

HOPKINS, BENJAMIN THOMAS (1897 - 1981), farmer and poet

Name: Benjamin Thomas Hopkins
Date of birth: 1897
Date of death: 1981
Spouse: Jane Ann Hopkins (née Phillips)
Child: Emyr Hopkins
Child: Eilian Hopkins
Parent: Ifan Hopkins
Parent: Mary Hopkins (née Jones)
Gender: Male
Occupation: farmer and poet
Area of activity: Nature and Agriculture; Poetry
Author: D. Ben Rees

Ben T. Hopkins was born on 3 December 1897 at Waunhelyg, Lledrod, Ceredigion, the son of Ifan Hopkins (1851-1931), carpenter, and his wife Mary (née Jones, 1859-1897). His mother died a week after his birth and he was brought up by his mother's sister and brother, Margaretta Jones (1867-1944) and Dafydd Jones (1854-1929), at Triael, Blaenpennal, a smallholding which is now a ruin. His father remarried and had another son, Evan Pugh Hopkins, half-brother to Ben.

He was educated at Tan-y-garreg Elementary School, where he learnt cynghanedd and began to compose verses under the guidance of the head-teacher, David Davies, and a local poet, John Rowlands, Dolebolion. Together with his fellow pupil, the writer **Tom Hughes Jones**, he began to compete in local eisteddfodau.

He left school at the age of 15 to farm Triael and in the evenings he attended three extra-mural classes in philosophy, agriculture and Welsh literature at the local school. He got to know two other young men who shared his interest in poetry, **Prosser Rhys** (1901-1945) and Jenkin Morgan Edwards (1903-1978). The three of them became best friends and would meet regularly to discuss their work and compete, and to read the works of other poets such as **Cynan** and **R. Williams-Parry**.

He was called up to the army in 1918, passed his medical in June, but before joining any camp the war ended, and he was saved from having to leave his native area. He was busy there with Blaenafon Chapel, where he was elected an elder in 1923, and was a prominent member of the Chapel Drama Company. He served on Blaenpennal Parish Council from 1922 to 1979, and was elected in 1964 to the Tregaron District Council.

Politically he was a member of Plaid Cymru and was one of the founders of the Cardiganshire Constituency Executive Committee in October 1932. Prosser Rhys was elected President, he himself Vice President and J. M. Edwards Secretary. He organized a meeting for the national party in Blaenpennal as early as March 1933, and he had a high regard for his fellow supporters in Ceredigion, such as **Cassie Davies**, Tregaron and Sali H. Davies, Lampeter.

B. T. Hopkins won six chairs at Ceredigion eisteddfodau, first at the Llangeitho Eisteddfod in 1913, then at Goginan in 1925, Aberaeron in 1927, Pontrhydfendigaid in 1933 and the crown of Y Berth Eisteddfod near Tregaron in 1937. All these poems were under discussion in the Mynydd Bach seiat. The other two friends went on to win the Crown and Chair at the National Eisteddfod, but due to his shyness and lack of confidence he never ventured to compete himself, although according to Prosser Rhys and J. M. Edwards he would have won easily. And when he composed his masterpiece, the cywydd 'Rhos Helyg', in 1931, there was no doubt in their minds that he had created one of the finest poems in the Welsh language.

Their meetings, which were usually held in Morfa Du, the home of Prosser Rhys in Trefenter, came to an end when J. M. Edwards moved to Barry in the late thirties. By then, B. T. Hopkins had established another home, having married Jane Ann Phillips (1905-1988), Brynwichell, in 1937. They had two sons, Emyr (1939-2015) and Eilian (1941-2007). Triael and Brynwichell were merged into one unit which he farmed until his retirement in 1964. In retirement he and his wife moved to the Blaenafon Welsh Presbyterian chapel house known as Maes-y-Wawr. He himself had for many years been acknowledged as a recognized lay preacher.

At Maes-y-Wawr the discussion groups became possible again as in the days of Morfa Du. Other Ceredigion poets regularly attended, the two brothers **Isfoel** and Alun Jones y Cilie, **Evan Jenkins** and Dafydd Jones from Ffair Rhos, **T. Llew Jones**, John Roderick Rees, Gwynfil Rees, Pennant, and Professor Gwyn Williams, Bethel, Mynydd Bach. B. T. Hopkins was reluctant to publish a volume of his poetry, but eventually gave in to persuasion from friends. Since he had not kept copies of his poems, **Dyfnallt Morgan**, T. Llew Jones and D. Ben Rees had to search for them in periodicals such as *Y Llenor* and *Y Genhinen*. **J. Eirian Davies** selected the material for the volume, *Rhos Helyg a Cherddi Eraill* which was published in 1976. In 1979 **Alun Creunant Davies** published a selection of his poems, *Detholiad o Gerddi B. T. Hopkins*, which was distributed locally. His masterpiece, 'Rhos Helyg', has appeared in every anthology of Welsh poetry since the thirties. He judged the lyric competition at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff in 1938 and was one of the judges for the awdl at the Cardigan National Eisteddfod in 1976.

B. T. Hopkins died on 21 January 1981 at a care home in Aberystwyth. His funeral was held at Blaenpennal Chapel on 24 January. A memorial stone commemorating four writers from the Mynydd Bach region, B. T. Hopkins Prosser Rhys, J. M. Edwards and T. Hughes Jones, was erected on the shores of Llyn Eiddwen in 1992.

Author

D. Ben Rees

Sources

J. M. Edwards, 'Cyflwyniad: Bardd Rhos Helyg' in B. T. Hopkins, *Rhos Helyg a Cherddi Eraill* (Lerpwl, Pontypridd 1976), 13-17

Information from Dr Eirian Jones, Llangeitho, and from her PhD dissertation *B.T. Hopkins a thraddodiad llenyddol y Mynydd Bach, Ceredigion* (Prifysgol Caerdydd 2007)

Personal knowledge

Further reading

Ebenezer Edwards (ed.), *Bro a Bywyd: Beirdd y Mynydd Bach* (Abertawe 1999)

Wikipedia Article: [B. T. Hopkins](#)

Additional Links

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