

EVANS, EVAN (Ieuan Fardd or Ieuan Brydydd Hir 1731 - 1788), scholar, poet, and cleric

Name: Evan Evans
Pseudonym: Ieuan Fardd, Ieuan Brydydd Hir
Date of birth: 1731
Date of death: 1788
Parent: Catherine Evans
Parent: Jenkin Evans
Gender: Male
Occupation: scholar, poet, and cleric
Area of activity: Poetry; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Aneurin Lewis

It is now usual to refer to him under the former name, as there was a much older **Ieuan Brydydd Hir**. Born 20 May 1731 at Cynhawdref farm in the parish of Lledrod, Cardiganshire, the son of Jenkin and Catherine Evans.

He was taught by **Edward Richard** at Ystrad Meurig school, but the exact dates of his stay at that school are not known. On 8 December 1750 he was entered at Merton College, Oxford; here again there is no definite evidence as to the length of his stay - he was there in 1751 and again in 1753, but left without graduating. Before going to Oxford he had made the acquaintance of **Lewis Morris**, who influenced his whole life by instructing him in the technique of poetry, kindling his interest in Welsh learning, and bringing him into contact with others who were helping to promote the literary and antiquarian renaissance in Wales in the 18th century, e.g. **Richard** and **William Morris**, **William Wynn** of Llangynhafal, and **Goronwy Owen**.

Ordained deacon at S. Asaph, 4 August 1754, and priest, 3 August 1755, he was licensed as curate of Manafon, Montgomeryshire. Some time in the first six months of 1756 he left, and spent the remainder of the year as curate of Lyminge, Kent. Early in 1757 he spent three months at Oxford copying Welsh poetry from the Red Book of Hergest, after which he was a naval chaplain for two months. Returning to Wales, he spent ten months as assistant to Samuel Griffiths, vicar of Llanafan-fawr, Brecknock. From October 1758 until October 1766 he was in North Wales, officiating as curate of Llanllechid for a year, of Trefriw and Llanrhydwyn for two years, and of Llanfair Talhaearn for the remainder of the time. During this period he was busily engaged in collecting and copying Welsh manuscripts of literary and historical interest and so came into touch with others who were doing the same thing, e.g. **David Jones** of Trefriw (1708? - 1785), **John Thomas** (1736 - 1769), **Rhys Jones** of Blaenau, Richard Roberts, translator of *Y Credadyn Bucheddol*, 1768, **Robert Thomas** (died 1774), and **John Powell** (died 1767). He also formed an acquaintance with those English antiquaries who were interested in Welsh history and literature, e.g. **Daines Barrington**, who encouraged him to begin translating Welsh poetry and took specimens of his work to Thomas Gray, and Thomas Percy, who corresponded with him for years. It was the encouragement he received from these Englishmen which chiefly induced Ieuan to publish the work which established his fame as a Welsh scholar, *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards*, 1764. In this volume he made a systematic and remarkably successful effort to interpret the work of the poets of the Age of the Princes and to give some idea of the history of Welsh poetry from the 6th to the 16th century. This, to some extent, satisfied the cravings of English antiquaries for enlightenment on the literature of Wales, and provided new material for the leaders of the Celtic movement in English literature towards the end of the 18th century.

He left Llanfair Talhaearn in October 1766, and from November 1766 until May 1767 officiated as a curate in churches near his home - Lledrod, Llanwnnws, and Capel Ieuan (Ystrad Meurig). He then crossed over to England, where he was curate at Appledore, Kent, for a month, and from July 1767 until the beginning of 1768 at Newick, Sussex. Early in April 1768 he enlisted, but within four days the military authorities, having discovered that he was a cleric, discharged him with the comment that he showed signs of mental instability. After a short stay at home he again became a curate, this time of Llanvihangel Crucorney near Abergavenny, where he remained until the early part of 1769. He then returned to North Wales, becoming curate successively of Llanystumdwy (1769-70), Llandecwyn and Llanfihangel-y-traethau (1770-1), Llanberis (1771-2), and Towyn, Meirionnydd, from the end of 1772 until the early part of 1777. From 1771 to 1778 he was helped by **Sir Watkin Williams Wynn II**, who gave him a pension and every opportunity of using the splendid library at Wynnstay. In 1772 he published *The Love of our Country*, a poem in English; in 1773, *Rhybudd Cyfr-drist i'r Diofal a Difraw*, a booklet comprising a short address and a sermon; in 1776, *Casgliad o Bregethau*, two volumes containing twenty-eight sermons translated from English. Thanks to his connection with **Sir Watkin** and his propinquity to Hengwrt and Peniarth, he also copied and studied a vast number of manuscripts and had important materials ready for publication. But he did not proceed further in the matter. Instead, he spent six months in 1777-8 being taught Hebrew and Arabic by the tutor at the Presbyterian Academy, Carmarthen; whereupon **Sir Watkin**, angered by his failure to publish the results of his scholarly researches, stopped his pension.

The last ten years of his life were completely disorganized; apart from occasional visits to Aberystwyth and Carmarthen, and wandering up and down the country living on the charity of his friends, he spent most of his time at Cyn-hawdref, where his mother still lived. He tried to start a school at Aberystwyth, but this was a failure; it is also said that he worked for a time, about 1780, as a curate at Bassaleg, Monmouth, when he composed the 'Englynion i Lys Ifor Hael,' the best and most famous of his poetic works. All this time he was making constant appeals to the Welsh gentry and to the learned societies of the day for funds to enable him to publish the contents of some of the more important manuscripts he had collected in the course of his life. All his appeals fell on deaf ears. To some extent it is probable that he himself was to blame for this, because throughout his life he had the besetting weakness of his generation and drank heavily. This caused him to lose the confidence of those who might have helped him and was doubtless the reason why he failed to get advancement in the Church. But it must also be remembered that the Church authorities in Wales did not regard with any favour those who genuinely sought to promote Welsh learning. This injustice angered Ieuan, who condemned it in a long and bitter essay on 'the Anglian bishops,' as he termed them. It is true that this essay was never published, but Ieuan undoubtedly suffered because of his opinions.

Paul Panton and **Thomas Pennant** were very kind to him in those last years of poverty and disillusion, and arranged for annual subscriptions to be raised in North Wales for his support. In 1787, when he perceived that his health was failing and that he could no longer engage in serious study, he sold his manuscripts to **Paul Panton**. They were sent to Plas-gwyn, Anglesey, at the end of December 1787, and later extensive [and unacknowledged, as far as Ieuan was concerned] use was made of them by the editors of *The Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, 1801-7. Ieuan died at Cynhawdref, 4 August 1788.

Ieuan Fardd was undoubtedly the greatest Welsh scholar of his age: he knew more than any of his contemporaries about the contents of the Welsh manuscripts in the various private libraries, and he was also acquainted with the work of the great Welsh scholars from the time of the Renaissance onwards. He realized that the chief need of Welsh scholarship in his time was the publication of the texts of the principal manuscripts dealing with the history and literature of Wales. He himself wished to do this, and had the necessary ability to carry out the work. He did not, however, receive the necessary support. For all that, and in spite of great disadvantages, the brilliant work he actually accomplished has earned him a position of unquestioned importance in the world of Welsh scholarship.

Author

Aneurin Lewis, (1924 - 1989)

Sources

D. Silvan Evans, *Gwaith y Parchedig Evan Evans (Ieuan Brydydd Hir)* (Caernarfon 1876)

Panton Manuscripts at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth in N.L.W.

personal research

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