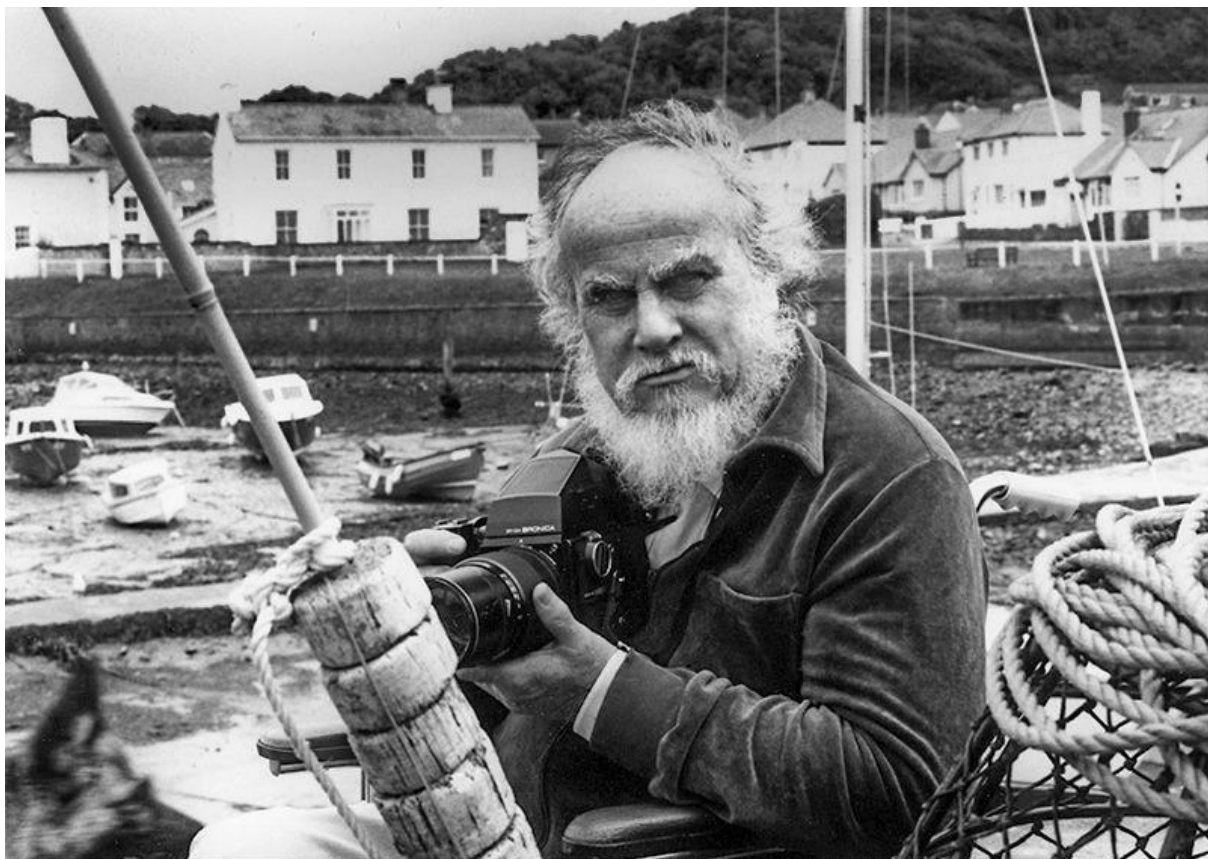


# Ron Davies: Photographer (1921 – 2013)

**Ron Davies OBE, FDPS, ARPS, Hon Fellow SDUC.**

Ron Davies was a much respected and sought after wedding and portrait photographer as well as working as a press photographer and TV cameraman. He later became well known as a teacher and for his landscapes. All this despite being paralysed and confined to a wheelchair for the greater part of his life.

Ron was born in Aberaeron in 1921 and at the age of eight took the job of errand boy with Mr E. J. Thomas a local pharmacist. Around this time photography became available to ordinary folk and Thomas, a keen amateur himself, started a developing and printing service and taught Ron the process. A kindly man, Mr Thomas gave Ron a box brownie for his tenth birthday. His love of photography was born.



Ron Davies Photographer

© Phill Davies

After his schooling Ron became an apprentice instrument maker with a company in Stroud. When war broke out he was considered to be in a reserved occupation and not allowed to join up. Authority was never allowed to get in his way and he soon persuaded a recruitment officer that his skills were needed and joined the RAF as an instrument technician. After his initial training he was posted to Bombay where he

fitted and maintained the instrumentation in the Spitfires which had been shipped over in kit form.

Ron, of course by now, never went anywhere without his camera and he soon had a little business running taking pictures of the boys to send home to their families. Money was sent home to help his family and spare cash was spent travelling and taking photographs.

Ron's photographic skills were recognised and he was seconded to Air Information South East Asia Command becoming an official war photographer covering the Far East War Trials. During his time in Bombay Ron met Marie Kass, a Red Cross volunteer, who became his wife. After the war ended they travelled back to Britain together prior to Ron's demob. Ron brought Marie home to Aberaeron and joined the family painting and decorating business whilst trying to establish himself as a photographer, he also played the drums in a local dance band, The Brown Ale Boys.



**Ron and Marie Davies on their wedding day in Bombay 1946 © Phill Davies**

The photography business was gaining momentum and they were about to open a studio when disaster struck in September 1950. Ron was travelling from a dance in Aberystwyth to take photographs in Lampeter when his motorcycle combination struck

the hedge on a rather nasty bend at the bottom of Rhiwbwys Llanrhystud, causing the sidecar lid to fly open. It struck his back paralysing him instantly. Ron was given a fortnight to live in the local hospital but Marie got a second opinion and he was transferred initially to the Middlesex Hospital in London and then some months later to the Promenade Hospital in Southport. Here he refused the occupational therapy of basket weaving etc and asked for a darkroom. He became the hospital's medical photographer during his stay of some three years. Ron had also become a member of the hospital netball team which regularly played at the Stoke Mandeville Inter Hospital Games and indeed his team represented GB in the first ever international games at Stoke which eventually became the Paralympics of today.

Marie had kept the rent up on the studio and Ron returned intent on getting to work once more. He of course could no longer go upstairs and the ground floor had to be adapted to provide the necessary work areas, with the space to manoeuvre his wheelchair. Work once again picked up and a Morris Minor car was bought and specially adapted with hand controls. Ron was soon travelling the length and breadth of the county taking pictures of weddings and various events.

A request by a photographer from the Welsh weekly paper *Y Cymro* to use the darkroom to free up a jammed film kick started Ron as a press photographer. His journalist colleague was chatting and looking at Ron's work when he saw a photograph that he could use to illustrate a forthcoming article. More were submitted and used and eventually papers and magazines both local and national were giving him assignments. When ITV came to Wales Ron bought a second hand 16mm cine camera and submitted some work which was used. The assignments soon followed. An important news item had to be driven to Cardiff one day, the first time the news editor and Ron had met in person. "Gosh what's happened" he was asked and then "how long will you be like this". "Forever" was the reply. "Well" said the boss, "If I'd known from the beginning I'd never have employed you. It's too late now, carry on".



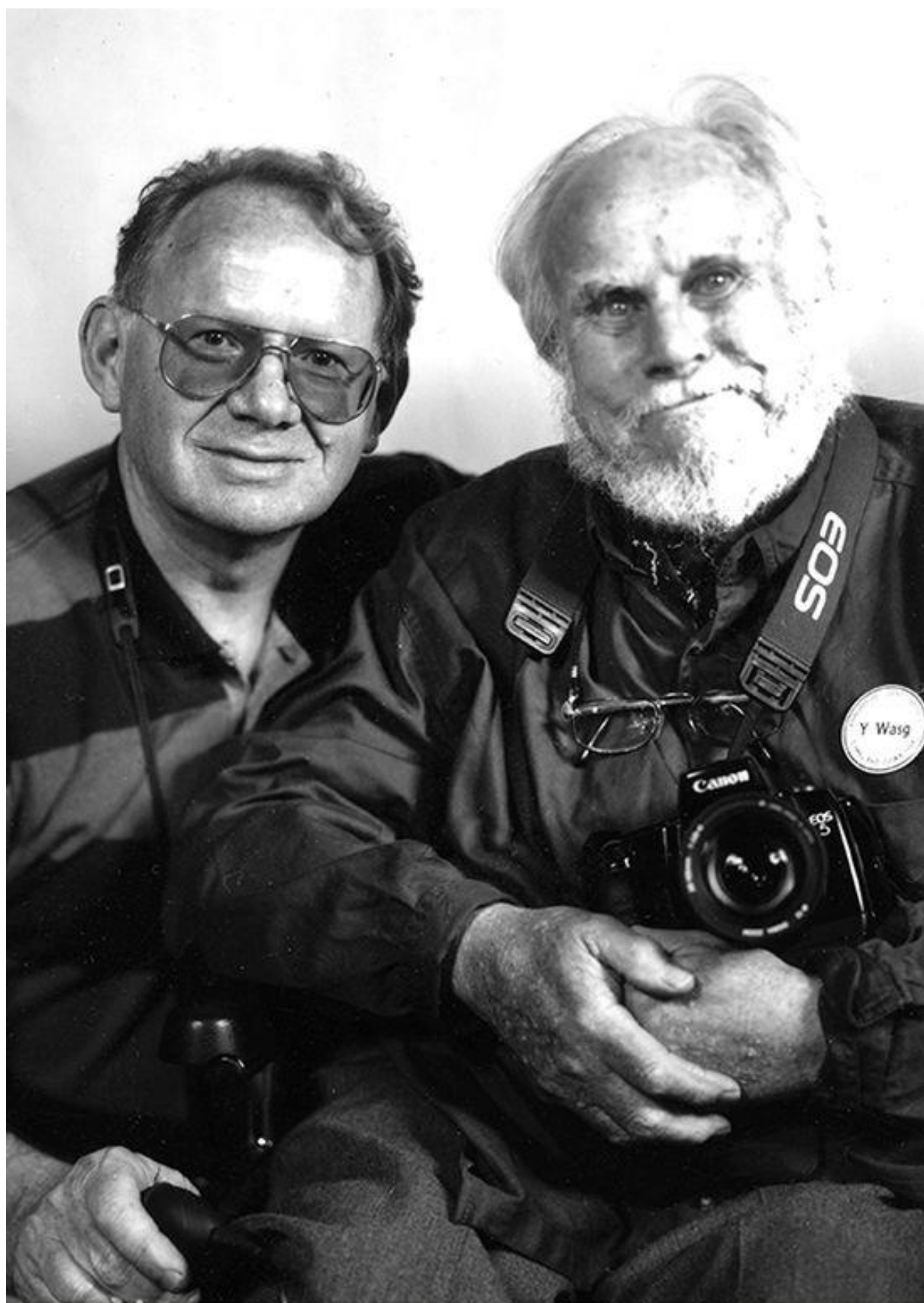
Ron Gets a birds eye view of the harbour works in the 1960s

© Phill Davies

Ron was intrepid, doing anything to get the required pictures. Fork lifts or cranes were commandeered for high shots and the buckets on tractors to take him where the car or chair couldn't go.

In 1969 Ron's son Phill joined him in the business after gaining a diploma in photography from the Ealing Technical College, School of Art and Photography, also passing the associate exam of the Institute of Incorporated Photographers. The Ron and Phill Davies partnership was established.

An old friend of Ron's, Geraint Evans a ceramics lecturer, approached him one day and asked if he could help out with some teaching at the local college as unfortunately their photography lecturer had suddenly passed away. He had no previous teaching experience but soon found that he had another talent and a new career was born. As he was now in academia he thought he should have some formal qualifications and not just rely on his undoubted experience. He gained the Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society and the Fellowship of the Disabled Photographers Society.



Ron with Geraint Evans at the Carmarthen College of Art

Ron's contribution to Welsh life was recognised by the National Eisteddfod and he was made a Member of the Green Robed Order of the Gorsedd of Bards at the Abergwaun Eisteddfod in 1986 and further elevated to the White Robed Order at the Tŷ Ddewi Eisteddfod in 2002.





Ron Is congratulated by the Archdruid WJ Griffiths after his induction into the Gorsedd at Fishguard.

© Phill Davies



**Ron With the Archbishop of Canterbury on their way to the Gorsedd Ceremony at the Tŷ Ddewi Eisteddfod. © Phill Davies**

For his work as a photographer, teacher and member of the Arts Council he was awarded the OBE and an Honourary Fellowship of the St David's University College in Lampeter.



Ron At buckingham Palace with his OBE



Jonno Evans New Quay

In the meantime Jonno Evans, from New Quay, a former student had turned the tables and taught Ron digital photography. Film was of course his medium but age was taking its toll and he could no longer see well enough to print in the darkroom. The new medium gave him another lease of life and enabled him to carry on with his passion to end.

His was a life full of laughter often at his own expense. Without it and a lot of help, life would have been a lot more difficult.

*Article & photographs provided by Phill Davies, Ron's son .... and photographer of note in his own right.*