

DAVIES, GRACE GWYNEDDON (1878 - 1944), singer and folk-song collector

Name: Grace Gwyneddon Davies
Date of birth: 1878
Date of death: 1944
Spouse: Robert Gwyneddon Davies
Parent: Lewis Roberts
Parent: Anne Roberts (née Williams)
Gender: Female
Occupation: singer and folk-song collector
Area of activity: Music; History and Culture
Author: Rhidian Griffiths

Grace Elizabeth Roberts was born on 26 November 1878 at 'Larkfield' in Anfield, Liverpool, the eldest daughter of Lewis Roberts, a timber merchant, and his wife Anne (Annie, née Williams). Her father was born in Liverpool but his roots were in Anglesey, and her mother hailed from Llannerch-y-medd. Grace showed early aptitude for music. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, gaining the LRAM diploma in piano playing, and received five years' vocal training from the celebrated baritone Charles Santley. After a year in Paris for further vocal training, she studied in Italy. She embarked on a professional singing career, appearing as a soloist at the Celtic concert of the National Eisteddfod at Caernarfon in 1906.

At that Eisteddfod she met Robert Gwyneddon Davies (1870-1928), the son of **John Davies**, 'Gwyneddon'. Robert was a solicitor who was a member of the County Council and the Caernarfon Town Council, and served as chairman of the county education committee, a member of the court of governors of the University College of North Wales, justice of the peace and High Sheriff. He also served as mayor of Caernarfon in 1908. In 1897 he had published *The Visions of the Sleeping Bard*, his translation of **Ellis Wynne's** *Gweledigaethu y Bardd Cwsc*; the translation was re-published in a popular edition in 1909. He was also a regular contributor to the newspapers *Y Genedl Gymreig* and the *North Wales Observer*. The couple were married in Charing Cross chapel, London (where Grace had been a member during her time in London) on 14 April 1909. Because of the groom's eminence as a former mayor, Caernarfon was festooned with banners for the occasion.

Grace and Robert made their home at Graianfryn, a house located between Glanrhyd and Llanwnda on the road from Caernarfon to Pwllheli. Though Grace had abandoned her career as a professional singer when she married, Graianfryn became a cultural centre for the area, hosting regular musical evenings. Its garden was also a notable attraction. **Lloyd George** and other prominent politicians were regular visitors to Graianfryn.

Grace and her husband took a great interest in Welsh folk-song, and she had been one of the soloists at the inaugural meeting of the Welsh Folk-Song Society at the Caernarfon National Eisteddfod in 1906. Both she and Robert were elected to the Council of the Society on its formation in March 1909, and were members of the first executive committee. Grace became one of the leading collectors, alongside **Mary Davies** and **Ruth Herbert Lewis**. Robert would lecture on the songs and Grace would perform them, and in 1923 they went to the U.S.A. and Canada to introduce Welsh societies to the folk-song tradition. Grace collected songs on Anglesey, where her family's roots lay, and published three valuable collections: *Alawon Gwerin Môn* (Folk-songs of Anglesey, 1914), *Ail Gasgliad o Alawon Gwerin Môn* (Second Collection of Folk-songs of Anglesey, 1923), and *Chwec'h o Alawon Gwerin Cymreig* (Six Welsh Folk-songs, 1933). For the two volumes of Anglesey folk-songs she relied heavily on the singing of Owen Parry of Dwyran, whose voice she recorded on the phonograph. Although she composed her own accompaniments to the songs in those two volumes, she had the assistance of the composer **Mansel Thomas**, then a student at the Royal Academy of Music, in the preparation of the third.

A frequent adjudicator of folk-song competitions at the National Eisteddfod, she was always keen to protect the rights of folk-song collectors over their songs and would protest when composers arranged them without the appropriate consent. She served as a justice of the peace in Caernarfonshire and played a leading part in the activities of the Women's Institute.

Grace Gwyneddon Davies died on 17 October 1944, aged 65, and was buried in Brynrodyn cemetery. There were no children of the marriage.

Author

Rhidian Griffiths

Sources

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