

DAVIES, HENRY (1696? - 1766), Independent minister

Name: Henry Davies
Date of birth: 1696?
Date of death: 1766
Child: Samuel Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: Independent minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born it is said in Carmarthenshire, of a fairly well-to-do family; there are indications in his letters that he had relatives in Brecknock, possibly near Erwood; his handwriting and his correct English imply a good early education, and according to the Wilson MSS. in Dr. Williams's library he was at Carmarthen under **William Evans**. He was ordained (c. 1718) minister of Blaen Gwrach in the Vale of Neath, and kept a school there; **Lewis Rees** was brought up under his pastorate. But he was a tireless itinerant, of the new 'evangelical' type of Dissenter, and preached throughout the Glamorgan hill-country (and indeed within a still wider ambit), founding a church at Llanharan (c. 1734) and penetrating into the Rhondda valleys. About 1738 he left Blaen Gwrach, founded a church at Cymer (Porth), and built a chapel there (lease dated 1743), which is still in use - the first Nonconformist place of worship in the Rhondda region. Davies lived at Eirw (Hafod); he met his death by drowning (**O. Morgan**, *History of Pontypridd and the Rhondda Valleys*, 286), being unseated by his frightened horse while fording the Rhondda, in July 1766; the exact date is illegible on his tombstone [but according to the diary of William Thomas (*Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd*, 1949, 46) it was 28 July - Thomas adds the rather wild statement that he was then 84 years old], at the age of 70; his widow died in 1772, aged 77. A booklet of extracts from a pocket-book of his was published (Llangollen, 1840) by **J. Rufus Williams**, under the title *Hen Lyfr H.D.*, with a preface, containing useful chronological data. Henry Davies's itinerating coincided with the earliest phase of Welsh Methodism, and (possibly owing to local contacts) he allied himself heartily with it. He was one of the Dissenters who invited **Howel Harris** to Glamorgan; he visited Trevecka; indeed, his co-operation with Methodism lasted longer than did that of any other of the early Dissenting friends of the movement if we except **Edmund Jones**. He kept on attending the Welsh Methodist associations till 1744, and corresponded with **Harris**, to our certain knowledge, till 1750 at least. Twenty letters of his to **Harris** survive (list, with extracts, in *Y Cofiadur*, 1935); they are warmly friendly and show acquaintance with all the leading Calvinistic Methodists in Wales and in London, and with English Evangelical Dissenters.

Henry Davies's descendants (**O. Morgan**, op. cit., 286-8) deserve mention, for their history mirrors the economic and social development of the Rhondda region. He is said to have dabbled in medicine (some proof may be found in *Hen Lyfr H.D.*), and was certainly the progenitor of a whole dynasty of medical men in the district. His only son, **SAMUEL DAVIES** (1734? - 1820), is described on his tombstone as 'surgeon'; he married a farmer's daughter. Their eldest son, **HENRY DAVIES**, had a wide country practice; his brother-in-law is said to have 'owned most of the land on which Porth now stands.' Henry and his wife had four children. The eldest, **EVAN DAVIES** (1801 - 1850), was a 'character.' He was medical officer of the colliery opened by **Walter Coffin** at Dinas Rhondda, and like **Coffin** was a Unitarian; there are amusing stories of his warm but good-humoured theological disputations with the colliers. Styling himself 'leuan ap Dewi,' he wrote much on theology to *Seren Gomer*, published a book *Rhifedi ac Undod Duw* (Cardiff, 1846), and started in 1827 a serial *Family Doctor*, which fell flat. He died 22 October 1850 (*Enw. F.*). His wife, **CATHERINE NAUNTON**, was a daughter of David Naunton (1777 - 1849), Baptist minister at Ystradyfodwg. She had a sister, Ann, who became the mother of D. W. Davies, a medical man at Llantrisant, and thus the grandmother of **NAUNTON WINGFIELD DAVIES** (1852 - 1925 - see *Who's Who in Wales*, 1921, and *Western Mail*, 14 February 1925), also a medical man (F.R.C.S.), but better known as a playwright and a promoter of the drama in South Wales - consult index to **O. Llew Owain**, *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru*, 1948. Evan Davies and Catherine Naunton had three sons, two of whom in their turn became medical men; the elder, **HENRY NAUNTON DAVIES** (1827 - 1899), was a prominent figure in the public life of the Rhondda valleys, and his name is associated with the rescue work at the great colliery disaster at Tynewydd (Cymer) in 1877.

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Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

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