

DAVIES, IDRIS (1905 - 1953), miner, schoolmaster and poet

Name: Idris Davies
Date of birth: 1905
Date of death: 1953
Parent: Elizabeth Ann Davies
Parent: Evan Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: miner, schoolmaster and poet
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Education; Poetry
Author: Islwyn Jenkins

Born 6 January 1905 at 16 Field Street, Rhymney, Monmouthshire, the Welsh -speaking son of colliery winderman Evan Davies and his wife Elizabeth Ann.

After leaving the local school at the age of fourteen, for the next seven years he worked underground as a miner in the nearby Abertysswg and Rhymney Mardy Pits. After an accident in which he lost a finger at the coalface, and active participation in the General Strike of 1926, he became unemployed and spent the next four years following what he used to call 'the long and lonely self-tuition game'. He then entered Loughborough Training College and Nottingham University to qualify as a teacher, and eight years later gained the University of London diploma in history. Between 1932 and 1947 he taught in London County Council primary schools and in schools evacuated from wartime London to Pytchley, Northamptonshire, Meesden, Hertfordshire, Treherbert, Glamorganshire and Llandysul, Cardiganshire. In 1947 he returned to his native Rhymney Valley to teach in a junior school at Cwmsyflog, to read, broadcast, lecture and write until his death from cancer at 7 Victoria Road, Rhymney on Easter Monday, 6 April 1953. He was buried in Rhymney Public Cemetery.

During his lifetime four volumes of his poetry were published: *Gwalia Deserta* (1938), written at Rhymney; *The Angry Summer: a poem of 1926* (1943), which he wrote in three months at Meesden; *Tonypandy and other poems* (1945), which he wrote during the short stay at Treherbert; and *Selected Poems* (1953), chosen by T. S. Eliot, who thought that the poems of Idris Davies had a claim to permanence as 'the best poetic document I know about a particular epoch in a particular place'. His work in both English and Welsh reflected the idealism and protest of a people during a time of great economic, social and religious change; in particular the inception, growth and decay of the old iron and coal town of Rhymney, Monmouth.

After his death over two hundred of his manuscript poems and a short verse-play, together with the typescripts of his comprehensive wartime diaries, were deposited at the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. Later, more of his unpublished poems and most of his prose - an unfinished novel, essays, lecture notes and some of his letters - were found. Some of this later material appeared posthumously in *The Collected Poems of Idris Davies* (1972); *Idris Davies* (1972), and *Argo Record No. ZPL.1181: Idris Davies* (1972).

His knowledge of poetry was immense, but he climbed on no bandwagon. He became the archetypal poet of the mining valleys of south Wales during the first half of the twentieth century.

Author

Islwyn Jenkins

Sources

Islwyn Jenkins, *Idris Davies* (Cardiff 1972)

Islwyn Jenkins, *Idris Davies of Rhymney a personal memoir* (Llandysul 1986)

personal acquaintance 1918-53

NLW Archives: [Idris Davies manuscripts](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 20770E: Idris Davies poems, 1930-1951](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 20771E: Idris Davies prose, 1930-1951](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW ex 947: Idris Davies Papers](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 24075D: Morfydd Peregrine \(Idris Davies\) papers](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW ex 2921: Idris Davies printed works](#)

private papers

Dafydd Johnston, ed., *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (1994)

Further Reading

Nigel Jenkins, 'O what can you give me?' : Nigel Jenkins on Idris Davies, *Poetry Wales* 40/4 (2005), pp. 48-52

Islwyn Jenkins, *Collected poems of Idris Davies* (Llandysul 1972)

Wikipedia Article: [Idris Davies](#)

Additional Links

VIAF: [71554581](#)

Wikidata: [Q3400605](#)

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