

## DAVIES, WILLIAM (1899 - 1968) botanist and grassland specialist

**Name:** William Davies  
**Date of birth:** 1899  
**Date of death:** 1968  
**Spouse:** Alice Muriel Davies (née Lewis)  
**Parent:** Margaret Davies  
**Parent:** William Davies  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** botanist and grassland specialist  
**Area of activity:** Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics  
**Author:** Llywelyn Phillips

Born 20 April 1899 in Norman Road, London, eldest son of William and Margaret Davies, both of farming families from north Cardiganshire. He was educated in Sloane School, London, and after service in the army in 1917-18 he entered the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and graduated with first-class honours in botany in 1923. He was appointed to the staff of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station the same year, the beginning of the long and productive collaboration between him and [R.G. Stapledon](#). He was a plant geneticist at Palmerston North, New Zealand, 1929-31, and the choice of varieties to be developed for the grassland of that country was based on his work there. He visited Australia and had an opportunity to spend a year there in 1932-33. Between 1933 and 1940 he was head of the department of grassland agronomy at the Welsh Plant Breeding Station. He did not confine himself to experimental work, but made a survey of the grassland and waste lands of Wales which was published in *A survey of the agricultural and waste lands of Wales* in 1937, under the editorship of [R.G. Stapledon](#) and with the financial help of [David Lloyd George](#). Between November 1936 and March 1938 he made a detailed survey of the grassland of the Falkland Islands and his report, *The grasslands of the Falkland Islands*, was published in 1939. During 1938 and 1939 he and his assistants surveyed and carefully mapped the grassland of England. This survey was used as a guide in the campaign for ploughing grassland during World War II to grow more corn and other arable crops. This survey intensified his belief in a policy of ploughing up permanent grassland and reseeding it as leys which would be much more productive. This is when *Ley farming* (1941) was written in conjunction with [R.G. Stapledon](#). Another consequence of the survey was the establishment of the Grassland Improvement Station in 1940 near Stratford-upon-Avon, with [R.G. Stapledon](#) as director and William Davies as assistant director. He was appointed director on the retirement of [Stapledon](#) in 1945, and he continued in that post after the work was moved in 1949 to a new centre near Hurley, in the Thames valley, namely the Grassland Research Institute. He remained there until he retired in 1964. He published very many articles in his own field, but his most important work is *The grass crop* (1952), in a volume which gathers his studies, thoughts and investigations regarding grassland in every part of the world during the preceding quarter of a century. He travelled widely to advise governments and international societies on research matters and developments in grassland, and he played a leading part in founding the British Grassland Society in 1945. He was its president on two occasions and an honorary fellow of the society for life. He was awarded the degrees of M.Sc. (1925) and D.Sc. (1945) of the University of Wales and was awarded an honorary D.Sc. degree by the University of New Zealand in 1956. He was honoured with the C.B.E. in 1964, and was an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, and honorary life president of the European Grassland Federation.

He married in 1928 Alice Muriel Lewis and they had one son. Davies died 28 July, 1968, and was buried in the churchyard of Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn, Cardiganshire.

### Author

Llywelyn Phillips, (1914 - 1981)

### Sources

Personal knowledge

*Who was who?*

*Journal of the British Grassland Society*, 1968, 265-7

### Additional Links

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