

EVANS, DAVID (1886 - 1968), Professor of German and author

Name: David Evans
Date of birth: 1886
Date of death: 1968
Spouse: Margaret Evans (née James)
Parent: Elizabeth Evans
Parent: John Evans
Gender: Male
Occupation: Professor of German and author
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Benjamin George Owens

Born 18 November 1886 in the Blaen-ffos area of Pembrokeshire, son of John Evans (died 18 January 1914, 81 yrs old) and Elizabeth his wife (died 30 January 1937, 86 yrs old) of Bwlchnewydd, parish of Castell. He was educated at Cardigan intermediate school, where German had a prominent place in the curriculum, and after a fruitless period farming at home he entered the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1907. He graduated with honours in German in 1910, and two years later gained his M.A. He then moved to Berlin as an English lektor and a student at the University where he became acquainted with the Celtic scholar Kuno Meyer. He was working there at the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and was interned for the next four years as one of about five thousand civilian prisoners in the comfortable surroundings of Ruhleben race-course. His major interest there was the Camp School, formed early in 1915, where he was head of Celtic studies and, to his great amusement later in life, president of the Irish Society. One of his students, initially, and then an assistant to him, was **Ifor Leslie Evans**, later Principal of the University College, Aberystwyth.

After his release he was for some three months a teacher at Wrexham and then became a lecturer at the University of Birmingham until his appointment on 24 September 1920 as an Independent Lecturer and Head of the Department of German at Aberystwyth. Despite the prevailing hatred towards Germany and its people, he succeeded in creating a particularly lively department and his name symbolised the new interest being awoken in the language. His success led the college in 1936 to establish a Chair of German and elevate him as Professor. He remained in the post until his retirement in 1952 when he was made Emeritus Professor.

In addition to translating *Detholiad o chwed-iau Grimm* (1927) and *Detholiad o storiâu Andersen* (1921, 1931) and also plays by Herman Heijermans (*Ahasfer*; *Y Gobaith da*) and Anatole France (*Y gwr a briododd wraig fud*), he contributed numerous articles on German education, religion and contemporary problems and literature to Welsh periodicals. He published *A simplified German Grammar* (1948) and *Gofyniadau ac atebion i Lythyr Cyntaf Paul at y Corinthiaid* (1926), but his most important work which brought him into prominence generally was *Y wlad: ei bywyd, ei haddysg, a'i chrefydd* (1933), a searching survey of the fundamental values of rural life (for him, around Y Frenni Fawr) and a study for which there was a great demand for a second edition at the end of the year, partly because it was so enthusiastically recommended by **David Lloyd George** in a speech at Wrexham national eisteddfod.

David Evans was very active in the college at Aberystwyth. He was the prime mover in the introduction of a scheme of medical care for students, the first medical scheme to be instituted at any British university. He was president of the Old Students' Association in 1952, and the British Council representative at Aberystwyth for many years. He was an uncompromising Baptist, and a member, deacon and Sunday school teacher at Bethel, Aberystwyth.

He married, 30 December 1920, Margaret James of Llandeilo; her father was an Inspector of Elementary Schools in Carmarthenshire and her mother had been a member of the 'Côr Mawr' conducted by **Griffith Rhys Jones** ('Caradog'). His wife, too, was a graduate of Aberystwyth College in 1910, and by the time she met David Evans in Birmingham she had been appointed French teacher at Halesowen grammar school for girls. At Aberystwyth she actively supported several good causes, e.g. Friends of the Hospital and the R.S.P.C.A. Two sons and a daughter were born of the marriage. David Evans died 26 October 1968 in Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth and was buried in his mother-church at Blaen-ffos. His wife died 29 November 1973 aged 84 years at her daughter's home in Camberley and was buried in Aldershot.

David Evans was of a companionable nature, kept rigidly to his principles, and made his views known, but occasionally he would not be bound by convention. As **Principal Thomas Parry** said at his funeral: 'in spite of the infinite variety of human nature, there will never be anybody exactly like David Evans'.

Author

Benjamin George Owens

Sources

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Seren Cymru, 10 January 1969

In Ruhleben camp (Berlin 1915) (later *The Ruhleben camp magazine* (Berlin 1916-1917)) and copies of the prospectus of the Camp School, from David Evans' library, at N.L.W.

NLW MS 19979A: *Miscellaneous letters* (a letter from D. Lloyd George)

D.L.I.G.'s personal copy of *Y Wlad ei bywyd, ei haddysg a'i chrefydd* (Liverpool 1933) with notes, at N.L.W.

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information from his son Roland D.W. Evans, Solihull, Birmingham, and the Rev. William Jones, Blaen-ffos

personal acquaintance

Further Reading

David Thorne, 'Y Gymraeg ym 'Mhrifysgol Ruhleben',' *The National Library of Wales Journal*, Vol. XXXI, no. 1, 1999-2000, pp.75-106

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