

PAYNE, FRANCIS GEORGE (FFRANSIS) (1900-1992), scholar and literary figure

Name: Francis George Payne
Date of birth: 1900
Date of death: 1992
Spouse: Helena Payne (née Bilek)
Child: Ceri Payne
Child: Ifan Payne
Parent: Hannah Elizabeth Payne (née Lewis)
Parent: Francis George Holton Payne
Gender: Male
Occupation: scholar and literary figure
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Trefor M. Owen

Born 21 November 1900 in Kington, Herefordshire, to Francis George Holton Payne (1865-1909) and Hannah Elizabeth Payne (née Lewis) (1867-1937). His father was a Welsh-speaking native of Cardiff who owned a draper's shop in Kington and who died when Ffrancis Payne was nine years old. From the local elementary school he went to Lady Hawkins' School, Kington, where his imagination was aroused by 'a miraculous little teacher' who took her pupils on field trips. As a fourteen-year old chorister in St Mary's Church, Kington, he suddenly realised that the alabaster tombs of [Tomas ap Rhoser](#) of Hergest (died 1469) and his wife at which he had so often gazed across the chancel were actually described in a fifteenth-century *cywydd* by [Lewis Glyn Cothi](#) that he had read in translation in a history of Kington. 'That moment', he records, 'was the fount of all the main interests of my life, and that place was where I first saw history and literature and place coming together'. He left school at the age of fifteen, against the wishes of his mother and teachers, and worked as a check-weigher in the iron furnaces of Ebbw Vale and subsequently as a clerk in Glasgow before being called up to the Air Force as a wireless operator towards the end of World War I. On his return he was employed on a farm in Bryngwyn, Monmouthshire, and in Aber-porth, Cardiganshire. Subsequently, he found work repairing coal wagons in Port Talbot, where he renewed his efforts to learn Welsh, using Caradar's *Welsh Made Easy*. The job came to an end with the General Strike of 1926 but he found other employment on Little Hampton farm, Dyffryn, St Nicholas, in the Vale of Glamorgan until 1929. In 1930 he became a 'licensed' bookseller in Cardiganshire and he described his adventures in his first published article 'Pacmon yng Ngheredigion'. He secured a temporary post in the museum in Carmarthen which allowed him to act as a proof-reader for the publisher [Spurrell](#). He moved in 1933 to become a cataloguer of Welsh books in the library of the University College, Swansea, where he met and came under the influence of [Saunders Lewis](#). Even though lacking a university degree he was appointed Assistant Keeper in the newly established Department of Folk Life in the National Museum in Cardiff. He subsequently graduated in Welsh in University College Cardiff in 1940. In 1936 he married Helena (Helly) Bilek (1913-2005) and they had two sons, Ifan and Ceri. He moved first to Rhiwbina, Cardiff, and then to a flat in St Fagans Castle when the Folk Museum was opened in 1948. During World War II he was seconded to the Art Department of the National Museum where he became familiar with the paintings of Welsh artists such as [Hugh Hughes](#) and was the first to draw attention to the work of [Thomas Jones](#), Pencerrig, Radnorshire, in an article in *Y Llenor* in 1945. He was appointed Keeper of Collections in St Fagans in 1959. When he retired in 1969, he moved to Llandegla, Radnorshire. He died 21 August 1992 and was cremated in Hereford and buried in Llandegla.

Ffrancis Payne first achieved recognition as an elegant stylist in his writings published in *Chwaryddion Crwydro* (1943) which drew upon his reminiscences of his childhood in Kington and his experiences as a farm worker. These essays were incorporated in *Cwysau* (1980) which also included later articles such as his important study of the historical garden in Wales. He became an authority on the literary tradition of Radnorshire and was elected President of the Radnorshire Society. His thorough knowledge of its history and his love of the country are revealed in the two volumes *Crwydro Maesyfed* (1966 and 1968). In his *Guide to the Collection of Samplers and Embroideries* (1939) he drew upon the evidence of the medieval poets and their descriptions of embroidery. Likewise in his scholarly study of the plough in Wales, *Yr Aradr Gymreig* (1954), his understanding of the archaeological evidence was greatly enhanced by his thorough knowledge of the descriptions of the medieval poets and the Laws of [Hywel Dda](#) as well as his practical experience of ploughing. Although his main work on the plough was published in Welsh he was well known on the continent and in Scandinavia for his pioneer contributions to the subject in English scholarly journals.

Author

Trefor M. Owen

Sources

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Marged Haycock, '[The Scholarship and Creativity of Ffransis G Payne](#)', *The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 75, 2004

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