

NICOLAS, DAFYDD (1705? - 1774), poet

Name: Dafydd Nicolas
Date of birth: 1705?
Date of death: 1774
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet
Area of activity: Poetry
Author: Griffith John Williams

T. C. Evans (Cadrawd) thought that he was the man of the same name who was born in Llangynwyd, Glamorganshire, in 1705. According to Cadrawd, the older people spoke of him as one who had kept school in the parish. Iolo Morganwg listed him with the literary men who were self-educated. He lived afterwards in Ystradyfodwg and perhaps in Glynccorwg and Cwm-gwrach. It is quite possible that he was an itinerant schoolmaster at that time. Towards the middle of the century (or, perhaps, before that) he came to the notice of the Williams family of Aberpergwm, and that mansion was his home thenceforward until he died. It was maintained during the last century that he was kept there as 'family bard' - the last in Wales, so it was said; but William Davies of Cringell (1756 - 1823) said in 1795-6 that he was private tutor to the family. He earned a high reputation as a classical scholar and he translated some of Homer's *Iliad* into Welsh - at least, that was the tradition in the Neath valley. Iolo Morganwg also claimed that Nicolas knew Latin, Greek, and French, and that he was the greatest poet among those whom Iolo knew. Although he paid little attention to poetry in the strict metres it is evident that he was a rather important figure in the literary revival in Glamorgan. It is his poems in free metre which give him his place as a bard. Two lyrics are attributed to him in *Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morgannwg*, 1844, by Maria Jane Williams, songs to be sung to old and later airs. He possessed a special gift for this kind of work, and it would not be inappropriate to describe him as the Ceiriog of the 18th century. Here is a lyric poet, one who could hear the music of words, a poet who delighted in the liveliness of his measures. He was undoubtedly the best bard in Glamorgan in the 18th cent, before the time of Iolo Morganwg. It is generally said that he sent to Edward Evan (1716 - 1798) a letter in which the technique of composing in the free metres was discussed, but it is fairly certain that it was Iolo who wrote that letter. He was buried at Aberpergwm in 1774.

Author

Emeritus Professor Griffith John Williams, (1892 - 1963)

Sources

- T. C. Evans *History of Llangynwyd Parish, with Illustrations* (Llanelly 1887), 186-8
D. Rhys Phillips, *The History of the Vale of Neath* (Swansea 1925), 1925, 546-53
G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (1948), 1948, 241-3, 290-300

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