

DAVIES, JENNIE EIRIAN (1925-1982), journalist

Name: Jennie Eirian Davies
Date of birth: 1925
Date of death: 1982
Spouse: James Eirian Davies
Child: Guto Davies
Child: Siôn Eirian Davies
Parent: Jane Howells
Parent: David Howells
Gender: Female
Occupation: journalist
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Elin Angharad

Jennie Howells was born on 6 February 1925, one of six children of Jane and David Howells, Waunrhelfa, Llanpumsaint, Carmarthenshire. Two of her brothers, Richard and Dewi, and a sister Mary died young of tuberculosis. Jennie was educated at Llanpumsaint Elementary School, Carmarthen County School for Girls and the University of Wales, Aberystwyth where she gained first class honours in Welsh. She then went on to complete a teaching course with a distinction. She married the **Reverend James Eirian Davies** (1918-1998), a Methodist minister and poet, on 19 November 1949 and they had two sons, Siôn Eirian (born 1954) and Guto Davies (born 1958). The family lived in Hirwaun (1949-54), Ammanford (1954-62) and Mold (1962-82).

Jennie Eirian was the first female candidate for Plaid Cymru in Carmarthenshire and she made quite an impression in the General Election of 1955 when she gained 7.8% of the vote, and in the by-election of 1957 when she increased her share of the vote to 11.5%. This was a significant step for the party since Carmarthenshire was regarded as a Liberal stronghold, and it can be seen to have prepared the way for **Gwynfor Evans's** win in 1966.

Jennie published three books for children, *Bili Bawd* (1961), *Guto* (1961) and *Fflwffen* (1963) and was also the editor of *Trysorfa'r Plant* (The Children's Treasury), a magazine which she renamed *Antur* (Adventure) in July 1966. This gave her a chance to emphasise the meaning and importance of a Christian life: 'adventure, initiative, danger, romance ... The cover image by **Hywel Harries** portrays two youngsters ready for an ADVENTURE. Their eyes are looking upwards - the aim is always upwards. They have the Bible in hand, this will be their map for the journey.' This Christian idealism, the conviction that we must always aim high, was essential to Jennie Eirian's life and work.

Jennie received a very special honour in 1965 when she won the Welsh Woman of the Year award at the James Pantyfedwen Family Eisteddfod in Pontrhydfendigaid. For this competition the public were asked to choose from a list of names and three were shortlisted, Mrs Tegryn Davies (Aber-porth), Mrs Jennie Eirian Davies (Mold) and **Dr Kate Roberts** (Denbigh). The audience at the Eisteddfod decided that Jennie Eirian was the worthy winner.

Jennie was responsible for a radio and television column in *Y Cymro* newspaper between 1976-8 where she voiced her concerns on the lack of Welsh language broadcasting hours and her disappointment when programmes through the medium of Welsh were what she called 'cawl eildwym' (rehash). During this period she also lectured in the Welsh Department at Cartrefle College, Wrexham. In 1978 she became National President of Merched y Wawr and she was invested at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff the same year.

Her appointment as editor of *Y Ffener* in 1979 was in many ways the high point of Jennie Eirian's career. This post gave her the opportunity to voice her opinions on current affairs, 'to weigh things up in the light of her beliefs,' as **Gwilym Prys Davies** put it. As editor she gave a platform to a wide range of political and social ideas and encouraged debate. And most important of all, the weekly national magazine gave Jennie herself a chance to convey her message to a wider audience and to make a more lasting impression than she had been able to do in chapel, Merched y Wawr and on television. But the editorship brought her a mixture of both joy and grief. Although her tireless work was appreciated, many were annoyed by her editorial style and her personal opinions on events during the turbulent years of 1979-82. This resulted in Jennie receiving numerous letters from well-known individuals in Wales voicing their opposition. Jennie's unyielding principles certainly contributed towards her breakdown, but the main cause of opposition towards her was her stance on the issue of the Welsh-language television channel. Like **Jac L. Williams**, Jennie believed that putting all Welsh programmes on a single channel would have a damaging effect on the language, and her view represented a challenge to **Gwynfor Evans** who had the support of the great majority of Welsh nationalists at the time.

Jennie was a perfectionist; she aimed for discipline and the highest professional standards and thorough preparation was key. Of course, in an imperfect world one must compromise, and this she was not prepared to do. She had an agonising concern and sense of duty towards Wales and the Welsh language, but in an unconventional way, and in the end this alienated her fellow nationalists. These tensions mounted and contributed towards her final tragedy.

Jennie Eirian died on 6 May 1982 aged 57 and the coroner recorded an open verdict. Her funeral was held at Bethesda Chapel, Mold on 12 May 1982.

Author

Elin Angharad

Sources

Jennie Eirian Davies, 'Golygyddol', *Antur*, July 1966

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Tape 'Dadorchuddio Cofeb Jennie Eirian', Cell E123004160/01 (contribution by Gwilym Prys Davies)

'Jennie o Gymru', documentary by Arwel Ellis Owen (Cambrensis Cyf.), S4C, 26 February 2008

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Gwyn Erfyl, *Cyfról Deyrnged Jennie Eirian* (Caernarfon 1985)

Elin Angharad Owen, 'Bywyd a Gyrfa Jennie Eirian Davies 1925-1982' (MPhil thesis, 2014)

Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Jennie Eirian Davies. The Wales Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Un o'r Sir ar ran y Sir. Jennie Eirian Davies. The Welsh Candidate](#)

NLW Archives: [Etholiad Sir Gaerfyrddin, Mai 26, 1955. Jennie Eirian Davies](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Jennie Eirian Davies](#)

Additional Links

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