

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM EMYR (1889 - 1958), solicitor and eisteddfod patron

Name: William Emyr Williams
Date of birth: 1889
Date of death: 1958
Spouse: Mary Williams (née Powell)
Parent: Sarah Ann Williams (née Hall)
Parent: John Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: solicitor and eisteddfod patron
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Law; Philanthropy
Author: Gwilym Evans

Born 24 May 1889 at Llanffestiniog, Merionethshire, the eldest of the 7 children of Rev. John Williams, minister of Engedi (Calv. Meth.) and Sarah Ann, daughter of Edward Hall, ship's captain and an elder at Tabernacl, Aberystwyth. The family moved to Dolgellau and then, when John Williams was appointed secretary to the Presbyterian Home Mission, to Wrexham. Emyr Williams was educated at Grove Park grammar school, Wrexham, and University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he gained his LL.B. in 1911. He took an active part in several college societies, including the Liberal Society of which he was secretary.

On the outbreak of World War I he joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers and served as a lieutenant under Allenby in Palestine. His services were retained by the army for some months after the end of the war as judge of a military court dealing with unrest among the Egyptians who were seeking independence from British authority. On his return to Wrexham he became a partner with J.S. Lloyd in the firm of solicitors J.S. Lloyd and Emyr Williams. He married Mary, daughter of J.E. Powell, Wrexham. Elected a member of the Wrexham borough council in 1923 he was mayor in 1933 and chairman of the executive committee of the national eisteddfod held in the town that year. He was deputy mayor on 7 occasions and elevated to the aldermanic bench in 1935. He was made an hon. Freeman of the borough in 1951 and served the council for 35 years. He was made C.B.E. in 1952 in recognition of his public services in several spheres, especially for his dedication to the success of the eisteddfod. At the time of his death he held offices on several national bodies. He served for some years on the Council of Wales, he was one of the prime founders of the Association of Welsh Local Authorities in 1927 and held the Presidency for a quarter of a century from 1933. He was a vice-president of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. As a member of the Court he took considerable interest in the University of Wales, and the north-east Wales branch of the Guild of Graduates, of which he was president, received his enthusiastic support.

The progress of education in the Wrexham area was high on his list of priorities and he was elected chairman of the Education committee. His election as a governor of his old school, Grove Park, gave him particular pleasure and throughout his life he was a loyal member of Seion (Presb.) church, Wrexham, where he was senior elder and precursor. The Properties Board of the Presb. Church relied on his guidance as their hon. solicitor and secretary. The national eisteddfod also appreciated the guidance of Emyr Williams and he helped to resolve difficulties in more than one crisis. During the years prior to World War II the weakness arising from the dual control by the Gorsedd and Eisteddfod Association became more apparent. Emyr Williams's 'vision and drive proved a great asset to the Joint Committee which strove for the fusion of the two societies into one governing body; his quiet firmness and legal acumen were invaluable in helping to frame a just, comprehensive and workable constitution for the Council in 1937'. Sir D. Owen Evans was elected chairman and Emyr Williams vice-chairman of the Council. During World War II he again came to the aid of the *eisteddfod* as chairman of the Emergency Committee responsible for organising the series of eisteddfodau for the period of the war. He became chairman of the Council on the death of Sir Owen Evans, an office which he held until his death. Followers of the *eisteddfod* mourned the loss of a great *eisteddfod* leader whose consistent firmness and dignified personality proved a tower of strength to the All-Welsh *eisteddfod*. 'He nothing common did nor mean!' In 1957 the University of Wales conferred an hon. LL.D. on him.

The culture of the Llanbryn-mair area had considerable influence on his way of thinking and living, having spent many of his holidays since boyhood at Bontdolgadfan, the home of his grandfather, William Williams, 'Gwilym Cyfeiliog'. His choice of name, 'Emyr Cyfeiliog', on becoming a member of the Gorsedd of Bards was an indication of his attachment to that locality.

While following his profession as a solicitor, he dedicated his life to serve the community. He was an administrator by his very nature. A man of few words he would steer a discussion to the salient points of a problem with certainty and courtesy. He loved the arts. He delighted to place his administrative gifts at the disposal of the *eisteddfod* for he believed in it with all his heart as an instrument for fostering the arts in Wales and as an institution for promoting and safeguarding the use of the Welsh language.

He died, without issue, on 11 July 1958 and was buried at the public cemetery, Wrexham.

Author

Gwilym Evans, (1896 - 1983)

Sources

Personal knowledge

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