

EVANS, WILLIAM EMRYS (1924-2004), banker and philanthropist

Name: William Emrys Evans
Date of birth: 1924
Date of death: 2004
Gender: Male
Occupation: banker and philanthropist
Area of activity: Economics and Money; Philanthropy
Author: David Lewis Jones

Emrys Evans was born on 4 April 1924, the son of Richard and Mary Elizabeth Evans, Maesglas, Y Foel, Montgomeryshire. On leaving Llanfair Caereinion County School in 1941, he went to work with the Midland Bank (now known as HSBC). A year later, he enlisted in the Royal Navy where he served as a radio operator; he was among a small group of men landed in Normandy, one day before D-Day, to report on enemy positions and to provide assistance to the ships in the assault on the French coast. Evans, among the few men who survived from that small group, was mentioned in despatches for his conduct.

In 1946, Evans returned to work at the Midland Bank where he built a successful career over the next forty years. He moved rapidly from working at the counter in Welsh branches of the bank to the head office in London; Evans was appointed Assistant General Manager (Agriculture) in 1967, Regional Director for South Wales in 1972, Regional Director Wales in 1974, and Senior Regional Director Wales from 1976 until his retirement in 1984. Despite his heavy commitments at the Midland Bank, he found time to assist many Welsh organisations. He supported the introduction of bilingual cheques and became a member of the Council for the Welsh Language between 1973 and 1978. The Welsh economy was a matter of great interest to Evans and he was a director of a number of bodies, including the Development Corporation for Wales, Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board, and the Development Board for Rural Wales.

During the twenty years of his retirement, Evans was an active member of several Welsh charitable and other organisations linked to the economy, medicine and education. He was particularly concerned to improve economic opportunities for young people in the Welsh-speaking parts of Wales and, as chairman, he developed Menter a Busnes to provide the support needed. He was also chairman of Sefydliad Addysg Menter a Busnes and of the Welsh Committee for Economic and Industrial Affairs.

Inspired, to some extent, by his own encounter with ill health, Evans was ready to assist medical charities, including the Tenovus Cancer Research Unit, the Kidney Research Unit for Wales Foundation, and the Noah's Ark Appeal for the Children's Hospital for Wales. At the age of seventy, he raised money for Tenovus by undertaking a sponsored walk from Holyhead to Cardiff. The University of Wales recruited Evans to serve on its committees and he acted as treasurer for a short period. He was closely involved with the University of Wales Swansea from 1972 to 1996; he served as chairman of the council from 1982 and he was close to **James Callaghan**, the former Prime Minister and President of the College 1986-95. He also served on the Council of the Welsh College of Medicine and the Council of University of Wales Aberystwyth.

Born on a small farm in Montgomeryshire, Evans was especially anxious to assist in the development of Welsh agriculture. He was an active member of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society from 1973; elected chairman of the board of management in 1999, he provided important assistance in overcoming the financial crisis arising from the effects of the foot and mouth disease on the annual show in 2001. During the last years of his life, he was involved in preparations for the Society's centenary, but died on the eve of the annual show at which he was to receive the Society's gold medal. On the day of his funeral, the offices of the Society were closed as a mark of respect to a man who had made a considerable contribution to the Society.

A loyal congregationalist, Evans served both as treasurer and president of the Union of Welsh Independents. He worshipped at Ebenezer Chapel in Cardiff where he was secretary for many years. Through his work for the Union of Welsh Independents, he was invited to hold the office of treasurer of Mansfield College, Oxford, in 1977 (to 1995) and he gave valuable advice when the College applied, successfully, for full college status within the University of Oxford.

Evans was an able fundraiser and his activities benefited Welsh organisations large and small. He was always ready to travel anywhere to seek funds; as chairman of the finance committee of the National Eisteddfod, he visited Brussels in 1978 to seek a regular donation from the European Community. On the occasions he was refused, he was not dejected but turned immediately to another possible source of support. Over fifty Welsh organisations owed him much for his enthusiasm, his expertise and his energy. He was High Sheriff of South Glamorgan in 1985-86; an honorary LLD of the University of Wales 1983; and appointed C.B.E. in 1981.

Emrys Evans was short and well built, with heavy spectacles and always well dressed; he had a warm personality, with much humour and tolerance, and he maintained good relations with people from all political parties and from all walks of life. For many years, Evans and his wife were close friends of Lord and Lady **Cledwyn**; they frequently went on holiday together. Among the wide range of his friends and acquaintances throughout Wales, it was difficult to meet a person with a bad word for Emrys Evans. With considerable affection, he was widely known as 'Emrys y Midland Bank'. He was unwell during the last year of his life, but he made a great effort to keep his commitments.

In 1946, he married Mair Thomas and they had one daughter. Emrys and Mair Evans lived in London while he was at the bank's head office and then they moved to South Wales in 1972 when they settled at Dinas Powys in a house named after his childhood home. He died at his home in Dinas Powys on 18 July 2004 and the funeral was held on 26 July at Ebenezer Chapel, Charles St., Cardiff, followed by cremation at Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff.

Author

David Lewis Jones

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