

## EVANS, WILLIAM CHARLES (1911-1988), chemist and biologist

**Name:** William Charles Evans  
**Date of birth:** 1911  
**Date of death:** 1988  
**Spouse:** Irene Antice Evans (née Woods)  
**Parent:** Elizabeth Evans  
**Parent:** Robert Evans  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** chemist and biologist  
**Area of activity:** Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics  
**Author:** R. Gareth Wyn Jones

Charles Evans was born 1 October 1911 in Bethel, near Caernarfon, Gwynedd, the third son of the five children of Robert and Elizabeth Evans; the father was a stone mason at Dinorwic quarry. After receiving his early education at Bethel primary school and Caernarfon Central and grammar schools, he won the John Hughes Exhibition to Bangor University College where he graduated with first-class honours in chemistry in 1931. Sir Ewart Jones, Wrexham, who also became a Fellow of the Royal Society and was Waynflete Professor of chemistry in Oxford, was a fellow student. Charles Evans completed his MSc under Professor J. Simonsen in 1934 before winning the Plat Scholarship to study for his doctorate (and to follow a substantial part of the medical course) at Manchester School of Medicine.

Having gained his doctorate in 1936, he moved that year to a post in the physiology department at Leeds University where he began his interest in the physiology of microbes. Soon after the outbreak of World War II he was appointed Director of Plasma Production and Serology at the Regional Blood Transfusion Centre serving an extensive part of northern England and, later, the Royal Navy.

In 1942, while he was in Leeds, he married Dr Irene Antice Woods herself a gifted scientist; they had four children. Before the end of the war he went to the Wright-Fleming Institute at St Mary's Medical School in London during the early days of penicillin, though he himself was working on immunisation against *Clostridium diphtheria*.

In 1946 he realised his dream of returning to Wales, as the first University of Wales lecturer in biochemistry at Aberystwyth University College. Soon afterwards, in 1951, he was promoted professor of Agricultural Chemistry (and later Biochemistry and Soil Science) in Bangor where he remained in the Chair until retiring in 1978.

In 1979 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, mainly for his research into the microbial degradation of aromatic compounds such as benzene, toluene, some amino acids, anthracene and naphthalene and substances such as lignin (in trees) and organic matter in soil, and herbicides of various kinds. His work is basic to our knowledge of nature's cycles and how nature responds to pollution, e.g. oil spill or weed-killer spray. This was his major scientific contribution though he was well known in Wales for his work on the poisonous substances in ferns.

Charles Evans was witty and talented, able to recall a wide range of literature and science. He was a charismatic lecturer with a pioneering vision of the importance of chemistry for the life of microbes, plants and animals, and for soil as the raw material of food on earth. He published extensively in the scientific press. He developed a unique department in Bangor where he nurtured more than one scientist of international importance. He was a warm hearted Welshman committed to the countryside and the wildlife and literature of Wales.

Uniquely he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society having spent almost the whole of his scientific career in Wales within 10 miles of where he was born. He died on his farm, Cae Ocyn in Llangaffo, Anglesey, 24 July 1988.

### Author

R. Gareth Wyn Jones


### Sources

John Rodney Quayle, *Biographic Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society (London 1994)*, 87-103;

R. Gareth Wyn Jones, *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions*, 72, 2011, 123-132.

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