

JAMES, DAVID ('Defynnog'; 1865 - 1928) schoolmaster, educationist, organiser of summer schools, and author

Name: David James
Pseudonym: Defynnog
Date of birth: 1865
Date of death: 1928
Spouse: Sarah James
Spouse: Sarah James (née Harris)
Child: David Geraint James
Parent: Mary James (née Thomas)
Parent: David James
Gender: Male
Occupation: schoolmaster, educationist, organiser of summer schools, and author
Area of activity: Education; Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing
Author: Gwilym Arthur Jones

Born 17 August 1865 in Libanus in the parish of Defynnog, Brecknockshire. He was the son of David James, Baptist minister and his wife Mary, sister of 'Myfyr Emlyn' (Benjamin Thomas), the poet-preacher. They had four sons and four daughters.

Defynnog was educated in Cynwyl Elfed, Carmarthenshire, and Dinas, Pembrokeshire, where his father was minister. He was intent on becoming a teacher, and after a period as a pupil-teacher, was accepted as a certificated teacher. He was successful in the matriculation examination of the University of London (1889) and was awarded various certificates in a number of teaching subjects. He became a member of the University Correspondence College, Cambridge, and was successful in the Intermediate Arts examinations in Latin, Greek, French, mathematics and English.

He won prizes, too, in the National Eisteddfod. In the *eisteddfod* at Merthyr Tydfil (1901) he won for his study of 'Kymric Literature' and in the *eisteddfod* at Bangor (1902) he was awarded first prize for his critical treatise on the novels of Daniel Owen. He was admitted to the Gorsedd of Bards; he also became a national adjudicator. He spent periods as a schoolteacher in Eglwysrwrw, Cwmifor, Templeton, the Rhondda Pupil-teacher Centre, Dunraven and Treherbert (1908-26).

Although he was a good mathematician, like his brother John, he turned his attention towards improving methods of teaching Welsh. When he was appointed secretary of the Welsh Language Society on 1 October 1902, he took the opportunity to promote his mission throughout Wales. He applied himself to preparing reading books, teaching manuals, plans for language teaching and a children's dictionary. He contributed prolifically to *Cymru*, *Cymru'r Plant*, *Y Darian*, *Yspryd yr Oes*, *Y Genhinen*, *Seren Gomer*, *The Welsh Outlook* and *The Welsh Leader*. More importantly it was he who started the Welsh Summer School in 1903. He was an excellent organiser and succeeded in inviting some of the nation's leading scholars to address members of the summer schools on methods of teaching Welsh and on literary history. He won the admiration and support of men like Sir Isambard Owen, Sir O.M. Edwards and Sir J.E. Lloyd.

He was invited to join the Mosely commission on education in 1903 and visited the U.S.A. and Canada. He published a book based on his impressions entitled *American methods of organisation and instruction* (1908). He believed strongly in the direct method of language teaching and he (through the Society) recommended this to schools in Anglicised areas. His *Scheme of instruction in Welsh* which he produced jointly with H. Howells received the blessing of the Rhondda education committee. He could not tolerate lazy teachers who did not commit themselves fully to promote the language. The action of the departmental committee which looked into the place of Welsh in education and life (1925) in neglecting the mission and activities of the Welsh Language Society, saddened him, though consideration had been given to inviting Sir Isambard to serve on the committee.

Defynnog was not content to be idle even after his retirement. He continued to write daily as editor of the Welsh column of the *South Wales News* until he was hindered by ill-health. He supported the establishment of a Secretaryship of State for Wales. He died on 1 December 1928 in Swansea and was buried in Llethr Ddu cemetery, Porth, Rhondda. The newspapers were loud in praise of his kindness, generosity, dedication and zeal for the Welsh language.

He married Sarah Harries and they had one son. After her death he married Sarah Williams on 7 August 1920, a widow with three daughters. They had one son, David Geraint.

Author

Gwilym Arthur Jones, (1925 - 1998)

Sources

Gwilym Arthur Jones, 'David James (Defynnog) 1865-1928 in the context of Welsh education', *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1978, 267-84 (with bibliography)

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Published date: 2001

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Jones, G. A., (2001). JAMES, DAVID ('Defynnog ': 1865 - 1928) schoolmaster, educationist, organiser of summer schools, and author. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 9 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s3-JAME-DAV-1865>

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