

THOMAS, LEWIS (1877 - 1955), pioneer of the art of Cerdd Dant (the art of singing to harp accompaniment) in south Wales in the first half of the 20th century

Name: Lewis Thomas
Date of birth: 1877
Date of death: 1955
Spouse: Mary Emiah Thomas (née Jones)
Parent: Jane Thomas
Parent: William Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: pioneer of the art of Cerdd Dant
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Music
Author: Evan Gwyndaf Evans

Born at Pontyberem, Gwendraeth Valley, Carmarthenshire, 30 May 1877, the eldest of nine sons of William Thomas, a collier, and his wife, Jane. Lewis worked in the mines for a short period before being apprenticed and gaining his trade as a local shoemaker.

In 1905 he married Mary Emiah Jones, a teacher at Pontyberem, but originally from Llan-non, Llanelli. They had a son and two daughters. His daughter Amy married T. H. Parry-Williams, and his daughter Mary married D. J. Llewelfryn Davies. They built a house and an attached shop and for years he kept the shop and trained his apprentice shoemakers in a workshop at the rear. Later he was a rates collector for Llanelli Council. He and his wife were prominent in the cultural and social activities of the village.

He was an eisteddfod enthusiast since his youth, competing at recitation, composing essays, hymn tunes, anthems for children, and choral works. Like some of his brothers he was interested in music and there was a small organ or harmonium at home. He won a certificate of the Tonic Sol-fa College in the examination which the movement held in the vestry of Caersalem Congregational chapel, where he was a member. About 1916-18, his musical interests turned to *Cerdd Dant*. A harp was bought and he had lessons from Telynores Elli, mastering the harp well enough to accompany his children where he had previously used the piano. Many professional musicians sought his help and found him very ready to share his knowledge. He began competing as a 'setter' of words to harp music and his settings won at the national eisteddfod in Caerphilly (1950), Aberystwyth (1952), and Ystradgynlais (1954). The last, *Hwiangerddi gyda'r tannau*, was published by Snell & Co. in 1956. He contributed articles and settings to *Allwedd y tannau* and *Yr Athro*. For many years he regularly adjudicated Cerdd Dant at the national eisteddfod, the Cerdd Dant Festival and the Urdd National Eisteddfod. For his services he was made a member of the Gorsedd of Bards at the Llanelli national eisteddfod in 1930. He was a founder member of the Cerdd Dant Society and lectured at its first Summer School. He was its second President and was made an honorary member.

He died in Aberystwyth hospital 16 May 1955, and was buried in Llan-non church cemetery, Llanelli.

Author

Evan Gwyndaf Evans, (1913 - 1986)

Sources

Information from his daughter, Lady Amy Parry-Williams

personal knowledge

Allwedd y Tannau Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Cerdd Dant Cymru, 15 (1956)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Papurau'r Fonesig Amy Parry-Williams: Gosodiadau Cerdd Dant I

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