

DAVIES, DAVID ('Dai'r Cantwr'; 1812? - 1874), Rebecca rioter

Name: David Davies
Pseudonym: Dai'r Cantwr
Date of birth: 1812?
Date of death: 1874
Parent: Mary Davies
Parent: John Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: Rebecca rioter
Area of activity: Activism; Offenders; Anti Establishment; Law; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Williams

Born in the hamlet of Treguff (Tregof) in the parish of Llancarfan, Glamorganshire, in 1812 or 1813 (his age was given as 31 when he reached Tasmania in July 1844). His father is said to have been John Davies, a tenant of the duke of Beaufort. It would seem that he was dead at the time of Dai's transportation, but Dai's mother, Mary, his brothers, William and Morgan, and his sisters Ellen Jane Margaret Elizabeth (it is not clear how many persons these names indicate) were alive. He was moderately tall, with brown hair and reddish whiskers. In the police records his trade is given as 'farm labourer; can plough.' He is said to have worked in a quarry at Newcastle, Bridgend, where he acted as local preacher among the Wesleyans, and as a farm labourer at Cadoxton, Barry, where he attended the Philadelphia Baptist church. In the threnody (**B. B. Thomas**, *Baledi Morgannwg*, 56-8) which he wrote in Carmarthen prison, after his sentence to transportation, he speaks of living, also, at Troedrhwi'r-clawdd and Tredegar. He may have been the David Davies of Bridgend who won the harp at the Cymreigyddion eisteddfod at Abergavenny in 1838. He explained his sobriquet to the Tasmanian authorities by the statement: 'I taught them to sing at church.'

In 1843 he is said to have been a 'contractor' at Pontyates or Pontyberem, that is, he acted as a middleman between a number of workmen and the pit owners, and '**Shoni Sgubor-fawr**' (John Jones, c.1810-1867) may have been in his employment. In the autumn of 1843 he was associated with '**Shoni**' in various acts of incendiarism and gatebreaking, and, like '**Shoni**,' was paid for his services. He was arrested on 24 September 1843 at the Plough and Harrow inn at Pum Heol near Llanelly, and was taken to Carmarthen gaol. He was sentenced to transportation for twenty years at the Carmarthen assizes (22 December 1843) for demolishing the turnpike gate at Spudder's Bridge (near Kidwelly), and on 5 February 1844 was removed to the Millbank penitentiary. He embarked on the *London* on 12 March, and reached Van Diemen's Land on 10 July. He served in a probation gang on Maria Island till 14 June 1845. After that he was employed by various persons, but received three brief sentences of hard labour for gross insolence, for drunkenness, and for using indecent language and resisting a constable, and was fined three times for drunkenness and once for a breach of police regulations. He eventually received a ticket of leave on 20 April 1854, and was conditionally pardoned on 31 October of the same year.

A person representing himself to be 'Dai'r Cantwr' was soliciting alms in Wales in 1848, and this may be the origin of the popular belief that the convict returned to Wales. 'Dai'r Cantwr's' career after his pardon has not been ascertained. He was then known as 'Taff Davis.' He died 10 August 1874. For several nights previously he had received permission to sleep in an outhouse of the Ross Hotel. He retired to sleep in an intoxicated state on the night of 10 August, and it is presumed that he set the grass, on which he slept, on fire by lighting his pipe, for he was found next morning suffocated and partly burnt.

The threnody which he wrote in prison is not without literary merit. Two other ballads attributed to him were sold as broadsheets, and yet another appeared in the *Merthyr Guardian* in 1853.

Author

Emeritus Professor David Williams, (1900 - 1978)

Sources

Personal research

Further Reading

Janine Marshall Wood, *No Ordinary Convict: a Welshman called Rebecca* (Tasmania 2021)

Wikipedia Article: [David Davies](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q5232848](#)

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