

DAVIES, GWENDOLINE ELIZABETH (1882 - 1951), art collector and benefactress

Name: Gwendoline Elizabeth Davies
Date of birth: 1882
Date of death: 1951
Parent: Mary Davies (née Jones)
Parent: Edward Davies
Gender: Female
Occupation: art collector and benefactress
Area of activity: Art and Architecture; Philanthropy
Author: Glyn Tegai Hughes

Born Llandinam, Montgomeryshire, 11 February 1882; her father Edward (1852 - 1898) was the only son of [David Davies](#), 'Top Sawyer' (1818 - 1890. Her mother Mary, daughter of the Rev. Evan Jones, Trewythen, died in 1888 and three years later Edward married her sister Elizabeth (died 1942).

Gwen Davies and her sister [Margaret](#) were educated at Highfield School, Hendon, and through foreign travel, particularly in France. They acquired Gregynog mansion near Newtown, just after World War I, intending it to become an arts and crafts centre for Wales. The one craft activity that came to fruition, largely through the energy of [Dr. Thomas Jones](#) was printing, and between 1923 and 1942 the Gregynog Press published forty-two titles in limited editions. Among the works, many of great beauty in typography and binding, eight were in Welsh and a good number of others had a Welsh connection. (The sisters themselves were not Welsh -speaking.) They began to buy paintings seriously in 1908 and, in the following fifteen years, built up notable collections, eventually given or bequeathed to the National Museum of Wales almost in their entirety. In their early purchases they were advised by Hugh Blaker (1873 - 1936), brother of their governess and sometime Curator of the Bath Museum, and among their more spectacular acquisitions were fine works by Corot, Millet, Cézanne, Monet and Renoir, and some Rodin sculptures. Gwen Davies was an amateur violinist of some accomplishment, and the musical side of life at Gregynog soon developed. A Music Room was built and an organ by Frederick Rothwell installed under the supervision of [Sir \(Henry\) Walford Davies](#), who was also chiefly responsible for the concerts, which culminated in the annual Festivals of Music and Poetry between 1933 and 1938. The sisters were members of the Gregynog Choir that sang on these occasions, and visitors included Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams. The National Council of Music for Wales had been to a considerable extent funded by the sisters, and their often very large charitable bequests also extended to many other musical, social, medical and educational institutions. At Gregynog, too, they welcomed many conferences on issues of the day, often in conjunction with their brother the 1st Lord Davies ([David Davies](#)).

The life style of the sisters, rooted in a strong Calvinistic background, was in no way conventionally aristocratic. They were both reticent and modest and, for many years, strongly influenced by their formidable stepmother. Gwen was, however, the bolder and perhaps more imaginative personality, with some liking for luxuriance and variety, for instance in gardening. Though unassuming, they had ideals, together with the means and will to realise them.

Gwen Davies, who had been created a C.H. in 1937, died in the Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, on 3 July 1951 and her ashes were interred at Llandinam.

Author

Glyn Tegai Hughes

Sources

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- M. Hutchins, *Printing at Gregynog (Cardiff 1976)*;
- D. Harrop, *A History of the Gregynog Press (1980)*;
- Eirene White, *The Ladies of Gregynog (1985)*;
- B. McIntyre, *Sisters select works on paper from the Davies Collection (2001)*.

Further Reading

Beryl H. Griffiths, *Mamwlad (Gwasg Carreg Gwalch Llanrwst 2016)*, pp.133-154

Trevor Fishlock, *A gift of sunlight (Llandysul 2014)*

Andrew Renton, [Welsh History Month: Gwendoline and Margaret Davies helped to transform the range and quality of Wales's national art collection](#) , Wales Online, 23 October 2015

, BBC Walesarts, 25 Ionawr 2011

[The Davies Sisters](#) , National Museum Cardiff


[The Davies sisters: Gregynog and the sisters](#) 

[The Davies Sisters at the Front in World War One](#) 

Wikipedia Article: [Gwendoline Davies](#) 

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