

JENKINS, DAVID (1912-2002), librarian and scholar

Name: David Jenkins
Date of birth: 1912
Date of death: 2002
Gender: Male
Occupation: librarian and scholar
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

David Jenkins was born in Blaenclydach, Rhondda Valley, 29 May 1912, one of the five children of Evan Jenkins and his wife Mary (née James). Like many in the coalmining valleys of Glamorganshire who had emigrated there from rural Wales but retained their connections with their home areas, Evan Jenkins had come to Blaenclydach from Aberaeron, Ceredigion, after spending a few years in London, and he found work as a collier.

David Jenkins received his early education in the Rhondda but he suffered from a weak chest (he had a bad attack of pneumonia in 1921) and to safeguard his health he regularly spent time with his grandmother, Mary James, her daughter Elizabeth and her younger son Henry at Brogynin Fawr, Penrhyn-coch, Ceredigion. He went to Penrhyn-coch in the early summer of 1924 to recuperate after a long illness but his uncle Henry died unexpectedly, aged 42, in the autumn of that year and it was decided that David would make his home with his grandmother. The wrench was difficult for the young David and he found solace in the company of some of the older generation in the village listening to their reminiscences and the history and traditions of the parish. He made new roots in the village that had been the native heath of his family and he developed a deep interest in the history of the locality. Throughout his life, the Rhondda and Penrhyn-coch each claimed David Jenkins's loyalty in equal measure. He presented a history of Blaenclydach and his personal memories in 'Cyfaredd Cof a Chyfnod' in *Cwm Rhondda* (ed. Hywel Teifi Edwards, 1995), 227-53, and the story of Penrhyn-coch in 1992 and 1993.

He attended Ardwyn grammar school, Aberystwyth and then, in 1932, he became a student at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth where he graduated in Welsh Literature in 1935. As the Sir John Williams Research Student 1937-39 he began his research on the life and work of the poet **Huw Morys** (Eos Ceiriog, 1624-1709). He published a valuable article in *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (vol. 8, 1925-37, 140-5) on the personal and place-names in the poems of **Dafydd ap Gwilym**. The subject had been suggested to him by his teacher, **T. Gwynn Jones**, as one who knew the topography and place-names of the area and the result was a study that places the poet and his associations firmly in the commote of Genau'r Glyn, an important step in reclaiming the historical poet. David Jenkins had a temporary post in the National Library of Wales in 1937 and in 1939 he was appointed a temporary assistant in the department of manuscripts. He was conscripted into the army in November 1940 and served throughout the years of World War II, gaining the rank of major. He was in Paris when the city was liberated and he was among the first units to reach the concentration camps in Poland and northern Germany in 1945. He returned in 1946 to a permanent position in the department of printed books at the National Library where he had a successful career. He was appointed Keeper (Head) of the department in 1957 and Librarian in 1969. In 1948 he married Menna Rhys, the daughter of Reverend Owen Evans Williams, minister of Horeb, Penrhyn-coch from 1919 to 1954. There was a son and a daughter from the marriage.

David Jenkins was secretary of the Welsh Bibliographical Society and he edited its *Journal* from 1965 to 1979. He edited the *National Library of Wales Journal* from 1969 to 1979 and *Ceredigion* from 1973 to 1984. He was closely associated with the Welsh Books Council and served as deputy chairman and then Chairman, 1974-80. He was also active in public life, JP (1959-82), General Commissioner of Income Tax 1960-87, chairman Mid Wales Hospital Management Board 1969-70, and a member of the Pantyfedwen Trust 1969-95, the Welsh Libraries Advisory Council 1979-82, the British Library Advisory Council 1975-82, the BBC Archives Committee 1976-79, and the Court and Council of the University College of Wales Aberystwyth. He was appointed CBE in 1977 and retired from the National Library at the end of December 1979.

David Jenkins was in the tradition of the scholar-librarian and he never lost his urge to research in bibliographical studies, Welsh literary history and Ceredigion local history. He gained his MA degree in 1948 for his work on **Huw Morys** and he was awarded an honorary D.Litt. by the University of Wales in 1979. He had extensive knowledge about the Gregynog Press and its fine printing but his history of the press was never published. He published a number of studies of Ceredigion printing and 18th century books. He did not publish his MA dissertation but he wrote articles on **Huw Morys**'s manuscripts and on Welsh carol literature. David Jenkins's major literary work was his standard biography of **T. Gwynn Jones** (1973, 1994), a labour of love and pietas and a book that was the result of many years' original research. It won a Welsh Arts Council Prize and the University of Wales Ellis Jones Griffith Prize. The illustrated *Bro a Bywyd T. Gwynn Jones* appeared in 1984. The **T. Gwynn Jones** biography was followed in 1978 by *Ethyglau ac Ysgrifau Llenyddol* Kate Roberts, an edited collection of the author's literary essays with an important introduction.

On the eve of his retirement David Jenkins was invited by the Council of the National Library to write the official history of the institution. He accepted the challenge but decided to write the history from the first discussions and political struggles to 1952, the close of the period of office of the second Librarian, **Sir William Llywelyn Davies**. He began work immediately, drawing on the extensive administrative archives of the Library, and his completed book, *A Refuge in Peace and War*, was hailed by one reviewer as 'not only an institutional history of outstanding range and depth, but also a highly significant contribution to a far broader understanding of modern Welsh social and political history.' The author died shortly before the book was published in 2002.

David Jenkins's interest in local history followed two paths. His scholarly work on the history of the Gogerddan estate and the **Pryse family** appeared in the *National Library of Wales Journal* (vol. 8, 1953-54), but he also wrote several articles with a popular appeal and two books on the history of Penrhyn-coch village and Horeb, the Baptist chapel where he was reared and where he was a faithful member all his life. *Bro Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1992) and *O blas Gogerddan i Horeb, taith dwy ganrif* are entertaining reading but they are based on the same thorough and scholarly research that characterises his work. They have a wider significance than the purely local, for in the former he took the opportunity to expand his 1935-37 article on **Dafydd ap Gwilym**'s locality and to give an account of the poet's memorial plaque in Brogynin. David Jenkins's research papers are in the National Library of Wales.

David Jenkins died in Aberystwyth 6 March 2002 aged 89, and he was buried in Horeb cemetery, Penrhyn-coch 9 March.

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

Who was who?, 2001-2005, vol. XI

The Independent, 8 March 2002

David Jenkins (librarian), Wikipedia

Ceredigion Authors, Ceredigion Library Website

Autobiographical material in *Bro Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1992) and 'Cyfaredd Cof a Chyfnod'

National Library of Wales Archives

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [David Jenkins](#)

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