

## EVANS, DAVID (1879-1965), public servant and hymn-writer

**Name:** David Evans  
**Date of birth:** 1879  
**Date of death:** 1965  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** public servant and hymn-writer  
**Area of activity:** Poetry; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Religion  
**Author:** Alun Roberts

Born at Blaenpennal, Cardiganshire, on 26 September 1879, one of the ten children of David Evans and his wife Jane (née Jones). His father, a farmer at Caerochor farm, was active in the local community, serving as a member of the Blaenpennal and Lower Lledrod School Board and as an elder at Peniel CM chapel. David was educated at Tanygarreg board school, where he became a reportedly strict pupil teacher in 1895 at an annual salary of £5. The schoolmaster at this time was John Finnemore, a highly effective teacher, a well-known author of books for boys and undoubtedly, as David Evans would later acknowledge, an important influence on his intellectual development during his formative years. After leaving school he initially pursued a career as a school teacher. After a short spell as assistant master at Cwmcarn, near Newport he became headmaster of the council school in Conwil Elfed, Carmarthenshire, where he remained until 1913.

However, by then he had decided to change the direction of his career for in 1912 he had taken the Civil Service Examination for an appointment to the outdoor staff of the Welsh National Insurance Commission. Placed first on the list of successful candidates he took up his duties at the beginning of 1914 and spent the next seven years working in Merthyr Tydfil, Haverfordwest and Carmarthen before being promoted to district inspector for Cardiff and East Glamorgan in 1921. In this position he was heavily engaged in addressing the severe effects of the depression in south Wales, and his appointment in 1932 as Chief Inspector of the Welsh Board of Health in succession to the late R Trefor Williams was widely welcomed. On the outbreak of the Second World War he became Deputy Senior Regional Officer for the Welsh Region of the Ministry of Health, combining these duties with those of Chief Inspector. He retired from the Civil Service in 1944.

During his years in Cardiff David Evans identified himself closely with various social and religious organisations, particularly with the affairs of Crwys Road Presbyterian Chapel, serving for many years as one of the elders and in 1941 as the general secretary. He was also a member of the Cardiff Cymmrodorion Council. After his retirement he and his wife went to live first in Aberystwyth and from 1951 in Porthcawl, continuing to immerse themselves in chapel life.

Throughout his life David Evans was a prolific writer of verse. His earliest work, some of which was composed when still a teenager, was written under the names 'Aeronian' and 'Gwylltaeron' and appeared in *Trysorfa y Plant* and other Welsh-language publications. By the time of his late twenties he was writing mainly under his own name and, even though his output diminished as his career progressed, he was still publishing verse in the Welsh-language press well into his retirement. Much of his work was commemorative in content, sometimes an event of national significance such as the Welsh Religious Revival, but more usually to mark the death of a relative or friend. The death of his grandfather in 1898 stimulated an elegy of no fewer than 21 stanzas, each one eight lines in length. At about the same time, perhaps encouraged by John Finnemore, he submitted the composition 'Yn Nghôr Caersalem Lan' to *Trysorfa y Plant*, where it was published in September 1899 under the nom de plume 'Aeronian'. **Joseph Parry**, clearly having no idea of the identity of the author, composed a rousing tune, and two verses of the original composition together with the chorus quickly became established as a popular favourite at hymn-singing festivals, the words being attributed to 'Aeronian'. When the hymn appeared in the Independents' collection of hymns, *Y Caniedydd Cynulleidfaol Newydd* in 1921 the authorship of the words was erroneously attributed to the now dead **Rev Thomas Levi** (died 1916), the editor of *Trysorfa y Plant* at the time of the composition's original publication. It was only in 1940 that the true identity of 'Aeronian' was revealed by **Rev. J. Seymour Rees** in the *Western Mail*, his natural modesty having no doubt inhibited David Evans from asserting his authorship of 'O ganu bendigedig' earlier.

In 1905 he married Dinah, daughter of James and Maria Griffiths of Lletty Caru, Croesyceiliog, near Carmarthen and they had four sons and one daughter. His wife's sister, Kate, married **T. J. Jenkin**, later Director of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station and Professor of Agricultural Botany at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. David Evans died on 20 August 1965, aged 85, and was buried in Porthcawl cemetery where his wife had been laid to rest in 1962.

### Author

**Dr Alun Roberts**

### Sources

NLW Archives: NLW ex 2705: Papurau'r emynydd David Evans

Rhidian Griffiths and Alun Roberts, 'O! ganu bendigedig', *Y Traethodydd*, July 2011

*Western Mail*, 9 December 1940

*Y Faner*, 7 February 1986

personal knowledge

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