

EVANS, DANIEL SIMON (1921-1998), Welsh scholar

Name: Daniel Simon Evans
Date of birth: 1921
Date of death: 1998
Spouse: Frances Evans (née Evans)
Child: Dafydd Huw Evans
Parent: Sarah Jane Evans (née Lewis)
Parent: David [John?] Evans
Gender: Male
Occupation: Welsh scholar
Area of activity: Scholarship and Languages
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

D. Simon Evans was born in Broderi, Llanfynydd, Carmarthenshire, 29 May 1921, the eldest child of David Evans and his wife Sarah Jane (née Lewis); he had a sister and a younger brother, Prof. D. Ellis Evans. David Evans's family had for generations played a prominent part in the life of the community in Llanfynydd and in particular in the Methodist chapel, Banc y Spite, and Simon Evans always had a warm affection for this area. His family circumstances as the eldest of 12 children had prevented David Evans from gaining a college or university education and he spent his life as secretary of the local branch of the Farmers' Union and a minor tax official. He died in 1948. He was a truly able and cultured man, competing in essay competitions at eisteddfodau, regularly gaining one of the top places in the denominational scriptural examinations, a lay preacher and poet, 'thirsting after knowledge' according to his admiring son.

Simon Evans was educated at Llanfynydd primary school, where the headmaster, E. J. Thomas, was a valuable and influential pillar of support to him, as he later acknowledged. He went to Llandeilo grammar school and in 1939 he entered University College Swansea, the holder of the Mary Towyn Jones Scholarship, to study classics and Welsh. As a child he had played at 'holding services' on his own, and as he grew older, the life of the chapel and Sunday school developed into mature conviction and he was accepted as a ministerial candidate in the Presbyterian Church of Wales. He graduated in Latin and Greek in 1942 and with first-class honours in Welsh in 1943 having become an able student of historical linguistics and grammar under the tuition of his professor, **Henry Lewis**. His first field of research was a syntactical study of some Early Modern Welsh prose texts, the language of the transition from Middle Welsh to Modern Welsh and a previously largely unexplored period. He was awarded his MA in 1948 and published a series of articles in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*. He was a student at the United Theological College Aberystwyth in 1945 and graduated BD in 1947. He was particularly attracted to Greek and Hebrew and was more interested in church history and biblical textual studies than in philosophy and theology as such. During 1947-48 he was at Jesus College Oxford, one of the first students of **Professor Idris Foster** who had been appointed to the Sir John Rhys Chair of Celtic that year, and he continued his studies of Welsh syntax. He gained his B.Litt (Oxford) in 1952. He did not, however, continue his ministerial course (though he was a lay preacher for many years) and he returned to the Welsh department at Swansea as an assistant lecturer in 1948 following the appointment of **Melville Richards** as principal lecturer in Celtic Studies at Liverpool University.

Simon Evans remained in Swansea until 1956 when he was appointed to succeed **J. Lloyd-Jones** as Professor of Welsh at University College Dublin, but in 1962 he was back in Wales as lecturer in Welsh at St David's University College, Lampeter. **Melville Richards** was appointed to the chair of Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1965 and Simon Evans became head of the department of Celtic Studies at Liverpool University the following year. A final move came in 1974 when he was appointed Professor of Welsh at St David's University College, Lampeter, a new post and status following restructuring when the college became a constituent college of the University of Wales. He had gained wide experience in more than one academic institution and he had been head of a number of departments that were very different in character from one another. He worked assiduously to develop the Welsh department at Lampeter into a strong academic unit and he threw himself into the administrative life of the college giving support to more than one principal. He was deputy principal from 1982 to 1988 and one of the student hostels bears his name. He served as secretary of the language and literature section of the University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies, he was awarded the Vernam Hull Memorial Prize twice, and delivered the G. J. Williams Memorial Lecture in 1980 on 'Llafar a Llên yn yr hen gyfnod' (published in 1982). In Lampeter, too, he became associated with the Edwin Mellen Press (Queenstown, Ontario, and Lewiston, New York) ensuring that the press published a Welsh Academic Studies series. Simon Evans retired in 1988 but continued as Director of the research centre that he had helped to establish.

His main research was in the grammar and syntax of Middle Welsh prose and he published a number of important articles in the major Celtic journals not only on Welsh but also on Cornish. His *Gramadeg Cymraeg Canol* (1951 and subsequently) and the *Grammar of Middle Welsh* (1970 and subsequently) were a pioneering and detailed description of Middle Welsh in terms of modern grammar. They have retained their value and have not been superseded. He edited the *Life of St David*, in Welsh in 1959 and a new revised and extended edition in English, from a different manuscript, in 1986. In the wake of his interest in the vitae of the saints he brought together and edited with a new introduction a collection of G. H. Dobles's pamphlets, *Lives of the Welsh Saints* (1971). His interest lay not only in saints' lives but in medieval religious literature more generally, and his *Medieval Religious Literature* appeared in the Writers of Wales series in 1986. Medieval Welsh tales and legends, 'Culhwch and Olwen' especially, was another area in which he made valuable contributions. With **Rachel Bromwich** and drawing on the unfinished work of **Idris Foster**, he prepared an edition of the tale in 1988; the English-language edition (1992) reflects the thinking of the two editors to a greater degree. The edition of another text that reveals the depth and detail of Simon Evans's research is *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* (1977). The discussion ranges over the content and literary associations of the text and also its historical context so that the edition is as much a contribution to historical studies as to literary history. An English translation of the text with an introduction appeared in 1990 under the title, *A medieval prince of Wales*. All Simon Evans's work is characterised by an uncompromising attention to detail and he published many illuminating articles and reviews not only on Middle Welsh texts but on other aspects of Welsh literature such as the 'Gododdin' and the work of the earliest poets, the language and influence of the Bible, hymn writers, **Morgan Rhys** in particular (his collection *Emynau Morgan Rhys* was published by Gwasg Gregynog in 2001 after his death), and on the fortunes of the Irish and Cornish languages. There is a list of his publications up to 1988 in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* XVI (1990). He was awarded a D.Litt by the University of Wales in 1979.

He was a genial character, good company and full of (sometimes biting) humour, but he had a sharp mind, an ambiguously witty tongue and keen critical faculties; he could present his case effectively, and often successfully, in committees, as Principal Brian Morris described in a warm and revealing essay. His last book was *O Fanc y Spite: atgofion am Gapel y Methodistiaid yn Llanfynydd, a'r Fro* (1996), 337 pages. The thoroughness of the research is indicative of the author's respect for his subject, the history of the village and chapel, but even more so, it is testimony to the importance for his own values of the nonconformist and Calvinistic culture within which he was nurtured, as he was always ready to acknowledge.

D. Simon Evans died in Carmarthen on 4 March 1998. His wife, Frances (Evans) from Llanedi, Carmarthenshire, had predeceased him. They had one son, Dafydd, himself a recognised Welsh scholar.

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

Tributes by J. E. Caerwyn Williams and Brian Morris, *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, XVI (1990), 9-11, 13-21, with a photograph

Obituaries in *Y Traethdydd*, October 1998, 203-4, *Barn*, April 1998, 40, *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, 6 (1998), 60-1, *The Independent* 18 April 1998, *Y Goleuad* 10 April 1998

D. Simon Evans, *O Fanc y Spite: atgofion am Gapel y Methodistiaid yn Llanfynydd, a'r Fro* (1996), contains some family history and autobiographical material

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VIAF: 242911980

Wikidata: Q13127794

Published date: 2015-07-08

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APA Citation



Roberts, B. F., (2015). EVANS, DANIEL SIMON (1921-1998), Welsh scholar. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 10 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s10-EVAN-SIM-1921>

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