

## EVANS, JOHN GWENOGVRYN (1852 - 1930), palaeographer

**Name:** John Gwenogvryn Evans

**Date of birth:** 1852

**Date of death:** 1930

**Spouse:** Edith Evans (née Hunter)

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** palaeographer

**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Printing and Publishing; Religion; Scholarship and Languages

**Author:** Evan David Jones

was born at Ffynnon-felfed, Llanybyther, Carmarthenshire, 20 March 1852, but his family removed in about a year to Llanwenog, Cardiganshire - later, he coined his second name in honour of that parish. At 16, having been at various schools in the district, he was apprenticed to his uncle David Rees, a grocer at Lampeter; but at 18, following an accident, he went to school once more (under [Gwilym Marles](#) at Llandysul and [Alcwyn C. Evans](#) at Carmarthen), and entered the Presbyterian College at Carmarthen in 1872, remaining there till 1876 (apart from an interval in 1874-5 as assistant in a school in England). Ordained to the Unitarian ministry in August 1876, he was pastor at Carmarthen (1876-7) and at Preston (1877-80), but early in 1880 loss of voice compelled him to give up the ministry - attacks of typhoid fever in early life had undermined his health, which throughout the greater part of his life continued to be precarious; his long residence at Oxford, where he lived for more than twenty years from 1880, was interrupted by a voyage to Australia and a sojourn at Davos. Attendance at ([Sir John Rhys](#)'s lectures on the *Mabinogion*, at Oxford, inspired him to study and transcribe the 'Red Book of Hergest,' and from this study of old manuscripts (a by-product of which was his collection of Welsh proverbs, awarded the prize at the Liverpool national eisteddfod of 1884 and printed in its *Transactions* in 1885) arose the idea of a series of 'diplomatic' editions of mediaeval Welsh texts, the first volume of which appeared in 1887 - the nominal co-operation of [Rhys](#) was acknowledged on the title-page. The University of Oxford conferred an honorary M.A. upon him in 1887 (he was to become D.Litt., *honoris causa*, of Oxford in 1903 and of Wales in 1905). In 1893 he was granted a Civil List pension of £200, and in 1894 he was appointed inspector of Welsh manuscripts for the Historical Manuscripts Commission - his *Reports* on these manuscripts (two volumes in seven parts, 1898-1910) are indispensable. His work as inspector further enabled him to take a leading part in the negotiations which led to the purchase (1905) by [Sir John Williams](#) of the Peniarth manuscripts, and so to determine the location of the National Library of Wales, of whose court and council he became member as a nominee of the Privy Council; he was also a J.P. (Cardiganshire) and a member of the court and council of the University College of Wales. He had by that time retired to 'Tremvan,' Llanbedrog, Caernarfonshire, where he went on printing old Welsh texts on a small hand-press; but in his later years he was interested more in interpreting than in reproducing texts, and his theories (represented by his drastic revision and translation of the 'Aneirin' and 'Taliesin' poems) met with little acceptance among scholars (see *Cymm.*, 1918, and his reply in *Cymm.*, 1924). He had married (1877) Edith (died 1923), daughter of principal Hunter of Carmarthen. He died 25 March 1930, and was buried in a rock-grave which he had prepared for himself and his wife near their house; two sons and a daughter survived him.

The bibliography of his series of Welsh texts has not been fully worked out, but the following tentative list may be offered - the dates in [ ] representing discrepancies between imprints and actual publication: (1) *The Text of the Mabinogion ... from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887); (2) *Facsimile of the Black Book of Carmarthen* (Oxford, 1908); (3) *The Text of the Bruts* (Oxford, 1890); (4) *The Text of the Book of Llan Dav* (Oxford, 1893); (5) *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Pwllheli, 1906; students' ed., 1907); (6) *Facsimile of the Chirk Codex* (Llanbedrog, 1909 [ 1920 ]); (7) *The White Book Mabinogion* (Pwllheli, 1907 [ 1909 ]); (8) *The Text of the Book of Aneirin* (Pwllheli, 1908); *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Aneirin* (Pwllheli, 1908 [ 1910 ]); (9) *The Text of the Book of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog, 1910); *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog, 1910 [ 1916 ]); (9b) *Poems from the Book of Taliesin, amended and translated* (Llanbedrog, 1915 [ 1916 ]); (10) *Kym-deithas Amlyn ac Amic* (Llanbedrog, 1909); (11) *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest* (Llanbedrog, 1911); *The Book of Aneirin revised and translated*, vol. ii (Llanbedrog, 1922 [ 1924 ]; students' ed., Aberystwyth, 1934 [sic]); *Poetry by Medieval Welsh Bards*, vol. ii (Llanbedrog, 1926. (In nos. (1), (3), (4), the name of [John Rhys](#) also appears on the title-page.) He also planned a series of 'Welsh Classics for the People,' but he issued only *Llyvyr Iob* (Oxford, 1888) and *Pedeir Kainc y Mabinogi. Breuddwyd Maxen. Lludd a Llevelys* (Oxford, 1897, 1905). *Oll Synnwyr Pen*, designed for this series, was published by the Guild of Graduates at Bangor, 1902. After his death the stock of his publications was transferred to the National Library, and his manuscripts and a selection of his books were deposited there.

### Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

### Sources

*Who's who?*

*Yr Ymfynydd*, 1876-7, 1893-4

obituary biographies in the

*The Welsh Gazette*

*Western Mail*

*The Times*

and *The Inquirer*

W. Ll. Davies, *The National Library of Wales* (Aberystwyth 1937), 24-7

*The National Library of Wales Journal*, i, 194-243

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Gwenogvryn Evans](#)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [J. Gwenogvryn Evans Family Papers](#)

VIAF: [54233126](#)

Wikidata: [Q6236665](#)

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