

DAVIES, DAVIS, or DAVYES, THOMAS (1512? - 1573), bishop of St Asaph

Name: Thomas Davies
Date of birth: 1512?
Date of death: 1573
Spouse: Margaret Davies
Child: Catherine Holland (née Davies)
Parent: Dafydd ap Robert
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop of St Asaph
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Arthur Herbert Dodd

The son of Dafydd ap Robert of Caerhun, a descendant, through **Sir Gruffydd Llwyd** (lord of Dinorwig), of **Ednyfed Fychan**. The date of his birth is variously given as 1512 (Strype, *Ann.*, i, i, 371), 1515 (*Griffith, Pedigrees*), and 1537 (*Browne Willis, A Survey of the Cathedral-Church of St. Asaph*, 1801 ed., i, 104). The first is the probable date, the last impossible. He was educated at Oxford and soon after graduation began accumulating sinecure benefices in the dioceses of Bangor and S. Asaph. He probably lived at Oxford till 1537, then at Cambridge, where he took his LL.D. from S. John's in 1548. It is unlikely that he was the Thomas Davies who became archdeacon of St Asaph in 1539-40 but was deprived during the drive against married clergy in 1554, since the future bishop kept all his other preferments, including that of chancellor of Bangor cathedral, to which he was appointed in 1546; but he can with greater confidence be identified with the archdeacon of St Asaph of 1558-61. On the death of **bishop William Glyn** of Bangor in 1558, Davies was made custodian of the 'spiritualia' of the diocese by cardinal Pole, archbishop of Canterbury. *Glyn's* successor-designate, **Morys Clynnog**, fled overseas on Elizabeth's accession, leaving Davies still 'custos' of the diocese, in which capacity he filled several vacant livings (all in 1558), till the consecration of **bishop Rowland Meyrick** (see *Meyrick family*) in December 1559. In 1561 the translation of **bishop Richard Davies** (1501? - 1581) to S. Davids left the see of St Asaph vacant, and Thomas Davies was elected, and was hailed by **William Llyn** as 'Cymro o waed Cywir' (a genuine Welshman).

Even before his election was confirmed, Davies had alarmed his predecessor by his 'hasty proceedings': some sixteen livings changed hands before the end of 1562, and wholesale changes on a smaller scale took place in 1564, 1566, and 1570. Most of the presentees were Welsh and some were men of learning, the most outstanding being **David Powel**, instituted to Ruabon in 1576; but a high proportion were sinecurists or pluralists. In November 1561 Davies issued at a diocesan council orders which included provision for reading the catechism, the epistle, and the gospel in Welsh, for educating the children of the diocese and ensuring the literacy of such incumbents as were not full graduates, and for purging the churches of 'fayned reliques and other superstycyons.' By 1570 he was satisfied that he had reduced the diocese to 'better order,' but asked Cecil (without effect) for an ecclesiastical commission to complete the work. Some of his own sinecures he had now resigned, but on representations from archbishop Parker he was allowed to keep those of Llanbedr, Caerhun, and his 'portion' of Llandinam, in consideration of the poverty of the see, a poverty he is alleged to have accentuated by improvident leases of Church lands, though the charge of nepotism does not seem to be borne out by diocesan records. He was active in the national settlement of the Church, being one of the original signatories of the Thirty-nine Articles drawn up by the convocation of 1563 (at which he was present) and of the letter from the bishops to Elizabeth in 1566 urging her to speed through the Lords the passage of the Bill embodying them. He also signed the disciplinary canons of 1571. In 1565 he was made a commissioner for the suppression of piracy on the Flintshire coast, and he was assiduous in his attendance at Parliament, especially his last (that of 1572), where he never missed a sitting; he was a member, with his fellow bishops of S. Davids, Hereford, and Chester, of the Lords' committee on the Bill for keeping records in the twelve shires of Wales (1567).

By temper and training he belongs to the class of Church lawyers and administrators rather than of theologians or spiritual leaders. Although one of the five bishops to whom the Act of 1563 entrusted the translation of the *Bible* into Welsh, he is not known to have taken any part in the work. His interest in education does, however, appear in his government of his own diocese, his legacy of books from **bishop Arthur Bulkeley** of Bangor, and his own bequests to Queens' College, Cambridge, and to Friars School, Bangor. He also left money for the furnishing of the bishop's palace. His will (dated 19 April 1570, with codicil 16 October 1573) divides the estate between his wife Margaret, his daughter Catherine (wife of **William Holland** of Abergele - see *Holland families*, 10), her children (Piers, William, and Edward), and his brothers Hugh, Griffith, and Owen. He died immediately after completing his will, on 16 October 1573, and was buried at Abergele.

Author

Emeritus Professor Arthur Herbert Dodd, (1891 - 1975)

Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

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The Journals of the House of Lords, i

N.L.W. St Asaph probate register

J. Jones ('Myrddin Fardd'), *Cynfeirdd Llyn, 1500-1800* (Pwllheli 1905), 1

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