

## DAVIES, ANEIRIN TALFAN (1909 - 1980), poet, literary critic, broadcaster and publisher

**Name:** Aneurin Talfan Davies

**Date of birth:** 1909

**Date of death:** 1980

**Spouse:** Mary Anne Davies (née Evans)

**Child:** Elinor Talfan Davies

**Child:** Geraint Talfan Davies

**Child:** Owen Talfan Davies

**Parent:** Alys Davies (née Jones)

**Parent:** William Talfan Davies

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** poet, literary critic, broadcaster and publisher

**Area of activity:** Poetry; Literature and Writing; Performing Arts; Printing and Publishing

**Author:** Alan Llwyd

Aneurin Talfan Davies was born on 11 May 1909 in Dre-fach Felindre, Carmarthenshire, the eldest son of the Rev. William Talfan Davies (1873-1938), from Ysbyty Ystwyth, Ceredigion, and Alys (née Jones, 1878-1948). His younger brother was Alun Talfan Davies (1913-2000). In 1911, when Aneurin was two years old, the family moved to Gorseinon near Swansea, where William Talfan Davies was appointed minister of the Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Libanus.

Aneurin attended Gowerton Grammar School, but left school at the age of 14 to begin an apprenticeship as a pharmacist, initially in Gorseinon, and then at a pharmacy in Temple Street, Swansea, before moving to London to complete his apprenticeship. After spending a fortnight in the enormous International Pharmacy in King's Cross, he got a more permanent post in a pharmacy in Palmers Green, where he remained throughout his time in London, with responsibility for three of the owner's shops, in Kenton, Harrow-on-the-Hill and Watford. He was a member of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in Charing Cross, and it was in classes held at the chapel that his interest in literature and theology was stimulated. He lived for a time in Swiss Avenue, Watford, where he prepared the first issue of *Heddiw*, a small magazine established by Aneurin and his brother Alun, and edited by Aneurin and [Dafydd Jenkins](#). *Heddiw* ran for six years, 1936-1942, and published work by some of the foremost poets of the twentieth century, such as [Gwenallt](#), [R. Williams Parry](#) and [Waldo Williams](#).

On 1 June 1936 he married Mary Anne Evans (1912-1971), a teacher from Barry, and they had two sons, Owen (born 1938) and Geraint (born 1943), and one daughter, Elinor (born 1946). He left London in 1937, and opened a pharmacist's shop at 9 Heathfield Road, Swansea. His name, Aneurin Davies, was prominent on the shop-front, with 'Aneurin ap Talfan' in brackets below, and the sign *fferyllydd* (pharmacist) in the window. His shop and home were completely destroyed by one of the German bombing raids on Swansea in 1941. Aneurin and his family then moved to Tŷ-croes in Carmarthenshire, and he joined the staff of the BBC, initially as a part-time news reader, and then as a producer of radio talks and features. He

returned to London for a while to follow his new career in broadcasting, and at the end of the war he joined the staff of the BBC in Cardiff. He produced several radio talks by [Dylan Thomas](#), providing the poet with some much-needed income. Some of those talks are included in *Quite Early One Morning* (1944). He was a personal friend of [Dylan Thomas](#), and in his book *Dylan: Druid of the Broken Body* (1964), he maintained that [Dylan](#) was essentially a religious poet. Aneurin Talfan Davies himself was a committed Christian, and in 1944 he was received into the Church in Wales.

He was also a personal friend of the poet and artist [David Jones](#), another contributor to his radio talk series, and he published their correspondence in the collection *David Jones: Letters to a Friend* (1979).

In 1951 he began commissioning long poems for radio, and one of these was the masterpiece by [James Kitchener Davies](#), 'Sŏn y Gwynt Sy'n Chwythu'. In the same year he established another literary magazine, *Llafar*, with the aim of publishing radio talks, stories and poetry. Throughout his career as broadcaster and writer he sought to combine the two worlds, in the belief that the media - and radio in particular - had a key role to play in promoting the literature and culture of Wales. Another volume edited by him was *Myfi Sy'n Magu'r Baban*, a collection of feature programmes (1951). In 1966 he was appointed Head of Programmes at BBC Wales, and continued to support Welsh and English-language writers. Although the Welsh language was very close to his heart, he did a great deal to bridge the gap between Wales's two languages and cultures.

In 1940, together with his brother Alun, who later became a successful barrister, Aneurin Talfan Davies began publishing a series of small booklets called *Llyfrau'r Dryw*, of which a total of 44 were published between 1940 and 1952. This venture was the foundation of *Llyfrau'r Dryw*, one of Wales's most important publishers in the second half of the twentieth century, although its output - by then known as the Christopher Davies Press - lessened from 1980 onwards, and it now no longer exists. *Llyfrau'r Dryw* was responsible for the successful 'Crwydro Cymru' series of travel books, to which Aneurin himself contributed three excellent volumes, *Crwydro Sir Gâr* (1955) and *Crwydro Bro Morgannwg* in two volumes (1972 and 1976). In 1962 the two brothers established a new Welsh magazine, *Barn*. Aneurin was its editor for a while, and contributed a regular column, 'Ar Ymyl y Ddalen' ('In the Margin'). His last column was published in the July/August 1980 issue of *Barn*, shortly after his death.

Aneurin Talfan Davies was a multitalented writer with wide-ranging interests and tastes, and he was also an original and astute critic. He published a number of studies on major authors of the twentieth century, and the most complex of modernists. Amongst these are *Yr Alltud* (1944), an introduction to the work of James Joyce, *Y Tir Diffaith* (1946), a study of T. S. Eliot, and Eliot is discussed further in *Eliot, Pwshcin, Poe* (1948). He came to realize that Wales has a rich literary and Christian heritage, which he called 'yr etifeddiaeth dda' ('the good inheritance'), in a chapter in his book *Munudau gyda'r beirdd* (1954) and in a complete volume, *Yr Etifeddiaeth Dda* (1967). His Welsh prose style was notable for its refined elegance.

Aneurin Talfan Davies was also a skilful poet. In 1937 he published a volume of poems jointly with another poet, W. H. Reese (1908-1997) from Blaenau Ffestiniog. [William Griffiths](#), head of the Welsh section of Foyle's bookshop in London, proposed to him that he should publish a collection of his poems, and when Aneurin said he did not have enough to make up a volume [Griffiths](#) suggested that he invite W. H. Reese to join him. At the National Eisteddfod in Caernarfon in 1935 a poem by Aneurin was awarded the second prize in the vers libre competition, with W. H. Reese third, and first prize going to Gwilym R. Jones (1903-1993). The vers libre was an unfamiliar metrical form in Wales at that time, and the collection in *Y Ddau Lais* ('The Two Voices') seemed foreign to readers in terms of form and content, consisting mainly of challenging poems which sought to interpret the complexities of modern industrial and urban existence. In 1975 he published a volume of his own poems, *Diannerch Erchwyn a Cherddi Eraill*. This is a personal and intensely meditative collection, in contrast to the earlier socio-political themes, and includes a number of religious poems. He also translated Christina Rossetti's long poem, *Goblin Market*, into Welsh under the title *Marchnad y Corachod* (1947).

Owen Talfan Davies was killed in a car accident in Scotland on 24 October 1963, and T. Glynne Davies (1926-1988) composed a radio poem, 'Yr Hedydd yn yr Haul' ('The Skylark in the Sun'), in his memory. Aneurin Talfan Davies also wrote two poems in memory of his son, which are in his collection *Diannerch Erchwyn a Cherddi Eraill*, 'Nadolig 1970' and the second part of the short poem, 'Hen ac Ifanc', where Owen is described as 'Hoywlanc lluniaidd a llawen' ('a handsome, joyous and spritely lad').

To celebrate and preserve the 'good inheritance' he edited and wrote numerous volumes, such as *Gwŷr Llên* (1948), a collection of critical essays on the works of a range of prominent authors of the first half of the twentieth century by various critics, and collections of essays on poets and prose writers, and on theology, such as *Sylwadau* (1951), *Astudio Byd* (1967) and *Gyda Gwawr y Bore* (1970). He was interested in cyghanedd and the traditional metres as well, and edited two anthologies of strict-metre poetry, *Blodeugerdd o Englynion* (1950) and *Englynion a Chywyddau* (1958).

He was awarded the degree of MA by the University of Wales in 1958, and in 1970 he received an OBE.

Aneirin Talfan Davies died of a stroke on 14 July 1980 in Priory Hospital, Carmarthen, and he was buried in the cemetery of Llandaff Cathedral.

## Author

Alan Llwyd

## Sources

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Derec Llwyd Morgan, '[Davies, Aneirin Talfan](#)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)

## Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Aneirin Talfan Davies](#)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Papurau Aneirin Talfan Davies](#)

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