of Liverpool. Lost four sons in the War, one dying a prisoner in turkey, another dying after discharge. A fifth son served and survived. I have identified
 - 5364 Lance Serjeant Nathaniel Houlgrave, “C” Coy. 10th Bn, Lancashire Fusiliers. He died 29th June 1916, age 25. He was buried at the Morlancourt British Cemetery No.1. He was listed as the son of Francis and Rachel Houlgrave, of 424, Mill St., Dingle, Liverpool.
 - 5484 Private Samuel Houlgrave, 10th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers. He died 7th July 1916, age 23. He was buried at the Thiepval memorial as he has no known grave. Listed as above.
 - 37051 Private W. Houlgrave, 3rd Battalion South Wales Borderers. He died 23rd April 1918, age 24. He was buried at the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery. He was listed as above
- Representing the **Midlands** was Mrs G. Henson, of Cotgrave, Notts. Lost one of two sons. Daughter served in the W.A.A.C.
- Representing **East Anglia** was
- Mrs E. Lewer of Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Lost her only son in the first Territorial Unit to go into action 1914.
- Representing **London**, Mrs Mary Sawyer, of Battersea, Daughter of a Crimean veteran. Had three sons serving, one killed, one subsequently died and one incapacitated. 653491 Rifleman Charles Louis Sawyer, “B” Coy, London Regiment (First Surrey Rifles), died 6th November 1917, age 25. He was buried at the Naval Trench Cemetery, Gavrelle. He was listed as the son of James and Mary Sawyer, of Battersea, London; husband of Annie Caroline Dennington (formerly Sawyer, nee Blake), of 62, Ford Mill Rd., Bellingham, Catford, London.

‘Grateful Mothers’ and ‘Thankful Villages’

The bereaved mothers were joined by Wales’ “most Grateful Mothers” – women whose entire families had returned from WW1 uninjured – and by representatives of **Wales’ ‘Thankful Villages’** – just three communities whose WW1 servicemen all returned unscathed:

- [Llanfihangel y Creuddyn](#) in Ceredigion
- [Colwinston/Tregolwyn](#) in Glamorgan
- [Herbrandston](#) in Pembrokeshire

View BBC Feature on [Thankful Villages of Wales, 2013](#).



Welsh Mother Opens Temple Of Peace



Mrs. James, who herself lost three sons during the war, opens the door with a gold key and declares the Temple open.

THE Temple of Peace and Health was opened at Cardiff yesterday by Mrs. Minnie James, of Doulais, on behalf of the mothers of Wales. Mothers representing all parts of the British Isles and foreign countries were present.



Lord Cecil of Chelwood, Alderman Sir Charles Bird, Chairman of the Trustees, and Mrs. James after the opening ceremony.



MRS. NIXON

Northern Ireland. Four of her five sons were killed. Her husband served with Lord Roberts at Kandahar.



MRS. LEWER

East Anglia. Lost her only son in the first Territorial Unit to go into action in 1914.



MRS. LAMONT

Scottish Highlands. Her eldest son was only 19 years of age when he was killed at Hazebruck in August, 1918.



MRS. BALL

Central Scotland. Three sons served. One was killed, one discharged wounded and the third is still serving in India.



MRS. HOULGRAVE

North West England. Lost four sons. One died as a prisoner in Turkey. A fifth son also served and is still alive.



MRS. HANSON

Midlands. Lost one of her two sons. Her daughter served in the W.A.A.C.

Press Coverage of the Mothers attending the Temple of Peace Opening, November 1938 – [view Press Coverage on Flickr](#).

Opening Day of the Temple of Peace, 23 Nov 1938

The Welsh National Temple of Peace and Health was the first building to be constructed in Britain to specifically intended to symbolise the devotion of Wales and its people to these two great humanitarian causes. On the day a special train had left Paddington at 8.20 a.m. to arrive at Cardiff at 11.20 a.m. Then coaches were used to bring the party of mothers and other representatives to the Welsh National Temple of Peace and Health. The weather that day was a typical November day – with a **gale that had torn branches off trees** in Cathays Park.

At 11.45 there was an introductory address on the Temple steps by **Alderman Sir Charles H. Bird** C.B.E, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. He said, “We are assembled here to day to take part in the solemn dedication of this building for the noble purposes for which it was erected.

“Much thought has been given to the question as to who should be asked to unlock the door on the occasion of to-day’s function, and it was felt that no better choice could be made than some representative Welsh mother, to represent not only the mothers of Wales and the Empire, who lost their sons in the Great War, but also to the mothers of other countries, the loss of whose sons has brought such poignant sorrow to them, whatever their nationality may be.

“So it is that we have with us today Mrs James of Dowlais who lost three of her sons, and we are all happy in the knowledge that she has been spared to join with us in this ceremony of dedication. It is, therefore , with great sense of the honourable position to which I have been appointed as chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Welsh National Temple of peace and Health, that I now call upon Mr Percy Thomas, the architect of this building to present Mrs James with the key, and to request her to perform the opening ceremony.”

At the ceremony Mrs James was wearing a hat and holding a large bouquet of scarlet carnations given by the Hon. Lady Davies, and was wearing all three sets of medals that had belonged to her sons. She was presented with a **Golden Key** by **Mr Percy Thomas**, the architect, to open the doors of the Temple.

He said: “Mrs James I have pleasure in presenting you with this key and asking you to accept it as a little token of this what I know must be a memorable occasion for you.” Mrs James said “Thank you”.



Mrs James spoke into the microphone to give her short, but historic speech:



Engraving the gold key which will open Cardiff's Temple of Peace to-morrow.

“In the name of the women of Wales it is my privilege to open the building. I dedicate it to the memorial to those gallant men of all nations who gave their lives in the war that was to end war. I pray that it may come to be regarded by the people of my country both of our generation and of those that are to follow as a constant reminder of the debt we owe to the millions who sacrificed their all; in a great cause and as a symbol of our determination to strive for justice and peace in the future.”

Because she was speaking in a low voice, and despite the microphone, the newspapers reported that not all the hundreds of people present were able to hear her.

She then took the key from the presentation box and symbolically put the golden key into the lock of the bronze doors, pushed the door open and was the first person of those gathered outside to enter the newly opened Temple of Peace.

The guests entered the Great Hall and sat down. Mrs James and the bereaved mothers then entered the Great Hall and the assembled crowd stood up as the bereaved mothers and other representatives entered. They walked down the central aisle to the platform. Hundreds of guests from all over the world stood up in tribute and respect.

Part of the congregation. Below: The mothers photographed after the ceremony. With Mrs. James are representative war bereaved mothers from 10 districts of the British Isles and women representing the British Commonwealth of Nations and foreign countries.



Views of the Temple. Centre portion of the building is the hall which was dedicated yesterday by the mothers as a symbol of the human desire throughout the world for peace and justice.

It will be used for peace pilgrimages, meetings and services. Beneath the Temple is a crypt where the Welsh National Book of Remembrance, hitherto kept in the National Museum of Wales, is to be placed.

Below: The mothers walking in procession through the hall during the dedication service.



The Temple Opening Ceremony



The mothers chosen to represent **countries from all over the world** stood up and spoke. First was Mrs E. Lewer of Aldeburgh speaking on behalf of the mothers of **Great Britain**, then spoke Mrs R Struben from the Union of South Africa, speaking for the **British Commonwealth** mothers. Mrs Cederlund of Sweden, for the **Scandinavian countries**, said:

“In the name of the women of Scandinavia I associate myself with the dedication of this building. May it be a constant reminder to the people of Wales of their duty to further the cause of progress, freedom, peace, and justice and of the debt they owe to those who fell in the defence of these ideals.”

Mrs Moller spoke for the **U.S.A.**, and Madame Dumontier from France spoke for the **European countries**.

Five of the mothers representing practically the whole world read **messages of goodwill from their regions**, speaking in their own languages.

At 12.00 noon **Viscount Cecil of Chelwood** began a **service of dedication** and gave an address to those present, followed by **extensive speeches from a number of high profile figures**, and messages from World Leaders (and Welsh figures) read out by Alderman Charles Bird – including US President Roosevelt, the US Ambassador to Europe Mr. Joseph Davies, the Rt Hon William Hughes of the Australian Cabinet, Mr Charles Evans Hughes, Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, and finally Mr David Lloyd George, former Prime Minister.

The guests then sang the Welsh National Anthem and concluded with the National Anthem. As they all left the organist played Handel's "Occasional Overtures".



At 1 p.m. they were welcomed at City Hall, where a civic reception was given by the Lord Mayor, Alderman W. G. Howell J.P., and the Lady Mayoress of Cardiff and Corporation of the City of Cardiff. At 1.15 p.m. they were given lunch, with a list of speeches and toasts almost as extensive as the mouthwatering menu:

Temple of Peace Opening Luncheon

*Grapefruit Cocktail
Crème Portugaise
Sole Bonne Femme
Roast turkey Chipolata
Croquette Potatoes
Brussel Sprouts Green Peas
Passion Fruit Ice Souffle
Fresh Fruit Salad and Cream
Cheese and Biscuits
Coffee.*

Among the many toasts and speeches, the Lord Mayor, Alderman W. G. Howell, made particular mention of the mothers:

"And particularly, do we welcome within our borders the women of courage from all parts of the Kingdom and from other countries who gave their sons in the service of their countries in the Great War and who gave themselves, in reality, made the supreme sacrifice. Wee glad to have the opportunity of meeting with them within the precincts of this City and shall honour and revere them and their sons as long as memory lasts. It may be some solace for them to know that the heart of this City beats in sympathy and in admiration for them."

The event closed later that afternoon and the special train left Cardiff for London at 4.20 p.m. At 5 p.m. Lord and Lady Davies gave a reception at the Connaught Rooms to 500 representatives of the branches of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations' Union. That evening the League of Nations' Union held a meeting at the Welsh National Temple of Peace, of the representatives of the branches of the Welsh Council of the League of Nations. It began at 7 p.m. with a two minute silence, followed by a hymn, the Chairman's' address and an address by Lord Davies.

It is presumed that Minnie James went home after the afternoon's proceedings.

She later told reporters that it had been a proud moment and said that:

"I felt every moment of it; but I had a duty to perform in the names of my sons and the mothers of the world. That helped me."

Minnie James' Later Life

Minnie does not appear to have had any further recorded involvement with the Temple of Peace, or other functions after the opening. She seems to have withdrawn from Welsh society in general, being quite a private person – but was obviously well known in the locality.

Her family were one of the first to have a television, and they would invite all the children in the street in to watch the programmes. Minnie James obviously was very fond of the children in the street and enjoyed watching the reactions of the children to the events on the television. She always held a Halloween party for the children and invited everyone to it. She was at the **peace party in May 1945** held in Cross Francis street to celebrate the end of the second world war. She was pictured resplendent in a superb hat sitting with all the children at the street party.

Minnie James died at the age of 87 and was buried on 3rd April 1954 at **Merthyr Tydfil Council Cemetery, Pant**. Her death was reported in the Merthyr Express on April 10th 1954 (Page 16.) This mentions that she had opened the Temple of Peace in 1938 and that she had been an **active spiritualist** for over 71 years. It reveals that at the time of her death, her youngest son William was alive and that her daughter, Winifred, was also living. The paper stated:

“It is difficult for those who knew her to realise life without Mrs James. She had known great sorrow in World War 1, her three sons, David, Jack and Tom made the supreme sacrifice. This experience merely enriched her life and was responsible for her many ministrations of good. Her home was a sanctuary to many and the obvious tributes paid reveal the esteem in which she was held by her close as well as by far distant friends.”

She will long be remembered for her gentleness, her immense triumph over personal sorrow and serenity of spirit. It was a privilege to have known her. Her home and wide circle of friends gaze sadly at the vacant chair but gratefully recall the lines:- “The memory of the just is blessed”. She will long be remembered as the heroine of the spirit who was so aptly chosen as official opener of the “The Temple of Peace”.



Her daughter and son, Winifred, known as “Winnie” and William , known as “Billy” never married and moved out of 8 Cross Francis Street in 1968. Her surviving children do not appear to have had any children themselves; and with their eventual deaths, the James family passed into history.

But as Minnie’s epitaph predicted – her memory lives on forever in Wales’ Temple of Peace.