

EVANS, SAMUEL ISLWYN (1914 - 1999), educationalist

Name: Samuel Islwyn Evans
Date of birth: 1914
Date of death: 1999
Spouse: Mary Ellen Evans (née Williams)
Child: Eryl Cydwel Evans
Child: Erfyl Dilwyn Evans
Child: Wyneira Delyth Watts (née Evans)
Parent: Samuel Evans
Parent: Mary Ann Evans (née Walters)
Gender: Male
Occupation: educationalist
Area of activity: Education
Author: Dafydd Johnston

Islwyn Evans was born in Cydweli on 29 December 1914, the third of twelve children of Samuel Evans (1885-1958), coal miner, and his wife Mary Ann (née Walters, 1886-1942).

He received his primary education at Ysgol y Castell, Cydweli, and in 1926 he won a scholarship to Llanelli County Intermediate School, but left in the first year after being shamed for his poverty by a teacher. For the next two years he assiduously avoided the truant officer until he was old enough to join his father and eldest brother down the mines at Mynydd y Garreg. During this time he also attended technical college in Llanelli. In 1935 he secured a miner's welfare scholarship which enabled him to study at the University of Sheffield. The war interrupted his studies, and in 1940 he enlisted in the RAF, serving as Flight Lieutenant in Iceland and Northern Ireland.

He met his wife, Mary Ellen Williams (1919-1993), an RAF nurse from T Croes, Ammanford, in London. They married in 1944, and had three children, Eryl Cydwel (b. 1946), Erfyl Dilwyn (b. 1950), and Wyneira Delyth (b. 1955).

Islwyn returned to Sheffield University in 1946 and completed a first class honours in applied science followed by a doctoral program. While at the university he was employed as a lecturer at the Rotherham College of Technology. He gained his PhD in 1950 with a thesis on 'Radiation from Non-luminous Gases' which was subsequently published in the *Bulletin* of the British Coal Utilisation Research Association.

In 1952, he was appointed area chief scientist with the National Coal Board in the Nottingham area. Three years later he was promoted to the position of divisional chief scientist in charge of the scientific operations of twelve of the board's areas. In addition he had responsibility for supervising a large research laboratory with several major investigative projects underway relating to the coal industry. In 1959, he was made Fellow of the Institute of Physics and a Fellow of the Institute of Engineering.

In 1961, he accepted the position of Director of the South Australian Institute of Technology and Dean of the Faculty of Technology and Applied Science at Adelaide University, and moved with his family to Adelaide, Australia.

The South Australian Institute of Technology had only a year before been known as the School of Mines. It was a technical college operating from a single campus and was mainly geared to vocational subjects for which certificates and diplomas were awarded. Islwyn Evans inherited an organisation with an archaic administrative framework and no sound academic structure. He set about streamlining academic procedures and establishing an effective administration in order to ensure that the new institute could meet the needs of the community, business and industry. Professional programs hitherto provided by local colleges were taken over by the institute, and new courses such as pharmacy, engineering and architecture that had an applied aspect were established. In order to serve businesses and students in outlying communities, other campuses were opened in regional centres in 1962 and 1971. In addition, a technology park was established where tenant firms would be affiliated with the institute so that academic knowledge and research outcomes could be progressed to viable commercial products. At the time this was an innovative concept. Under his stewardship the institute's academic role and standing in the community gained favourable comparison with universities, and in 1973 it was given the power to grant both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

Islwyn's attention was drawn to the need for aboriginal people to have their own community workers. Consequently, in 1973 a course in community development for aboriginals was created. This was the first of its kind in Australia and proved to be such a success that it was taken up by other centres for higher learning.

In 1978, Islwyn Evans retired having transformed a technical college into an influential tertiary institution that served as a model for developing educative bodies. The institute had become recognised internationally for its capacity to serve and relate to the community through employing its unique form of education while maintaining its mission as a 'people's university'. In 1981 he was awarded the Order of Australia in recognition of his contribution to education.

Although gifted in English expression Islwyn would always prefer to speak Welsh. In recognition of his attachment to Welsh-language culture he was inducted into the Gorsedd y Beirdd at the National Eisteddfod in 1982. He took the bardic name Mabgwenllian in reference to his birthplace where [Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd](#) led the Welsh against the Normans. Although educated in the sciences he had a love of classical literature and would often quote poetry, particularly Shakespeare. He enjoyed the great voices and would listen enraptured to the choirs of the valleys. He avidly followed the fortunes of Welsh rugby and had himself played for Cydweli and Sheffield University.

Islwyn was a short man with broad shoulders. This coupled with a stern visage gave the impression of immense inner and physical strength. His strength was evident when, after moving to Adelaide he single-handedly dug out a large swimming pool for his family. In his fifties a black spot was found on his lungs and an operation removed one half of his right lung. But what was thought to be tuberculosis was coal dust from his early years in the mines. It was this dust that also marked his hands and arms - natural tattoos from the coal that had entered the cuts and gashes acquired whilst underground.

Islwyn Evans died in Adelaide on 5 May 1999. He was cremated, half of his ashes being interred in Adelaide and the other half taken back to his beloved homeland, to be placed in the grave of his mother and father in Cydweli.

Author

Dafydd Johnston

Sources

Personal information from Eryl Evans

Anneli Aeckens, *The People's University* (1989)

Debrett's Handbook of Australia, 1989

Additional Links

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