

JENKINS, EVAN (1794 - 1849), cleric and schoolmaster

Name: Evan Jenkins
Date of birth: 1794
Date of death: 1849
Spouse: Eliza Jenkins (née Jay)
Child: Charles Edward Jenkins
Child: Helen Eliza Jenkins
Child: Alexander Livingston Jenkins
Child: Mary Jane Wilhelmina Jenkins
Child: Evan Jenkins
Child: John Card Jenkins
Child: Mina Janet Jenkins
Parent: Evan Jenkins
Parent: Elizabeth Jenkins (née Davies)
Gender: Male
Occupation: cleric and schoolmaster
Area of activity: Religion; Education
Author: Monica Kendall

Evan Jenkins was born on 10 November 1794 at Penycastell near Llangeitho in Cardiganshire, the youngest of three children of Evan Jenkins, a tenant farmer, and his wife Elizabeth (née Davies, 1760-1822). Penycastell in the parish of Llanbadarn Odwyn was part of the estate of the **Powell family** of Nanteos.

His older brother David (1787-1854) taught Classics in Chelsea for three years and was ordained in July 1810 as deacon to Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, but the original intention was probably to give him a title for orders to nearby Hartshead, Patrick Brontë's new living, where David officiated at first. He and Patrick Brontë were close colleagues for two years. David was later to preside as incumbent at Pudsey for over forty years and was visited on several occasions by his younger brother. Their sister Mary married a Calvinistic Methodist, Moses Roderick, and the farm remained in her family until the twentieth century. There are no records of contact between the Anglican brothers who left Wales and their Methodist sister.

Evan's father died when he was twelve, as indicated by the short will made on 8 December 1806. As the third son, owning no land of his own, farmer Evan had sunk below the status of gentleman claimed by his long-dead father. An estate record at the time of Evan's death in 1806/7 portrays the farm of about 47 acres in a poor condition with buildings in need of repair. There is no indication of farmer Evan's wishes for his younger son, but possibly the extended family decided he should attend Ystrad Meurig school, about eight miles away, where his brother had no doubt learnt English, Latin and Greek under the headmaster **Rev. John Williams**.

It is likely that after some years at ysgol Ystrad Meurig, Evan followed in his brother's footsteps to Chelsea to teach the Classics until he reached the age of twenty-three, the earliest age that a man could be ordained. The Cheyne House Academy was now run by the Felix brothers, one of whom had surely been at school with Evan (Evan described Peter Felix as his best friend in a letter of 1823). But it seems that the Rev. Joseph Allen, then at Battersea, graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, changed Evan's mind. He examined Evan and recommended him to Trinity College in December 1817 as a sizar. Evan began his BA degree in October 1818, at the age of twenty-three, graduating in spring 1822 (MA in 1829).

It is probable that Evan went at once to Brussels to pay off his student debts by private teaching. But he was offered a more permanent teaching job there by John Jay, fell in love with the headmaster's Scottish/English/French-Huguenot-descended daughter Eliza (1797-1864) and was offered a title for orders at the King's Church (which the Dutch King William I attended). In 1825, Evan was ordained deacon then priest by the Bishop of London, and married Eliza in Brussels in May. They had four sons and three daughters. On 1 January 1827 Evan was appointed by the British lessees of the Chapel Royal to be their chaplain for one year, where he was to remain until his death over twenty years later. Evan and Eliza took in pupils at their home, which is mentioned by a newspaper correspondent in 1835, who described Evan as 'one of the most amiable and respected members of the Established Church'.

The Jenkins family reportedly stayed in Brussels during the Revolution of 1830. There are letters in the Clarke papers in Sydney from Evan and Eliza welcoming the election of Prince Leopold as the king of the new country of Belgium in 1831. It is possible that Evan acted as a confidential courier between the embassy and the government in London; there is a much later letter (February 1842) by his sister-in-law in Greenwich saying that he was carrying letters from King Leopold to his niece and nephew Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

In June 1835 Evan was made the first honorary chaplain to King Leopold, who, as a Lutheran-turned-Anglican, attended Evan's services at the Chapel Royal. In 1838 Evan became a Freemason, apparently initiated by the king himself. By 1839 he was chaplain to the British Embassy and in February 1840 he officially welcomed Prince Albert, en route to his wedding to Queen Victoria, into the Anglican Church. Evan was also Honorary Secretary of the English charitable fund, under the patronage of the king. In February 1842 Charlotte and Emily Brontë arrived in Brussels to learn French, escorted by their father Patrick, who stayed a night at the Jenkins home. Not only did the sisters attend Evan's services, but they frequently went to visit the Jenkins family. It is probable that there are glimpses of Evan, and particularly of his eldest son Edward, in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* (1853).

His wife Eliza commented that Evan was 'very backwards in going forwards' as regards whether King Leopold attended his church from 1831, but Evan comes across as laid-back and warmly friendly in his letters to his geologist friend William Branwhite Clarke. Charlotte Brontë may have been thinking of Evan in *Villette* when she comments in the character of Lucy Snowe: 'of every door which shut in an object worth seeing, of every museum, of every hall, sacred to art or science, he seemed to possess the "Open! Sesame!," and "The lower orders liked him well; his poor patients in the hospitals welcomed him with a sort of enthusiasm.' He was also forthright and principled. A well-documented tussle with Bishop Luscombe in 1829 (in the Lambeth Palace Archives) shows that Evan was determined about his rights not to receive a dubious licence, and one letter to Clarke tells of his refusal to grovel to a parent.

Evan died aged fifty-four on 23 September 1849. He left no will; no obituary has been found. He possibly died of cholera, which was raging in Britain and Belgium at the time, but he may have also had underlying tuberculosis. He was buried in the old Protestant cemetery, but in 1887/8 his and Eliza's remains were moved to the new cemetery at Evere.

Author

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Published date: 2022-06-16

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APA Citation



Kendall, M., (2022). JENKINS, EVAN (1794 - 1849), cleric and schoolmaster. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 9 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s14-JENK-EVA-1794>

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