

PHILLIPS, EDGAR ('Trefin'; 1889 - 1962), tailor, school-teacher, poet, and Archdruid of Wales, 1960-62

Name: Edgar Phillips
Pseudonym: Trefin
Date of birth: 1889
Date of death: 1962
Spouse: Maxwell Phillips (née Fraser)
Spouse: Violet Annie Phillips (née Burnell)
Spouse: Hannah Phillips (née Clement)
Parent: Martha Phillips (née Davies)
Parent: William Bateman Phillips
Gender: Male
Occupation: tailor, school-teacher, poet, and Archdruid of Wales, 1960-62
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Education; Eisteddfod; Poetry
Author: Evan David Jones

Born 8 October 1889 in Rose Cottage, Tre-fin, Pembrokeshire, only child of William Bateman and Martha (née Davies) Phillips. His father was a sailor but after leaving the sea he was a baker in Porthcawl. Trefin's mother died in 1898 after she had been a patient for 5 years in Saint David's Hospital in Carmarthen, and he was adopted by his father's sister, Mary, wife of John Martin, a sailmaker and formerly a sailor. English was the main language of the home and English was the language of the day-school, but thanks to the Sunday school he retained his Welsh. He tried to run away to sea when he realised that the family intended apprenticing him to a tailor. When his father re-married the family moved to Cardiff and the 11-yr. old boy entered Sloper Road school. The Welsh master, [Sir John Rowland](#), took an interest in him and arranged for him to borrow *Cymru* and other Welsh periodicals. His father and stepmother tried to wean him from his interest in the Welsh language, but his Welshness was reinforced when he had the company of [Owen Morgan Edwards](#) on a train journey to Pembrokeshire. When he was 14 years old he returned to Tre-fin as an apprentice tailor to his uncle J.W. Evans, and as the workshop was a nursery for poets and a school in the *cynganeddion*, Trefin mastered *Yr Ysgol Farddol* ([Dafydd Morganwg](#)), the poets' primer. For a year after completing his apprenticeship he worked as a tailor in Letterston and Whitland. He returned to Cardiff to specialize in cutting and he became a tailor of ladies' wear. In 1912 he moved to London, working in several clothes shops before returning to Cardiff as master tailor in one of the largest shops in the city. In August 1914 he opened a tailor's business in partnership with Trefor Roberts. He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery in 1915, becoming a bombardier. He was badly injured when one of the beams of a cellar fell on his head during an attack and he was moved from one hospital to another until his release from the army. He found temporary employment with Seccombes Company in Cardiff. With his health deteriorating he moved to the neighbourhood of Blackwood, Monmouth, and worked in a shop in Bargoed. In 1921 he went to Caerleon College and gained a teacher's certificate with distinction. He was Welsh teacher in Pengam primary school 1923-24 before being appointed Welsh master in Pontllanfraith secondary school where he taught until he retired in 1954. He was one of the pioneers of broadcasting in Welsh and his detective 'Bili bach' was a hero to children of that period. He was a regular competitor at eisteddfodau. Having already won 33 bardic chairs and a crown, he won the chair at the national *eisteddfod* in 1933 and he was Keeper of the sword of the Gorsedd of Bards from 1947 to 1960, when he was elected archdruid. He published *Trysor o gân*, poems for children in four volumes (1930-36), *Caniadau Trefin* (1950) and *Edmund Jones, 'The Old Prophet'* (1959).

He married three times: (1), Hannah Clement, a nurse of Tredegar, in 1915. She died 24 April 1943. They had one daughter. He married (2), Violet Annie Burnell, schoolteacher, 13 April 1946. The marriage was dissolved unopposed at Trefin's petition November 1950. He married (3), Maxwell Fraser, 24 October 1951. He died 30 August 1962.

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

Brinley Richards, *Cofiant Trefin* (Swansea 1963)(1963)
papers in N.L.W.

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Edgar Phillips](#)

Additional Links

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