

DAVIES, JOHN (1784? - 1864), known as ' Brychan,' poet, publisher, and promoter of the friendly society movement

Name: John Davies
Pseudonym: Brychan
Date of birth: 1784?
Date of death: 1864
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet, publisher, and promoter of the friendly society movement
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Printing and Publishing
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born (according to J.T. J., i, 155) on a farm called Clyn, in Llanwrthwl parish, north Brecknock - the statement sometimes made that he was born at Blaenau Gwent ('Blaina,' Monmouth) is probably due to a misunderstanding. The very little that we know of his early life comes from J.T. J. : he had not an hour's schooling; when he grew up, he left his remote home for Swansea; there, he signed on as a seaman and was on sea for three years, during which he learned to read and write. In the meantime his father had died, and the widow and her other sons moved to Tredegar. He joined them there, worked as a miner for some years, and became a foreman. He was afterwards for many years a bookseller and publisher. Indeed, his career is an interesting illustration of the way in which the Welsh speaking rural culture could become acclimatized among the raw industrial communities of 'the Hills.' Davies came under the influence (c. 1814) of *Iolo Morganwg*, and was initiated in 1818 into *Iolo's* 'Gorsedd': he bore a leading part in the eisteddfodic movement in Monmouthshire, and co-operated with *Taliesin ap Iolo*, *Carnhuanawc*, *Cynddelw*, *D. Rhys Stephen*, and other literati of the district at that time. But he himself preferred the 'free' to the 'strict' metres. He wrote much to *Seren Gomer*, and was a diligent purveyor of anthologies (including his own poetry along with that of others); these were all printed for him at Merthyr Tydfil - the best account of them will be found in *Ashton*, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymreig*, 609-11. They were: *Llais Awen Gwent a Morganwg*, 1824; *Y Gog*, 1825 (later editions, at Carmarthen, 1832, 1846, 1849); *Y Llinos*, 1827; *Y Fwyaichen*, 1835. He also published *Telyn y Cantorion*, 1828, by John Thomas, *Newyddion Da o Wlad Bell* (letters from America by two Monmouthshire emigrants - the date, 1830, is significant), and a translation, 1852, of the '*Book of Mormon*.' Along with this praiseworthy activity in providing reading matter for the Welsh-speaking 'Hillmen,' Davies was a zealous promoter of sobriety and 'saving,' exerting himself in particular on behalf of the Order of Odd fellows; he strove to give this movement a Welsh complexion, inditing a Welsh song for it, 1840, translating its *Rules* into Welsh (Cardiff, 1842), and starting a periodical, *Yr Odydd Cymraeg*, 1831, which, however, did not succeed. He seems to have been a genial and popular man. He died 20 June 1864 (J.T. J.), 'on the verge of his eightieth birthday' (*Enw. F.*, 77).

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

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