

DAVIES, JAMES EIRIAN (1918-1998), poet and minister

Name: James Eirian Davies
Date of birth: 1918
Date of death: 1998
Spouse: Jennie Eirian Davies (née Howells)
Child: Guto Davies
Child: Siôn Eirian Davies
Parent: Rachel Davies (née Davies)
Parent: David Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet and minister
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion
Author: D. Ben Rees

Eirian Davies was born on 28 May 1918, the son of Rachel and Dafydd Davies, both natives of Brechfa who had settled at a farm called Llain near Nantgaredig. His father was prominent in the religious life of the region and an elder at the local Presbyterian chapel. Eirian was educated at Nantgaredig Primary School and the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Carmarthen. The tragedy of losing his brother Emrys, who drowned when both were swimming in the river Towy near Llain, affected him deeply, and in the crisis he derived considerable comfort from his chapel community, which eventually influenced his choice of a career in the ministry.

He spent a year preparing at Trevecka College, and then went on to read for a degree at the University College of Wales, Swansea. He began to make a name for himself as a promising Welsh-language poet in this period, winning the Crown and the Chair twice in the Intercollegiate Eisteddfod and receiving commendation in **Dewi Emrys's** poetry column in the weekly newspaper *Y Cymro*. Some of his early poems were published in the new literary magazine, *Y Fflam* in 1946, and Keidrych Rhys published his first volume of poetry, *Awen y Wawr* in 1947. As a student he came into contact with the brilliant philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was on the staff of the Philosophy Department. They became close friends and Wittgenstein stayed with him at his home in Nantgaredig. From Swansea, he pursued theological training at the United Theological College in Aberystwyth. He became well known in the rural areas of Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire as a popular student-preacher, although unconventional in his style and his dress. Ordained as a Methodist minister in 1949, he ministered in three pastorates, Hirwaun and Penderyn, Cynon Valley (1949-1954), Brynaman (1955-1961) and Bethesda, Mold and Nercwys in Flintshire (1962-1981).

Before beginning his ministry, in 1949 he married **Jennie Howells** of Llanpumsaint, a talented young woman who was very active in Welsh cultural circles. **Jennie Eirian Davies** (1925-1982) first became nationally known when she stood as a parliamentary candidate for Plaid Cymru in the 1955 General Election and again in a by-election in 1957. Her husband supported her in this and in all the other campaigns she undertook on behalf of the Welsh language and the religious heritage. They had two sons, Siôn Eirian (1954) who became a full-time writer, and Guto (1958).

Eirian and his wife **Jennie** had a great deal of influence in every aspect of their ministry, but in particular in Mold. Bethesda chapel became a centre for Welsh speakers in the town and the congregation were enriched by his guidance in the worship and his heartfelt sermons. He was blessed with a melodious voice and conveyed his message with clarity. He communicated effectively with the younger generation, and encouraged many who recited and wrote poetry by his adjudications at national and local eisteddfodau throughout Wales. After moving to Mold Eirian Davies was one of the founders and editor of a magazine for young Welsh Nonconformists of all denominations entitled *Byw*. On behalf of Modern Welsh Publications of Liverpool he edited a series of contemporary Welsh poets for which he persuaded **Ben T. Hopkins** to publish his work. Eirian Davies won the Arts Council of Wales Prize in 1975 and 1984 as well as scholarships in 1983 and 1989.

He published three more books of poetry, *Cân Galed* (1967), *Cyfrol o Gerddi* (1985) and *Awen yr Hwyr* (1991), and a collection of poems for children, *Darnau Difyr* (1989). He edited the volume of poetry by the **Reverend G. Ceri Jones**, *Dilliau'r Dolydd* (1965) and a volume of sermons by the Reverend D. Cwyfan Hughes, *Iaith Amlwch* in 1969.

He assisted his wife in her role as editor of the weekly magazine *Y Faner* from 1979 to 1982. Her death in such sad circumstances in 1982 was very difficult for him to bear, and he soon retired from the ministry, moving to Llangunnor near Carmarthen to be near his sister Aeres Evans, and his sons and their families in Glamorganshire. The last years of his life were spent in a residential home in Ffairfach, near Llandeilo, where he died on 5 July 1998. The funeral took place on 11 July and his ashes were dispersed in the pool where his brother drowned. A plaque was placed to remember him at the chapel in Nantgaredig in 2004, and his colleague, the Reverend W. I. Cynwil Williams delivered a memorable address on the occasion.

Author

D. Ben Rees

Sources

W. I. Cynwil Williams, 'Y Parchedig James Eirian Davies, BA' in *Blwyddiadur a Dyddiadur Eglwys Bresbyteriaidd Cymru*, 1999, t 64

Personal knowledge

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Eirian Davies](#)

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