

EVANS, HAROLD MEURIG (1911-2010), teacher, lexicographer

Name: Harold Meurig Evans
Date of birth: 1911
Date of death: 2010
Gender: Male
Occupation: teacher, lexicographer
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Mair Thomas

Meurig Evans was born in Hendy, near Pontarddulais, Carmarthenshire on 5 March 1911, the only child of Henry James Evans, a miner, and Sarah Evans. He went to school there when he was three years old but the family moved to Caerbryn when he was five and he went to Blaenau School where he never had a single Welsh lesson. From there he went to the old Ammanford County School before moving to the new school in Margaret Street - the Amman Valley Grammar School. He was awarded an Open Scholarship to the University College of Wales Aberystwyth and after graduating with a First-Class Honours degree in Welsh in 1932 he worked for some time in the Manuscripts Department of the National Library of Wales.

He started his career in education as a Physical Education teacher in Bromsgrove and Birmingham for one year before moving to Caernarfon County School and then joining the RAF in 1941, serving some time at the Far East Headquarters under Lord Mountbatten. He would often speak about his time in Ceylon - as it then was called - and that island had a very warm place in his heart. In his last years his memories of that period were very evident in his conversation, and were as vivid as ever to him.

In 1942 he married Sarah (Sal) Walters from Llanedi. They had no children.

After leaving the RAF in 1946 he returned to Caernarfon for one term before moving to Bridgend and after one year there went back to his old school at Ammanford where he remained as Head of the Welsh Department till he retired in 1975. He gained his MA in 1937 for a dissertation on "Iaith a Ieithwedd y Cerddi Rhydd Cymraeg Cynnar" (The Language and Style of Early Welsh Free Metre Poetry). He was awarded an honorary M.Ed. degree by the University of Wales in 1988 and received the OBE in 1995.

Meurig Evans made a very important contribution to Wales and the Welsh language by publishing a series of dictionaries starting with *Y Geiriadur Cymraeg Newydd / The New Welsh Dictionary* published in 1953 with W. O. Thomas, after they had shared the first prize for a Welsh dictionary in the Llanrwst National Eisteddfod in 1950. This ran to at least 23 impressions, the most recent in 2008. This was followed by *Y Geiriadur Mawr / The Complete Welsh-English, English-Welsh Dictionary* published in 1958. This was the best standard dictionary published in Welsh for a very long time and still takes pride of place on bookshelves in the homes of Wales today. The most recent impression (of about 27) is in 2006. They then went on to publish *Y Geiriadur Bach / The Welsh Pocket Dictionary* (1959, at least 14 impressions, the most recent in 2006). W. O. Thomas was the headmaster of Cray (Brechs) primary school and these two teachers were able to work together on their dictionaries only during school holidays. Evans published *Y Geiriadur Cymraeg Cyfoes / The Modern Welsh Dictionary* in 1981 (editions to 2007). He published a number of text books that were a valuable contribution to the education of children in the schools of Wales but the jewel in the crown was *Y Geiriadur Mawr*.

He continued to make substantial collections of words and created poetry and prose until the end although the latter years were very frustrating for him due to the increasing deterioration of his sight. The compulsion to write remained particularly strong and gave him a reason for living but it was very difficult to understand what his handwriting and he was unable to carry out any checking and revisions. Through his determination, and with help, he continued to compete in the Literary Sections of the National Eisteddfod - poetry and prose - till the last year or two of his life. His very deep wish was to publish an updated edition of *Y Geiriadur Mawr* to include new modern Welsh words, coal mining terminology - words that were by now dying out with the death of that industry - and also more colloquial phrases. Sadly there was no hope of that dream ever being realised. Developments in the world of publishing with the coming of the age of computers and digital systems made it very unlikely that any publishing company would be prepared to invest either the time or money that would be needed to bring the Dictionary into the twenty-first century - especially as it continued to sell in its present format! He also wanted to publish a book under the title "O'r cwtsh dan stâr" ('From the closet under the stairs'), containing his works in poetry and prose over the years. He did not succeed in his lifetime but, who knows, it may yet see the light of day.

An application was made to the University of Wales in 2008 nominating Meurig Evans for an Honorary D.Litt, as a deserved honour but also as a celebration of the fifty years since the publication of *Y Geiriadur Mawr*. The nomination was supported by prominent Welsh academics amongst whom were two Emeritus Professors, namely Derec Llwyd Morgan and the late Hywel Teifi Edwards, Gareth Jones who was at that time Director of Education for Cardiganshire and Dr. Huw Walters, Head of the Bibliography of Wales Unit at the National Library of Wales. When Hywel Teifi Edwards was approached regarding the nomination his response was "My dear girl, where on earth have you been till now?". However, the University of Wales did not see fit to award him the degree, they did not even have the courtesy to inform the nominator of their decision and the information was only received following much chasing and numerous phone calls.

In December 2004, due to the deterioration of his eyesight and hearing, and following the death of his wife in 2001, Meurig Evans moved from his home in Pontlliw to Annwyl-Fan Care Home in Betws, near Ammanford. His mind was as alert and his voice as strong as ever and his memory was amazing. He was ill for the short period of a week before his death at Glangwili Hospital, Carmarthen on 2 December 2010. He was buried at Rhydygoch Cemetery, Pontarddulais on the 9 December following a service at the Chapel of Rest at Blaenau where the Reverend Lyn Rees paid him a memorable tribute reflecting the respect and admiration in which he was held by all who knew him.

Meurig Evans's main publications, apart from the dictionaries, are *Llwybrau'r Iaith* (1961), *Cerddi Diweddar Cymru* (1962, set book of poetry for many years), *Sgyrsiau Cymraeg Byw* (1966), *Cymraeg Heddiw* (1970), *Darllen a Gweddï* (1971, with Frank Price, a fellow teacher at Amman Valley Grammar School), *Dilyn Cymraeg Byw* (1974), *Rhodio Gyda'r Gymraeg* (1978), *Sylfeini'r Gymraeg* (1981). He published articles regularly in Welsh periodicals, especially *Barn*.

Author

Mair Thomas

Sources

Barn, February 2011

The Times, 10 March 2011

Personal knowledge

Additional Links

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