

ROBERTS, DAVID JOHN ('Dewi Mai o Feirion'; 1883 - 1956), journalist, folk poet, tutor and setter of cerdd dant

Name: David John Roberts
Pseudonym: Dewi Mai O Feirion
Date of birth: 1883
Date of death: 1956
Spouse: Kate Laura Roberts (née Ephraim)
Parent: Catherine Roberts
Parent: David Roberts
Gender: Male
Occupation: journalist, folk poet, tutor and setter of cerdd dant
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Music; Poetry
Author: Aled Lloyd Davies

Born 14 May 1883 at Talweunydd, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Merionethshire, son of David and Catherine Roberts. He began to take an interest in singing to the harp when he was very young, and as did a number of other youths from the neighbourhood of Blaenau, such as Ioan Dwyrdd, Robert G. Humphreys, and W. Morris Williams, he used to frequent the cottage Llys y Delyn, Rhiwbrydir, Blaenau Ffestiniog, where David Francis ('Telynor Dall o Feirion') lived in the early part of the 20th c. 'Dewi Mai', in company with his contemporaries, learnt from David Francis how to set a stanza to an air and how to handle *cynganedd*. After living for a time in England, he returned to Merionethshire, for a while in the neighbourhood of Bala, before settling in the town of Dolgellau. There he earned his living as a journalist and undertook the task of teaching others to sing penillion. He prepared hundreds of settings of verses, and sent them by post to all parts of Wales, thereby arousing the interest of many who in their turn came to be prominent performers and setters of *penillion*. He published three volumes of settings, many of the poems they contain being written by him: *Dilliau'r plant* (1913), *Trysorau'r tannau* (1935), *Y Patrw*m (1952). But despite his great contribution as a penillion setter and tutor, he made two other more important contributions which were essential cornerstones in the development of singing to harp accompaniment. Throughout 1933 and 1934 he wrote a weekly column in *Y Cymro* under the heading 'Cornel y delyn'. In it he dealt with every aspect of the ancient art, bringing it to the notice of the general public. He called for a national society to be formed to promote this ancient form of singing, and through his articles he prepared the way to secure the success of the society - Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru - when it was founded in Bala in November 1934. After the society was founded, 'Dewi Mai o Feirion' formulated the first draft of the rules of Cerdd Dant which were adopted later by the society, and which remain to the present day as aids for *penillion* setters. His contribution to the development of the art of singing to the harp between 1920 and 1956 was crucial. He married Kate Laura Ephraim and died 27 November 1956.

Author

Dr Aled Lloyd Davies

Sources

Allwedd y Tannau Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru, 1956, 9-10
information from his son, D. G. Roberts, Rhyl

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