

DAVIES, JOHN (Dr. John Davies of Mallwyd, c. 1567 - 1644), one of the greatest of Welsh scholars

Name: John Davies
Date of birth: c. 1567
Date of death: 1644
Spouse: Sian Davies (née Prys)
Parent: Elsbeth ferch Lewis ap Dafydd Llwyd
Parent: Dafydd ap Sion ap Rhys
Gender: Male
Occupation: one of the greatest of Welsh scholars
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Rhianon Francis Roberts

Born in the parish of Llanferres, Denbighshire, the son of David ap John ap Rees, who is said to have been a weaver, and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Lewis ap David Lloyd; he had three sisters, Jane, Catherine, and Gwen.

Very little is known with certainty about him before he went to Mallwyd. He is said to have spent four years at Jesus College, Oxford, and to have graduated on 16 March 1593/4. In one of his letters (**NLW MS 14529E**) he himself mentions the time when he dwelt in the neighbourhood of Llandaff; this was possibly between 1595 and 1601, when **William Morgan** (1541? - 1604) was bishop there. There was a close connection between him and **bishop Morgan**; in the preface to his grammar, 1621, he refers to himself as an unworthy assistant to the translators of the *Bible* into Welsh, viz. **William Morgan** and **Richard Parry** (1560 - 1623), and in the preface to the dictionary, 1632, he pays tribute to the former as the Gamaliel at whose feet he was brought up.

It is generally stated that it was towards the end of 1604, after the death of **bishop Morgan**, that John Davies became rector of Mallwyd, Meirionnydd, but if the dates given in **NLW MS 1626C** are correct, the appointment was made before the bishop died. He graduated B.D. from Lincoln College, Oxford, on 30 June 1608, and D.D. on 21 March 1615-1616. About the year 1609 he married Jane Price of Llwyn Ynn in the parish of Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, Denbighshire, a grand-daughter on her mother's side to **baron Lewis Owen** of Dolgelly and a sister to the wife of bishop Richard Parry, **William Morgan**'s successor at S. Asaph. Early in 1614 he became rector also of the parish of Llanym-Mawddwy near Mallwyd, and was given the sinecure of Darowen, Montgomeryshire, besides, but he surrendered the latter in 1621 on receiving the sinecure of Llanfor, Meirionnydd. In 1617 he was appointed prebendary of Llanefydd in the cathedral church of St Asaph. It was at Mallwyd that he lived, and he seldom went from there in the forty years between 1604 and his death - at Harlech, according to **William Maurice** (Cefn-y-braich, Llansilin) - on 15 May 1644. He was buried at Mallwyd on 19 May. His will has been preserved.

His published work belongs to the years 1620-1 and 1632-3. The 1620 edition of the Welsh *Bible* is known as **Richard Parry's Bible**, but it is thought today that much of the credit for the uniformity and correctness of the language used should be given to John Davies; he may have had something to do with the 1621 edition of the *Welsh Book of Common Prayer* as well. In 1621 too John Davies's own Welsh grammar, *Antiquae Linguae Britannicae ... Rudimenta*, appeared. This was followed in 1632 by the *Dictionary Duplex*, a dictionary (in two parts), the Welsh - Latin section being original work begun in 1593, while the Latin - Welsh section is an abridgement of a larger work by **Thomas Wiliems** of Trefriw, which is still in manuscript (**Peniarth MS 228**); John Davies himself spent almost a year in London when the dictionary was in the press. He was also the translator of *Llyfr y Resolusion*, 1632, and the editor of *Y Llyfr Plygain a'r Catechisme*, 1633. The *Articulau*, 1664, and *Flores Poetarum Britannicorum*, 1710, were not published until after his death.

There also remain some of the manuscripts copied by him and for him. The grammar and the dictionary which he published are the outcome of a detailed study of these sources and of the work of the Welsh poets in particular; in them he laid a firm foundation for recent studies of the Welsh language.

Author

Rhianon Francis Roberts, (1923 - 1990)

Sources

Personal research

T. Parry, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900* (1944), 158 et passim

Calendar of Wynn (of Gwydir) Papers, 1515-1690, in the National Library of Wales and elsewhere, 1926

Y Cymmrodor, xvii, 164

Llenyddiaeth Cymru o 1450 hyd 1600 (Lerpwl 1922), ii

Further Reading

Ceri Davies, *Dr John Davies of Mallwyd: Welsh Renaissance scholar* (Cardiff 2004)

Wikipedia Article: [John Davies](#)

Works

William Morgan, John Davies and Richard Parry (eds.), *Y Bibl Cyssegr-Ian: sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd* (Llundain 1630)

John Davies, *Antiquā; linguā; Britannicā; et linguā; Latinā; dictionarium duplex* (1632)

John Davies, *Antiquā; linguā; Britannicā; et linguā; Latinā; dictionarium duplex* (1632)

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