

## THOMAS, DEWI-PRYS (1916 - 1985), architect

**Name:** Dewi-prys Thomas  
**Date of birth:** 1916  
**Date of death:** 1985  
**Spouse:** Joyce Ffoulkes Thomas (née Parry)  
**Parent:** Adolphus Dan Thomas  
**Parent:** Elysabeth Watkin Thomas (née Jones)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** architect  
**Area of activity:** Art and Architecture  
**Author:** Ann Francis Evans

Dewi-Prys Thomas was born on 5 August 1916 in the Toxteth Park district of Liverpool, the eldest child of Adolphus Dan Thomas (1889-1974), a banking union official, and his wife Elysabeth (Lys) Watkin Thomas (née Jones, 1888-1953). His sister Rhiannon ('Nannon') Prys Thomas was born in 1919. The historian **Robert John Pryse** ('Gweirydd ap Rhys', 1807-1889) was his great grandfather. Dewi-Prys adopted the hyphen in his name later in his life.

His father was treasurer of the Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru) and his mother was national treasurer of the Welsh Pacifists. **Ambrose Bebb** and **George M. Ll. Davies** were regular visitors to the family home in Liverpool, and Dewi-Prys joined the Welsh Nationalist Party under the influence of Ambrose Bebb when he was fifteen years old.

Dewi-Prys Thomas was educated in Liverpool. He was persuaded by the architect and academician Lionel Bailey Budden to study architecture at Liverpool University rather than art. He entered Liverpool University in 1933, and after graduating with a first class honours BArch degree in 1939 and having won a number of prizes he went on to study town planning with Sir William Holford and was awarded a diploma in 1942.

Thomas moved to Cardiff for the first time in 1940 with his family. At the outbreak of the Second World War he declared himself a conscientious objector, firstly being a Welsh Nationalist and secondly a pacifist. He worked with the architects Ivor Jones and John Bishop and afterwards in the office of the architect **T. Alwyn Lloyd** in Cardiff, 1942-47. He worked as an architect during the day and in a hospital in the evening. One of his regular duties at 8 o'clock was transporting pregnant women from the Maternity Wing to the underground shelter and then returning them to their beds at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Dewi-Prys Thomas was also involved with broadcasting work for the BBC and as a stage actor and played King Creon in *Antigone*. He illustrated dust jackets for the novel *O Law i Law* (1943) and *Caneuon Siôn* (1943) by **T. Rowland Hughes**; *Hunangofiant Tomi* by **E. Tegla Davies** (1947); and *Havoc in Wales; the War Office demands* (1947) by **Gwynfor Evans**. He was also a political cartoonist. His booklet *The history and architecture of Lisvane Parish Church* was published in 1964.

The Liverpool School of Architecture invited him back in 1947 as a lecturer and he was later appointed a senior lecturer. During his time in Liverpool he designed Talar Wen, Liangadog, for his sister Rhiannon and his brother-in-law Gwynfor Evans, a modern house built with materials from Wales and with all the rooms around a courtyard. The family moved there in 1953.

1960 was a productive year for Dewi-Prys Thomas. He designed Cedarwood in Woolton, Liverpool, with Gerald R. Beech which was awarded the title 'House of the Year' in a competition organised by *Woman's Journal* in 1960. Cedarwood attracted over 66,000 visitors over a four week period. It was granted grade II status in 2007. In the same year he designed the Telecommunications Suite for The Shell Tower in London which was a very complicated project, and also The Friends' Meeting House in Heswall, on the Wirral, again with Gerald Beech.

Dewi-Prys Thomas was appointed head of The Welsh School of Architecture in 1960. He became the first Professor of Architecture in the University of Wales in 1964, and held that post until his retirement in 1981. The school grew in size under his leadership, and he established a separate Department of Town Planning with Lyn Allen in 1967. Dafydd Iwan and Prys Edwards were amongst his students.

He married Joyce Ffoulkes Davies (1908-1992), daughter of the Reverend Robert Ffoulkes Parry, Ballarat and Geelong, Australia, on 4 January 1965, at Rehoboth Church, Dolgellau. He was stepfather to Rhiannon, Siani, Ifor and Vaughan.

After his retirement he worked as an architectural consultant for Wyn Thomas and Partners, Cardiff, and was commissioned in 1980 to design the new Gwynedd County Council Headquarters at Caernarfon. Dewi-Prys Thomas was awarded a posthumous award with Merfyn Roberts, the T. Alwyn Lloyd Memorial Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod held at Porthmadog in 1987 for designing the Gwynedd Council Offices. The papers and plans of Dewi-Prys Thomas are housed at The National Library of Wales, including plans for a memorial garden at Aberfan and meeting house for The Religious Society of Friends, Heswall.

Thomas was received as a member of the Gorsedd at the National Eisteddfod held in Swansea in 1982 with the bardic name of 'Dewi Prys' for training hundreds of architects in Wales and beyond. He was a commissioner on the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and a founder member of the civic society, Cardiff 2000, which he chaired for three years. He was also an environmental campaigner. He was a frequent lecturer and broadcaster in Welsh and English and his last lecture was delivered in a Gweled conference in Caernarfon on 20 April 1985.

Dewi-Prys Thomas died due to complications of a stroke on 28 November 1985 at the University of Wales Hospital, Cardiff. His funeral service was held on 4 December at Thornhill Crematorium, and his ashes were scattered in Rehoboth Chapel cemetery, Dolgellau.

A memorial lecture, 'Darlith goffa Dewi-Prys Thomas: Cymro, pensaer, athro' was first delivered at the National Eisteddfod at Porthmadog in 1987. The **Dewi-Prys Thomas Trust** was established in 1990, awarding a triennial prize. Winners include the Great Glasshouse, National Botanic Garden of Wales, Llanarthne in 2003, and the Senedd building, Cardiff, in 2006.

## Author

**Ann Francis Evans**

## Sources

Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor, Rhag pob Brad* (Talybont 2005)

Richard Haslam, Julian Orbach and Adam Voelcker, *Gwynedd: Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth* (London 2009)

Nikolaus Pevsner, Edward Hubbard, *The buildings of England: Cheshire* (London 2003)

Neil Swanson, 'Me and my house Cedarwood', *C20: the magazine of the Twentieth Century Society*, Issue 2 (2014)

Jonathan Vining, 'The professorial practitioner', *Touchstone*, 2016

Official programme of the Swansea National Eisteddfod, 1982

A printed list of the members of the National Eisteddfod Court, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85

Marriage certificate of Dewi-Prys Thomas and Joyce Ffoulkes Davies, 4 January 1965

## Further reading

Dewi-Prys Thomas, 'Pensaerniaeth a Chymru', *Tir newydd*, Chwefror 1939, pp.8-11

[Dewi-Prys Thomas Trust website](#)

[Wikipedia Article: Dewi-Prys Thomas](#)

## Images

Geoff Charles, Ty a gynluniwyd gan Dewi Prys Thomas, ac a godwyd gan Howell Jones, yn ennill wobwr "Ty'r Flwyddyn"

## Sound and Film

Tribute programme to Professor Dewi-Prys Thomas, 1985 (Ffilmiau Scan, video available at The National Library of Wales)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: NLW MS 22361D: Dan Thomas: 'Y Tyrau'

NLW Archives: NLW ex 2386: Aberfan Disaster Memorial papers

NLW Archives: Dewi-Prys Thomas Papers

VIAF: 158191850

Wikidata: Q28137244

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