

EVANS, OWEN ELLIS (1920 - 2018), Methodist minister and biblical scholar

Name: Owen Ellis Evans

Date of birth: 1920

Date of death: 2018

Gender: Male

Occupation: Methodist minister and biblical scholar

Area of activity: Religion; Scholarship and Languages

Author: John Tudno Williams

Owen E. Evans was born on 23 December 1920 in Barmouth, the son of Owen Jones Evans (1887-1926), pharmacist, and his wife Elizabeth Mary (née Jones, 1887-1961), owner of a small hotel. He had one older brother, John William. He spent the first five years of his life in Wimbledon, London, but the family was forced to move back to Barmouth in the summer of 1926 because of his father's illness. He was a lovable character, generous and especially sociable, and possessing a stout physique.

He was educated at Barmouth County School. Since his widowed mother was unable to afford to support him throughout a university course, his headmaster encouraged him to sit the entrance examination for the civil service. In 1937, following his success in it, he chose to work in London as an assistant officer in an income tax office. As a result of following courses in night classes for two years he succeeded in the examination for the executive grade of the civil service and moved to Somerset House. Because of the bombing the office was relocated to Llandudno in the summer of 1940, but returned to London by the spring of 1941. As a conscientious objector he was ordered to undertake relief work in a bombed area, and from April 1941 until the end of the war in 1945 he was employed by Willesden council to carry out this work. He was an active member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales for many years and served as vice chairman from 1989 to 1991 and as chairman from 1992 to 1994.

It was during the war also that he started to preach on the Welsh Methodist circuit and in 1945 he was accepted as a candidate for the ministry and sent to Meifod as a non-collegiate probational minister for a year. Thereafter from 1946 to 1949 he studied at Wesley College in Headingley, Leeds, gaining a first class degree. Later he gained an external BD degree of London University and pursued research in the New Testament under the direction of the notable biblical scholar, Matthew Black. In this period he also acted as tutorial assistant to his professor at Headingley College, another eminent scholar, Vincent Taylor.

In 1951 he was ordained and served for two years as a minister in Criccieth. Then in 1953 he was invited by the Methodist Conference to be the New Testament Tutor in Hartley Victoria College, Manchester, where he served for sixteen years. During this period he was invited by the internationally renowned scholar, Professor T. W. Manson, to assume the responsibility of lecturing in his stead when he was taken gravely ill. He recorded his experiences of that time and also of the period when he assisted Vincent Taylor in his lecture 'On Serving Two Masters'.

He married Margaret Williams, a teacher from Ffynnongroyw, in 1953. She died in 2017. They had four children, two sons and two daughters.

In 1969 he was invited to join the Biblical Studies Department of the University College of North Wales, Bangor to lecture on the New Testament through the medium of Welsh. There he was greatly respected for his care of his students until his retirement in 1988.

He will be surely remembered pre-eminently for his enormous contribution in promoting the translation of the Bible as a whole, including the Apocrypha, into Welsh, *Y Beibl Cymraeg Newydd*, the first authorized translation since 1588 and 1620. He had been appointed chair of the New Testament translation panel in 1963, the first version of which appeared in 1975. In 1974 he had been appointed Director of the whole project and he carried on as chair of the New Testament panel which also undertook the task of translating the books of the Apocrypha as well as revising the first version of the New Testament. The whole task was successfully concluded by Saint David's Day 1988, exactly four hundred years since the publication of **Bishop William Morgan's** Bible, and the occasion was celebrated in special events held in Cardiff, London, Cambridge and Oxford, and commemorative stamps were produced by the Post Office to mark it. The task of editing and revising proceeded after this and a revised version of both the Old Testament and the New Testament was published in 2004, including this time inclusive language, and then a revision of the Apocrypha, which was by then under the chairmanship of Professor D. P. Davies, appeared in 2008.

After assuming the Margaret and Ann Eilian Owen Fellowship of the National Library of Wales, O. E. Evans immediately set out to produce a Concordance to the New Welsh Bible, which was published in 1998. It is a masterpiece and an indispensable tool for any student of the Bible in Welsh.

He was recognized for his immeasurable contribution to the New Welsh Bible by the University of Wales when he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1988. On his retirement from Bangor University in 1988 a Festschrift was published in his honour, *Efyrdiau Beiblaidd Bangor 4* (ed. Eryl W. Davies), and his Pantyfedwen lecture of 1970 was published as *Saints in Christ Jesus* in 1974. He was elected a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales in 2011.

Owen E. Evans died on 31 October 2018, and was cremated in Bangor Crematorium on 12 November.

Author

John Tudno Williams

Sources

Eryl W. Davies, obituary, *Barn*, Rhagfyr/Ionawr 2018/19

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Eryl W. Davies, tribute, *Y Traethodydd*, Ionawr 2019

Robin Gwyndaf, tribute, *Y Traethodydd*, Ionawr 2019, first published in *Y Gwyllydydd*, Rhagfyr 2015

Griffith T. Roberts, foreword to his *Efrydiau Beiblaidd Bangor 4* (Dinbych 1988)

Owen E. Evans, 'On Serving Two Masters', in *The Bible in church, academy, and culture* (2011), pp. 124-41

Personal knowledge and acquaintance

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