

DAVIES, JAMES KITCHENER (1902 - 1952), poet, dramatist and nationalist

Name: James Kitchener Davies

Date of birth: 1902

Date of death: 1952

Spouse: Mair Irene Kitchener Davies (née Rees)

Child: Manon Jones (née Davies)

Child: Mari Luned Llwyd (née Davies)

Child: Megan Davies

Parent: Martha Davies (née Davies)

Parent: Thomas Davies

Gender: Male

Occupation: poet, dramatist and nationalist

Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Patriots; Poetry; Politics, Government and Political Movements

Author: Gwilym Tudur

Born 16 June 1902, son of Thomas Davies of Pant-glas, Blaencaron, and Martha (née Davies) of Pantfallen, Tregaron, Cardiganshire. Their sons Thomas, John and James were born at Pantfallen; about a year later the family moved to Llain, Llwynpiod, a smallholding on the edge of Cors Caron, where their daughter Letitia was born. James attended the church school at Tregaron. When he was seven years old his mother died, and he was sent to Banbury for a period (having lost his Welsh on his return). The children were raised at Llain by an aunt, Mary Davies. In 1915 he went to Tregaron county school where everyone called him Kitchener because his father, with his moustache, resembled the British politician of that name. The father, of strong build, worked in Garw colliery and returned to farm the land each spring, summer and Christmas time. In 1919 the smallholding had to be sold when he re-married and made his home in Blaengarw, and the aunt moved to Tonypandy. The experience of breaking up the home left a deep impression on the youth. For the final two years at school he lived in lodgings in Tregaron. This is when he received the help and lasting influence of the history master, S.M. Powell, who created in him, as in so many other well-known people of the area, a love for the history and culture of his neighbourhood and nation, and for drama and public speaking.

He left school in 1921 to become a pupil-teacher at Blaengwynfi and during 1922-25 he took a B.A. course in Welsh and education, with history, Latin and philosophy, at the University College, Aberystwyth. This was 'Aber' during the creative upsurge brought about by such students as **Idwal Jones**. It was also the period of ex-servicemen and conscientious objectors (his friend **Gwenallt** (David James Jones) was there about the same time), and Kitchener's interest in the turmoil of politics and peace in Europe grew. He became secretary of the debating society and a member of the Students' Council, and led movements assisting continental students and the League of Nations which he represented at a month-long international school held in Geneva in 1925. After gaining his teacher's certificate in 1926, he spent the rest of his life teaching in several schools in the Rhondda valley. Soon after going there his aunt died, and in an essay he admits that this was as great a loss to him as losing his mother and leaving Llain had been.

If his childhood had a strong hold on him and his work, Rhondda was no less significant. He worked unsparingly for Welsh causes in the valley, a thankless task that nevertheless did not dis-hearten him. He led a strong campaign to establish the Welsh school there. He served in a host of national societies and organisations promoting culture, education and peace; he became particularly involved in organising adult education and lecturing. Poverty and economic conditions in the valley during the depression concerned him greatly, though there was no prominent position a nationalist could take in the workers' movements of his day; he helped with the social experiment in Maes-yr-haf during the war. He was a member of Bethania chapel, Tonypandy, and used to preach in the valleys, despite his dislike of the image and life of a preacher.

It was as one of the advocates of Plaid Cymru that he came into prominence. He was a masterly and influential speaker, with the gift to arouse people. He canvassed and held open-air meetings (often in the company of the inspired Morris Williams, and his wife **Kate (Roberts)**, who lived for a while in the same street). He stood as a candidate for the county council, and also as a candidate for his party in east Rhondda in 1945, and west Rhondda in 1950 and 1951, shortly before he was taken ill. In 1940 he married a Tonypandy grammar school teacher, Mair Rees of Ffos-y-ffin, Aberaeron, and they made their home in Aeron, Brithweunydd, Trealaw, where their three daughters Megan, Mari and Manon were born.

He enjoyed gardening, was good company, and read extensively. He steeped himself in the works of **Williams**, Pantycelyn, appreciated the works of **Saunders Lewis** and T.S. Eliot, and ensured that the poet was given a place in the theatre. He took an active interest in drama; he founded the Pandy Dramatic Soc., and produced and acted with the company during the 1930s; he became an adjudicator and lecturer, and broadcast many times. He contributed many articles to the Welsh and English press, usually on politics and drama. He was admitted as a member of the Gorsedd of Bards in 1945 for his contribution to Welsh drama. He regarded his own plays as literary experiments, being frequently the fruit of competition. His play *Cwm glo* (1935), about the shattered morals and relationships in a family during the depression, created a great stir. In the play the daughter departs to earn her living on the streets; denied the prize in Aberafan eisteddfod in 1932, people thronged to see it. His short play *Y tri dyn diarth* (1937) was an adaptation of one of Hardy's stories. *Susannah* (1938) was a one-act play based on the book in the Apocrypha, and *Hen wlad fy nhadau* (1939) a translation of a play by **Jack Jones**. *Meini gwagedd* (1944; 2nd. ed. 1945) is a metrical tragedy about the hard life on Cors Caron; with its notable use of the rich language of the district, it is considered to be his best work prior to *Sŵn y gwynt sy'n chwythu*. He completed five other plays: *Dies irae*, a three-act play based on the story of Bouicca; *Gloria in excelsis*, a short radio play on the theme of Easter; *Miss Blodeuwedd*, a farce based on the folk-tale, written in conjunction with his wife; *Y fantell fraith*, in collaboration with his summer school class in Harlech in 1942; and also *Ynys Afallon*, a partially-metrical play on the history of Wales, which he himself considered to be his most ambitious experiment.

He did not compose many poems. Nevertheless, it is as a poet that he is remembered because he left a message for his own age in his few poetical works, and in one poem in particular. *Meini Gwagedd* and the *pryddestau* 'Ing cenhedloedd' and 'Yr Arloeswr' present the theme which was definitively developed in 'Sŵn y gwynt sy'n chwythu'. This *pryddest* was commissioned, broadcast in 1952, and published posthumously in 1953. It was while he was in hospital, awaiting his second cancer operation, that he composed it, dictating its final form to his wife. It is a poem that shocks one, with the poet divesting himself of all his motives, as *Pantycelyn* had done, but here we have a new pitiless voice. It allows us to view a frightening pilgrimage into the presence of sanctity; and the author's plea to be spared his duty becomes the crisis of man in every age. It is regarded as one of the greatest Welsh poems of the 20th century, and Kitchener's name became synonymous with it, as with the Rhondda valley and Plaid Cymru.

He died 25 August 1952, and was buried in the cemetery of Llether Ddu, Trealaw. A plaque on the wall of Llwynpiod chapel in memory of him was unveiled on 3 September 1977, and in 1980 an anthology of his chief works was published.

Author

Gwilym Tudur

Sources

Documents and information mainly from his widow, and his sister

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Ioan Williams, *Kitchener Davies* (Caernarfon 1985), complete bibliography

Mair Kitchener Davies, (ed.), *Gwaith James Kitchener Davies* (Llandysul 1980)

Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Vote for Kitchener Davies. Rhondda East Parliamentary General Election, July 5th, 1945](#)

NLW Archives: [Rhondda East Parliamentary Division General Election, July 5th 1945... Vote Kitchener Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [Etholaeth Dwyrain Rhondda Etholiad Cyffredinol, Gorffennaf 5ed, 1945... Pleidleiswch Tros Kitchener Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [Rhondda West Parliamentary Division. General Election February 23rd, 1950. Kitchener Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [Voice of Wales. Parliament for Wales... Kitchener Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [Rhondda West Parliamentary Division General Election, October 25th 1951. James Kitchener Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [General Election, October 25th 1951... Pledleiswch Kitchener Davies](#)

Wikipedia Article: [James Kitchener Davies](#)

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