

WILLIAMS, JOHN ELLIS (1901-1975), author and dramatist

Name: John Ellis Williams
Date of birth: 1901
Date of death: 1975
Spouse: Kate Ellen Williams
Parent: Elis Ll. Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: author and dramatist
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Performing Arts
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

Born at Penmachno, Caernarfonshire, 19 April 1901, son of Elis Ll. Williams (tailor) and his wife (who kept a shop). He was educated at Llanrwst county school 1912-16, and following a period as a pupil-teacher and as an assistant teacher in Penmachno and Penmaen Bay, he was trained as a teacher at Bangor Normal College 1919-21. He married Kate Ellen 'Cadi' in September 1922. He taught in a number of schools, in Manchester, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Llanfrothen (headmaster), Blaenau Ffestiniog Secondary School 1926-47 (serving in the army 1939-46) and Glan-y-pwll, Blaenau Ffestiniog (headmaster). He retired in 1961 to Llanbedr, Meirionnydd, and then in 1970 to Gaerwen, Anglesey. He was awarded an honorary MA by the University of Wales in 1962 and awarded the MBE the same year.

He was a prolific writer in a variety of media - essays, short stories (he was a regular contributor to newspapers and journals), novels, stage and radio plays, film, children's literature and verse. He wrote his last essay on 1 January 1975, expecting it to appear in the same number of *'Herald Mon'* as his obituary, as in fact transpired. He began writing plays about 1918 and gained many prizes at the national eisteddfod, but when a production of one of his published plays revealed to him its structural flaws he was moved to set up his own company to perform his plays so that they could be revised before publication. He published a play almost every year during the 1920s and the 1930s and thus ensured that the hundreds of amateur companies active in Wales before World War II had a stream of proven and standard works as a repertoire. As a dramatist, publisher, producer, adjudicator and teacher he had a crucial role in the Welsh drama movement. His enthusiasm for new media led to his co-operation with **Sir Ifan ab Owen Edwards** in writing and producing *'Y Chwarelwr'* (*'The Quarryman'*), the first Welsh sound film in 1935 and to his pioneering work in Welsh radio plays.

He was a keen observer of life as revealed by his social comedies and especially his satirical verse. He was a popular novelist, creating two Welsh detectives, Hopyn and Parri in two series of detective novels, five titles of the former between 1958 and 1961 and five of the latter between 1965 and 1967. All J. Ellis Williams' work was produced as a leisure time activity but it is characterised by a professional attitude to all aspects of preparation and planning, a craftsman's regard for the finished product, and the ability to appeal to a wide audience without sacrificing standards.

Among his more important works are the plays *Y Pwyllgorddyn*, *Wedi'r drin*, *Yr erodrôm*, *Awel gref* (an adaptation of Emlyn Williams' *Wind of heaven*) and adaptations of plays by E. Einon Evans; *'Sglodion* (1932), *Whilmentan* (1961), *Dychangerddi* (1967), *Tri dramodydd cyfoes* (1961), and an autobiography, *Inc yn fy ngwaed* (1963). A festschrift edited by **Meredydd Evans**, *Gwr wrth grefft* (1974), has a bibliography. Both books contain photographs of J. Ellis Williams.

J. Ellis Williams died at ysbyty Dewi Sant, Bangor 7 January 1975 and was cremated at Bangor Crematorium. He left a widow ('Cadi') and 2 daughters.

There is a collection of his papers at the National Library of Wales.

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

Elfyn Pritchard, 'John Ellis Williams' in Mairwen and Gwynn Jones (eds), *Dewiniaid Difyr* (Llandysul 1983), 1983

Barn 140, 141

Glyn Evans, *Y Cymro*, 14 January 1975

Robert Owen, 'John Ellis Williams,' *Lleufer* 12, 39-42

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