

DAVIES, WALTER (Gwallter Mechain; 1761 - 1849), cleric, poet, antiquary, and literary critic

Name: Walter Davies
Pseudonym: Gwallter Mechain
Date of birth: 1761
Date of death: 1849
Parent: William Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: cleric, poet, antiquary, and literary critic
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: John Thomas Owen

Born 15 July 1761, at Y Wern, near Tomen y Castell, Llanfechain, Montgomeryshire. He claimed kinship, through his father, William Davies, with the families of Nant-yr-erw-haid in Edeirnion and Kyffin of Tre-brys. Leaving the village school at 12 years of age, he learnt the craft of a cooper. When still young he joined the fraternity of the bards, and the local eisteddfodau that were then becoming more numerous provided him with opportunities to compete. His eisteddfodic successes brought him to the notice of such persons as **Owain Myfyr** (Owen Jones, 1741 - 1814) and **William Owen Pughe**, and it was with **Owain Myfyr**'s support that he went to S. Alban Hall, Oxford, in 1791, graduating from All Souls in 1795; he proceeded M.A. from Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1803. The eisteddfod had a strong hold upon him throughout his life - he was 88 when he sent an *awdl* ('Y Greadigaeth') to the Aberffraw eisteddfod of 1849. After graduating he took orders (1795) and became curate of Meifod, Montgomeryshire, and later (1799) of Ysbyty Ifan, Denbighshire. At the latter place he married the widow of Rice Price, Rhosbrynba; there were four children of the marriage. He does not seem to have resided there; one of his curates, Morgan Lloyd, published in 1830 a volume of sermons which was translated into English by **Thomas Jones** of Creaton (1752 - 1845). He received the living of Llanwyddelan in 1803 and of Manafon in 1807 (both in Montgomeryshire); at Manafon he became friendly with **John Jenkins** (Ifor Ceri, 1770 - 1829) and the Vaughans of Penmaen Dyfi. In 1837 he was preferred to the living of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, where he ended his days.

Gwallter Mechain was closely associated with the London-Welsh circles, particularly the Gwyneddigion Society; with **David Rowland** (1782 - 1820), he became instrumental in the formation of provincial eisteddfodic societies. He was also a keen competitor in the societies' eisteddfodau; at the first eisteddfod, held in Carmarthen in 1819, he won the silver trophy for his ode 'on the death of the outstanding military officer Sir Thomas Picton, noble knight from the province of Dyfed in south Wales, who was killed at the apex of the Victory in the bloody Battle of Waterloo, 18 June 1815'. (A free-metre poem by Gwallter Mechain to honour **Picton**, composed 'on the request of **[John] J[enkins]**' was included in the latter's collection '**Melus-seiniau Cymru**' (1817-25), set to a tune from Cardiganshire.)

During his long life he saw several of his works published. Among them were: *Rhyddid: Traethawd a ennillodd ariandlws y Gwyneddigion* (London, 1791); *Diwygiad neu Ddinystr*, 1798, a translation of a work by T. Bowdler; *Eglur Olygiad o'r Grefydd Gristionogol*, 1801, a translation of a work by T. Gisborne; *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of North Wales* (London, 1813), and a similar work, in two volumes, on South Wales, 1815 (Vol. I, Vol. II), which owed much to **Iolo Morganwg**; he also edited the works of the poets **Huw Morys**, 1823, and **Lewis Glyn Cothi**, 1837 - the latter in collaboration with **John Jones** (Tegid, 1792 - 1852); and further published in 1827 an edition of the metrical translation of the Psalms into Welsh made by **William Midleton**.

Though his poetry is neither here nor there, Walter Davies was a man of extraordinarily wide and varied interests; his studies ranged over medicine, astronomy, literature, genealogy, antiquities, etc. He was a great book-collector; and the National Library has more than 300 of his manuscripts. He rendered yeoman service to the eisteddfodau of his day and was in demand as an adjudicator at such gatherings. Politically he was a Whig of the Walpole school: this explains largely why, in his essay 'Rhyddid,' he failed to understand the significance of the French Revolution. He died 5 December 1849.

Authors

John Thomas Owen

Revised by the editorial team, 2024

Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

D. Silvan Evans (ed.), *Gwaith y Parch. Walter Davies (Gwallter Mechain)* (Carmarthen 1866-1868)

NLW Archives: [NLW MSS 1641-1812, 1950-52](#)

T. Morgan, *Enwogion Cymreig 1700-1900* (1907)

Awen Dyfed: sef, awdlau ac englynion a ddanfonwyd i Eisteddfod Caerfyrddin, Gorph.8, 1819; at y rhai y 'chwanegwyd hanes yr eisteddfod (Caerfyrddin 1822), pp. 1-10

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: Gwallter Mechain

Gweithiau

Walter Davies, General view of the agriculture and domestic economy of South Wales containing the counties of Brecon, Caermarthen, Cardigan, Glamorgan, Pembroke, Radnor: drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement: Vol. I

Walter Davies, General view of the agriculture and domestic economy of South Wales containing the counties of Brecon, Caermarthen, Cardigan, Glamorgan, Pembroke, Radnor: drawn up for the consideration of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement: Vol. II

Walter Davies, General view of the agriculture and domestic economy of North Wales containing the counties of Anglesey, Caernarvon, Denbigh, Flint, Meirionydd, Montgomery: drawn up and published by order of the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement

Walter Davies, *Rhyddid* (Llundain 1791)

Gwyneddigion, *Cyhoeddiadau Cymdeithas y Gwyneddigion, yn Llundain, am y flwyddyn, 1800*(Llundain 1801)

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