

Rediscovering Ellen Evans (1891–1953), Principal of Glamorgan Training College, Barry

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During the last thirty years, thanks to the work of historians, publishers, broadcasters, and others, the contribution of women in the history of Wales is, slowly, being acknowledged. Although Welsh historiography needs to move beyond the stage of ‘uncovering’ the lives of ‘forgotten’ women to a more nuanced understanding of gender relationships, the fact remains that many women who were well-known during their lives for their contribution to Welsh national life are absent from the historical record. Thus, ‘rediscovering’ these women is still a valid activity.¹

A case in point is Ellen Evans (1891–1953), a prominent figure in educational and cultural circles in Wales in the inter-war and immediate post-war years. Her standing is such that she gained an entry in the *Welsh Dictionary of National Biography* and her name is included in the National Library of Wales online database.² Her contribution to the debate surrounding the teaching of Welsh in elementary and secondary schools has been recognised by historians of the Welsh language and culture.³ However, the breadth of her interests and involvement in public life has not yet been explored and little is known of her private persona. She is, therefore, a strong contender for ‘rediscovery’. The aim of this article is to begin that process. The timing is apt since it is the sixtieth anniversary of her death at the time of writing (2013).

Her credentials for inclusion in the annals of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion are strong. She was, above all, an enthusiastic promoter of Wales and the Welsh language, and a proud and active member of the society in Barry, where she spent most of her adult life; she became a popular speaker at Cymmrodorion society meetings in south Wales more widely in the 1920s and 1930s. Her death was noted in the Council’s Annual Report in 1953, a year of ‘very heavy’ losses for the society.⁴

The inter-war years have been described as a period of ‘quiet revolution’ for the

- 1 Angela V. John, ‘Two Decades of Development: Introduction to the New Edition’, in *Our Mothers’ Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History, 1830–1939*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp. 1–3.
- 2 *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig, 1951–70*, (Llundain: Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion, 1997), p. 50; ‘Evans, Ellen’, in *National Library of Wales Welsh Biography Online* <http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/32-EVAN-Ell-1891.html> [accessed 5 July 2013].
- 3 Marion Löffler, ‘Mudiad yr Iaith Gymraeg yn Hanner Cyntaf yr Ugeinfed Ganrif: Cyfraniad y Chwyldroadau Tawel’, in *‘Eu Hiaith a Gadwant’: Y Gymraeg yn yr Ugeinfed Ganrif*, ed. by Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 186; W. Gareth Evans, ‘Y Wladwriaeth Brydeinig a’r Iaith Gymraeg’, in *‘Eu Hiaith a Gadwant’*, ed. Jenkins and Williams, pp. 337–9; Sian Rhiannon Williams, ‘Welsh for All: Experiments in Bilingual Teaching in the Interwar Years’/ ‘Cymraeg i Bawb: Arbrofion mewn Addysgu Dwyieithog yn y Cyfnod rhwng y Ddau Ryfel Byd’, in *Trafodion Addysg Bangor: Welsh Medium and Bilingual Education / Addysg Cyfrwng Gymraeg a Dwyieithog*, ed. by W. Gwyn Lewis and Gareth Ff. Roberts (Bangor: Ysgol Addysg Bangor, 2006), pp. 43–5.
- 4 *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion (1953–5)*, pp. 4–5.

Welsh national movement, while the war years and the first decade post-war saw the emergence of Welsh-medium education.⁵ Ellen Evans was a central figure in this context from the early 1920s to the mid-1950s, best known for her advocacy of teaching Welsh in schools and of nursery education. She was active in most Welsh cultural movements, including the ‘Gorsedd’ of the National Eisteddfod, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (Welsh League of Youth), Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society), Undeb Cenedlaethol y Cymdeithasau Cymraeg (National Union of Welsh Societies) and Pwyllgor Diogelu Cymru (Committee for the Protection of Wales, 1939–41). She was also an enthusiastic participant in Y Gyngres Geltaidd (The Celtic Congress). Yet her interests ranged more widely, from adult workers’ education, higher education, and youth work to child welfare and nursery education, Sunday schools, and the cause of international peace through the Women’s Section of the League of Nations Society and the Wales panel of UNESCO.

Ellen Evans served on several committees, boards, advisory bodies, and councils, in Wales and beyond, often as the sole woman member, including, from its inception, the executive of Coleg Harlech (the adult workers’ college where she was later vice-president), the Central Welsh Board, the Court of the Medical School in Cardiff, the Court and Appointments Board of the University of Wales, and the Courts of the university colleges of Cardiff and Aberystwyth. She was the first chairperson of the South Wales Branch of the Nursery School Association and a member of the executive of the National Association of Youth Clubs. She served on the Departmental Committee of the Board of Education which produced the report, *Welsh in Education and Life* (1927), and she gave evidence to several other inquiries, including to the committees on Education in Rural Wales (1930) and Teachers and Youth Leaders (1944). During the Second World War, she sat on the Children’s Overseas Reception Scheme Advisory Council. She was awarded a CBE for services to education in 1948.⁶

Ellen’s platform for this public activity was her position as principal of Glamorgan (Women’s) Training College, Barry. She joined the staff in 1915, became principal in 1923 at the age of 32, and died in service thirty years later. For her, this role held the potential to allow her to influence the future of Wales, and she made it her own. Although the post of principal of a women’s training college was no higher than that of a head teacher of a girls’ secondary school in terms of salary and professional status, her own view of her role and the use she made of it

5 Löffler, ‘Mudiad yr Iaith Gymraeg’, pp. 173–206; Iolo Wyn Williams (ed.), *Gorau Arf: Hanes Sefydlu Ysgolion Cymraeg, 1939–2000* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2002).

6 *Western Mail and South Wales Daily News*, 28 September 1953, p. 5; *Barry Herald*, 2 and 9 October 1953; *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig, 1951–1970*, p. 50; ‘Evans, Ellen’, NLW Welsh Biography Online; *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 39 (1949); *Y Gymraeg*, 36 (7 July 1932); *Welsh in Education and Life, being the Report of the Departmental Committee...to Inquire into the Position of the Welsh Language and to advise as to its promotion in the Educational System of Wales* (London: HMSO, 1927); *Education in Rural Wales* (London: HMSO, 1930); *Teachers and Youth Leaders: Report of the Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Education* (London: HMSO, 1944); Children’s Overseas Reception Scheme Advisory Council, House of Commons, 26 June 1940, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1940/jun/26/childrens-overseas-reception-scheme> [accessed 20 August 2013].

elevated both the position itself and the college she led. In a tribute published as part of the *Western Mail*'s obituary in September 1953, Ellen's close friend, Annie Gwen Jones (Mrs Edgar Jones), is quoted as saying:

Wales will never possess a stronger or more pungent advocate of the Welsh way of life, its education or its literature. She lived for Wales without being insular. She pioneered for Wales at the expense of every personal and physical consideration as author, lecturer, adjudicator and broadcaster.⁷

It would be true to say that Ellen Evans's professional role and public interests dominated her personal life and merged with her personal identity. In her latter years, she continued in post even though she suffered from a terminal illness. A tall, stately figure with piercing eyes and a loud voice, former students, staff, and acquaintances described her as: 'large, both physically and personally', 'larger than life', 'full of character', a 'strong character', 'determined', 'colourful and powerful', and 'formidable'.⁸ They invariably commented upon her forceful personality and extraordinary energy and zeal. She was confident in her own opinions and impatient with doubters, and very few people, apart from her beloved nieces and nephews and her lifelong friend, Sir Ben Bowen Thomas, saw a softer and more caring side to this uncompromising Welshwoman.⁹ As principal, she used her considerable talents and authoritarian persona to lead and to mould the institution according to her own unswerving principles and values.

Knowledge of her family background helps to explain Ellen Evans's outlook and mindset. Her Welsh-speaking parents, nonconformist in religion and Liberal in politics, had migrated from Cardiganshire in west Wales to Gelli, near Treorchy, in the Rhondda Fawr valley where the coal industry was booming. She was brought up, the third of a family of five girls (one of whom died in childhood), at 17 Dorothy Street, an end-of-terrace house from which the family ran a small milk round. Her father, John Evans 'Y Lla'th' (the Milk), had worked as a quarryman in Blaenau Ffestiniog in his youth and was described in the 1901 census as a 'coal hewer'.¹⁰ He later suffered an accident underground which made the family entirely dependent on the milk round. As Ben Bowen Thomas, whose family were close neighbours of the Evans's, explained in a revealing memorial address at the college in 1956, 'This home ... knew ... the constant anxieties ... before the Welfare State was

7 *Western Mail and South Wales News*, 28 September 1953.

8 Interviews with retired teachers recorded as part of a project on women teachers in south Wales (2001–2), questionnaire responses by former students and staff of GTC Barry (2007), and notes made at Barry Cymmrodorion Society meeting transcribed and in the author's possession; Cassie Davies, *Hwb i'r Galon: Atgofion Cassie Davies* (Swansea: Gwasg John Penry, 1973), p. 70.

9 Ben Bowen Thomas, *Ellen Evans CBE, MA, Principal of the Training College Barry 1923–53: The Memorial Address Delivered by Sir Ben Bowen Thomas in the College Chapel, June 2nd 1956* (Cardiff Central Library Local Collection); telephone interview with Mrs Mary Rishko of Aberaeron, July 2012. Mrs Rishko also shared recollections at Archif Menywod Cymru event at Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru, Bro Morgannwg, 10 August 2012.

10 Census of England and Wales 1901, Parish of Ystradyfodwg, Enumerator's Schedules, RG13/5015.

conceived, to get both ends to meet, especially when the milk round which the family had started had eventually to be stopped.¹¹ Ben Bowen Thomas felt that this background made Miss Evans more able to identify with those students from similar homes in mining communities for whose welfare she was responsible many years later, though the views of my informants who were former students of hers were mixed on this point.

Ellen's capable and resourceful mother, the 'managing director' of the household (after whom she was named), ensured that she and her sisters performed their chores in the house and dairy before and after school, so time for play was limited. However, the family was fully involved in the lively religious and cultural life of their chapel (Dyffryn, Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Gelli, of which her father was a founder member) and local Welsh literary societies. Ellen was a 'formidable figure' who regularly won prizes at local penny readings and *eisteddfodau* for recitations. Her home contained a bookcase of 'sound volumes; Bible commentaries, poetry, editions of the Welsh classics, all bought with the sweat of sacrifice'. Welsh periodicals and newspapers were read and discussed and both her parents had 'a lively interest in current affairs and things of the mind'.¹²

Ellen's parents' sense of social duty, capacity for hard work, and the belief 'that ... life ... must be lived as ... a pilgrimage' were transferred to Ellen herself.¹³ Her upbringing among the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists of the Rhondda was, undoubtedly, a strong influence upon her. Local chapels, such as Jerusalem, Tonpentre, where Sarah Rees ('Cranogwen', 1839–1916) had set up Undeb Dirwestol Merched y Ddwy Rhondda, a temperance Union for Rhondda Women, in March 1901, were centres of social action and education, as well as being cultural and religious establishments.¹⁴ During her early teens, Ellen experienced the religious revival of 1904–5. This powerful, if short-lived revival, as E. Wyn James has shown, was largely led by women and driven from Cardiganshire.¹⁵ Although the leadership of nonconformist chapels was almost all male in this period, women were at the forefront of their educational and social activities, through the Sunday schools, missionary work, and temperance campaigns in particular. The young Ellen would have had powerful female role models in the Rhondda chapels, including Cranogwen herself, a regular visitor to the area.¹⁶

According to Ben Bowen Thomas, Ellen 'had always been a feminist'. 'Her mother,' he said, 'had practised feminism long before the theory had been articulated.'¹⁷ There is no evidence at present that either she or her daughter were

11 Thomas, *The Memorial Address* (unpaginated).

12 Ibid. For further information on her father, see *Y Goleuad*, 8 (Chwefror 1933), p. 7.

13 Thomas, *The Memorial Address*.

14 This Union soon developed into Undeb Dirwestol Merched y De, an influential temperance movement for women. See Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', in *Our Mothers' Land*, ed. John, p. 137.

15 E. Wyn James, 'Cwm Rhondda a Chei Newydd: Croth a Chrud Diwygiad 1904–5', in *Cawr i'w Genedl: Cyfrol i gyfarch yr Athro Hywel Teifi Edwards*, ed. by T. Jones and H. Walters (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 2007), pp. 199–216. My thanks to Prof E. Wyn James for drawing my attention to this volume and the one mentioned in footnote 40 below.

16 James, 'Cwm Rhondda a Chei Newydd'.

17 Thomas, *The Memorial Address*.

involved in any formal women's political grouping or activity, but the belief that women could and should take an active and public role in society was implicit in their values. Both were of the lineage of that strong, independently-minded Welshwoman of the period described by Jane Aaron as *pur fel y dur* ('as pure as steel').¹⁸

Great value was placed on education in a family such as this, and, despite the struggle to make ends meet, Ellen was supported to continue her education at Rhondda Intermediate (Secondary) School for a few years. The only career path for an academically able girl from a mining background in this period was school teaching.¹⁹ She started as a pupil teacher and attended classes at the Rhondda Pupil Teacher Centre in Porth. This formative experience influenced her career, for she was tutored there by David James ('Defynnog', 1865–1928), secretary of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, the society which campaigned for the inclusion of Welsh in the school curriculum. He was an advocate of the Direct Method of language teaching, which he had observed in Canada in 1903, and was the author of teaching schemes and bilingual resources for schools.²⁰ Much of Ellen's work followed his example, as evidenced by her later activities, which included publications for schools and the vice-presidency of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

The usual route for female pupil or student teachers would have been to work in a local school and gain certification by examination, or, possibly, to attend Swansea Training College (the only women's college in south Wales before 1913). But Ellen was one of the comparatively few women of her generation to be awarded a university scholarship. This linked a three-year undergraduate course to a one-year postgraduate teacher training programme which enabled her to study for a degree in Welsh at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth (presumably chosen because of family links with Cardiganshire) and obtain a well-respected teaching qualification.

The significance of the Aberystwyth years (1911–15) should not be underestimated:

These were kindling times, lighting enthusiasms that would endure and clarifying convictions that would abide ... Ellen Evans' Welsh temperature was high before going to Aberystwyth ... [but] she left it as one of the marked women of her generation, known to be Welsh, proud of it and anything but cool in her convictions regarding it.²¹

Had she remained at home, Ellen would probably have achieved much locally, but a university education gave her a wider stage and connections to a network of like-minded people. At Aberystwyth, she was inspired by three important figures

18 Jane Aaron, *Pur fel y Dur: Y Gymraes yn Llên Menywod y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1998).

19 Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Women Teachers and Gender Issues in Teaching in Wales, c. 1870–1950', *Cylchgrawn Addysg Cymru: The Welsh Journal of Education*, 13.2 (2005), 68–83.

20 Gwilym Arthur Jones, *David James (Defynnog) 1865–1928 in the Context of Welsh Education*. The Cecil Williams Lecture 1977, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1978), pp. 267–9.

21 Thomas, *The Memorial Address*.

in the Welsh cultural renaissance of the period: Professor Edward Anwyl (1866–1914), Chair of Welsh, a Celtic scholar and patriotic Welshman, Dr John Lloyd Williams (1854–1945), her Botany lecturer, later professor, a co-founder of the Welsh Folk Song Society, and the poet and writer, T. Gwynn Jones (1871–1949). Another talented poet, T. H. Parry Williams (1887–1975), was an assistant lecturer in the department and Cassie Davies relates how Ellen Evans would often say that listening to him read his work thrilled her into realizing the value of contemporary poetry for the first time.²² Ellen had been brought up to admire the work of the Rhondda poet, Ben Bowen (uncle of Ben Bowen Thomas), whose words she later chose as the Glamorgan Training College motto and song.²³

Among Ellen's contemporaries at Aberystwyth (co-members of Y Geltaidd, the Welsh/Celtic society) were Elizabeth Roberts (d. 1979) and Elizabeth's future husband, Griffith John Williams (1892–1963), later professor of Welsh at University College, Cardiff, with whom Ellen shared a connection with Cardiganshire. Both Elizabeth and her husband started their teaching careers in the south Wales valleys (in Treforest and Porth respectively) and a lifelong friendship ensued. Elizabeth was also an enthusiast for Welsh in education and both she and Ellen shared a desire to be of service to Wales.²⁴ Ellen's interest in the literary heritage of the Vale of Glamorgan probably owed much to the research interests and poetic inspiration of Griffith John Williams. She herself published a small volume on the literary and religious history of her beloved 'Bro Morgannwg', intended for a popular and young readership, entitled *Y Wen Fro* (1931).²⁵

Another friend from the Aberystwyth years was the folk singer, Dora Herbert Jones (1890–1974), later a political secretary who was closely linked to the Gregynog circle.²⁶ It was at Aberystwyth too that Ellen met Ifan ab Owen Edwards (1895–1970), another lifelong friend and co-educator, later editor of *Cymru* and *Cymru'r Plant* and founder of Urdd Gobaith Cymru, whose ventures on behalf of the young people of Wales she so enthusiastically supported.²⁷ Ifan was the son of Owen M. Edwards (1858–1920), Chief Inspector of the Welsh Department of Education, whose vision of a Welsh Wales transformed the Board of Education's official attitude towards the teaching of the Welsh language and the history and culture of Wales in schools. Ellen was personally acquainted with O. M. Edwards, and, like many other young patriotic Welsh-speaking teachers of her generation, was greatly influenced by his ideas.

Aberystwyth was near Llan-non, her parents' birthplace and spiritual home. As much as Ellen Evans loved the Rhondda valleys and empathized with the people

22 Davies, *Hwb i'r Galon*, p. 70.

23 Ellen Evans shared Ben Bowen's patriotism and belief in the moral and educational mission of nonconformist Wales. She chose his words, 'Cofia Ddysgu Byw', and included his work on the curriculum. See T. Robin Chapman, *Ben Bowen* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 26; *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 1 (1916); 4 (1919).

24 *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig, 1951–1970*, p. 233.

25 Ellen Evans, *Y Wen Fro: Mannau Hanesyddol Bro Morgannwg* (Aberystwyth: Gwasg Aberystwyth, 1931).

26 Gwennan Gibbard, 'Dora Herbert Jones, 1890–1974', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, n.s. 12 (2006), 121–135.

27 *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig, 1951–1970*, p. 45.

of all mining communities, she was also strongly attached to Cardiganshire and returned to the family cottage there regularly throughout her life. In common with many in the national movement in the inter-war years, the rural, Welsh-speaking and nonconformist society of west Wales represented for her an ideal of Welshness which, she felt, had been lost in south Wales through industrialization and immigration. This yearning for an uncomplicated, religious, and peaceful community was characteristic of nationalist movements in Europe in general, and in the case of Ellen Evans created a tension between the romantic ideal and the reality of the circumstances in which she found herself working – the fast-expanding, multi-cultural seaport and commercial centre of Barry, towering above the docks built by David Davies of Llandinam to export Rhondda coal.

By 1915, when Ellen arrived in Barry to take up the post of lecturer in Welsh and Welsh method at the recently-established Glamorgan Training College (GTC), the educational and cultural life of this hastily-built town had developed considerably with the establishment of County Intermediate (Secondary) Schools for both boys and girls and the women's teacher training college.²⁸ This was the home of Elizabeth Phillips Hughes (1851–1925), pioneer of women's education and one of the founders of the college. Here too, the periodical *Welsh Outlook*, under the patronage of David Davies, Llandinam, was edited, firstly by Thomas Jones of Rhymney (1870–1955), academic and civil servant (later secretary to the Cabinet and founder of Coleg Harlech) and then by Robert Silyn Roberts ('Silyn', 1871–1930), socialist poet, pacifist, and WEA organizer. Among others involved with this 'journal of national social progress' was Edgar Jones (later Major) (1868–1953), head teacher of the Boys' County School (the 'Dr Arnold of Wales'²⁹), and Reverend Llewelyn G. Williams, minister of Penuel Welsh Calvinistic Methodist chapel. Ben Bowen Thomas's rather patronizing comment, that 'these men befriended her',³⁰ underplays both Ellen Evans' own agency and the importance of other women who belonged to this *milieu*, such as Annie Ffoulkes (1877–1962), editor of the popular anthology, *Telyn y Dydd* (1918), and teacher of French at the County school, and Mary Silyn Roberts (1877–1972), Silyn's wife, another educationist. Yet there is no doubt that these connections and, in particular, her acquaintance with Thomas Jones (later strengthened via the appointment of Ben Bowen Thomas as first Warden of Coleg Harlech) and others in the Gregynog circle proved extremely beneficial to her public service career and, it seems, shaped her views on social and world issues.

Those involved with *Welsh Outlook* were also members of the Barry Cymmrodorion Society, which Ellen Evans joined on her arrival in the town. They formed part of a substantial Welsh-speaking community within a cosmopolitan

28 Barry Central Library, *Barry County Schools 1896–1946* (n.d.); W. Gareth Evans, *Education and Female Emancipation: The Welsh Experience, 1847–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), pp. 204–7.

29 Alan Vincent (ed.), *The Barrian: A Brief History of Barry Boys' School, 1893–1993*. (Dinas Powys: Alan Vincent, 1993).

30 Thomas, *The Memorial Address*.

environment which mostly, but not exclusively, centred upon the Welsh chapels.³¹ Ellen also joined Penuel chapel and remained a staunch and active member of both institutions throughout her life. In 1950, she paid tribute to the ‘warmhearted Welsh company ... who were of great assistance and an inspiration to me when I first arrived [in Barry]’, and named, in addition to those mentioned above, Bryn Davies, D. H. Williams, and the poet, R. Williams Parry, also a teacher at the County school. At the time, he held strong views on the teaching of Welsh in colleges.³² Another Welsh enthusiast, the secretary of the local Cymmrodorion, was D. Arthen Evans (1878–1936), a Cardiganshire-born teacher. He became secretary of the National Eisteddfod when it visited Barry in 1920 and later held the same post for Undeb Cenedlaethol y Cymdeithasau Cymraeg (the National Union of Welsh Societies). He, like Ellen, was active in the Celtic Congress and had much in common with his younger co-campaigner for Welsh in education. In 1912, he had authored a syllabus for teaching Welsh published by the Barry Cymmrodorion Society, an act which demonstrates the involvement of Barry teachers in the movement for Welsh teaching before Ellen Evans settled in the town, and indeed, prior to the establishment of the training college.³³ The hosting of the National Eisteddfod in Barry in 1920, where Ellen Evans entered the ‘Gorsedd’ as ‘Elen’, further strengthened the cohesion of Welsh cultural life in the town. This event allowed her to gain organizing experience on several committees and commenced her involvement with the National Eisteddfod.³⁴ In 1926, she was a member of the deputation which successfully lobbied to invite the Eisteddfod to Treorchy in 1928, another festival with which she was closely involved.³⁵

Her appointment to the Welsh lectureship in April 1915 was facilitated by Mary Silyn Roberts, who had observed Ellen teaching during her training year at Aberystwyth. Mary invited her to travel to Barry to meet with Silyn, who was then Executive Secretary of the Appointments Board of the University of Wales.³⁶ It might be presumed that he was able to influence the Glamorgan Education Committee’s Training College Sub-committee, though it was probably also equally true that Ellen Evans’s application was a strong one, despite her lack of post-training classroom experience. Although she always claimed to have been the first Welsh lecturer at Barry, this was not actually the case. The foundations of a strong

31 For descriptions of this intellectual and cultural circle in Barry, see E. L. Ellis, *A Life of Dr Thomas Jones, C.H.* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), pp. 153–160; Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor: Rhag Pob Brad* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2005), pp. 20–27; Alan Llwyd, *Cofiant R. Williams Parry, 1884–1956* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 2013), pp. 105–119.

32 Principal’s Address, *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 35 (June 1950); *Welsh Outlook*, 2 (11 November 1915).

33 D. Arthen Evans, *Syllabus of Instruction in Welsh: Chiefly for Elementary Schools in Districts where English is the Predominant Language* (Barry Docks: Barry Cymmrodorion Society, 1912); D. Arthen Evans Bibliography, Ceredigion Council, <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4544> [accessed 1 August 2013].

34 *Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Frenhinol Cymru, Barri, 1920: Y Rhaglen Swyddogol* (Liverpool: Brython, 1920).

35 Hywel Teifi Edwards, ‘Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Treorci, 1928’, in *Cwm Rhondda*, ed. by Hywel Teifi Edwards (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1995), p. 194.

36 Principal’s Address, *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 35 (June 1950); Glamorgan Archives, GC/EDTC 15, Index to Glamorgan County Council Training College Committee Minutes.

Welsh department at the college had been laid by her predecessor, Gwladys A. Pierce of Bala, who resigned her post on marriage in 1915.³⁷ However, Ellen Evans certainly consolidated and developed that work, and did so in no uncertain terms.

The lectureship gave her the opportunity to put her convictions into action. The fiery young Welshwoman immediately set about ‘cymricizing’ the curriculum and promoting many Welsh extra-curricular activities. Great emphasis was placed on vocal work and drama, and the Welsh dimension became far more prominent in college life than it had been hitherto. When Ellen succeeded to the principalship in 1923 (a somewhat controversial appointment given her comparative youth and strong Welsh language focus), GTC Barry became the only training college in Wales where Welsh was taught to all students, regardless of their home language. The curriculum was differentiated on several levels, depending on the students’ prior knowledge. The ‘Beginners’ course (dubbed ‘baby Welsh’) included learning simple phrases and songs which could be taught to young children.³⁸ In introducing these reforms and others, Ellen changed the emphasis and ethos of the college to give it a strong Welsh character. In later years, she paid tribute to her colleagues, Miss Philpott and Miss Litchfield, both Englishwomen, and other non-Welsh speaking staff for their longstanding support, but it was well known that those who had originally worked under the first principal, Miss Hilda Raw, a Yorkshirewoman, in a different cultural environment, did not share Miss Evans’s enthusiasm for all things Welsh. She was, however, an extremely determined character, not known for her tolerance of dissent, so her views reigned supreme. She also had the support of the committee which managed the college.³⁹

Her efforts at the college in these years were in tune with those of the national movement more widely. For instance, in the early 1920s, a small group of academics, teachers, and others, prompted by the spirit of post-war reconstruction and the urge to ‘safeguard Welsh culture’, formed Cylch Dewi (Dewi’s Circle); one of their chief aims was to promote the use of Welsh in education. They published a short series of (unauthored) pamphlets between 1919 and 1925 which were drafted and jointly revised by members of the group.⁴⁰ It is known that Ellen Evans contributed to the work of the circle in Cardiff, and the content of several of the pamphlets, for example, *Welsh Books for Children* and *Y Gymraeg yn yr Ysgolion* (Welsh in Schools) reflects her interests and views.⁴¹ Her friend Elizabeth (Mrs Griffith John Williams) was also an active member and this adds weight to the possibility that she was at least partly responsible for some of the writing.

Y Gymraeg yn yr Ysgolion refers to the ‘forthcoming’ book on the teaching of Welsh by Ellen Evans and, during this period, her knowledge of the subject was further developed through her personal study for a Master’s degree, culminating in

37 Glamorgan Archives, Glamorgan County Council, Report of Chief Education Official to Education Committee on Application for Appointment of Lecturer in Welsh Language and Literature, Training College Committee File 1, 1914; *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 1 (1916).

38 *Welsh in Education and Life*, Appendix IV, pp. 332–3: interviews and questionnaires.

39 Principal’s Address, *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 24 (1939); 35 (1950); 32 (1951).

40 R. T. Jenkins, *Edrych yn Ôl* (Dinbych: Clwb Llyfrau Cymraeg, 1968), pp. 251–252.

41 Thomas, *The Memorial Address*; *Welsh Books for Children: Cylch Dewi Pamphlets*, 2 (Cardiff: The Educational Publishing Co. Ltd., n.d.); *Y Gymraeg yn yr Ysgolion: Pamffledi Cylch Dewi 4* (Cardiff: The Educational Publishing Co. Ltd., n.d.).

a dissertation on bilingual teaching in Wales.⁴² The book was published in 1924 at a time when bilingualism was a contentious pedagogic and political issue, largely as a result of the research of the Aberystwyth teacher, D. J. Saer (1868–1928).⁴³ In *The Teaching of Welsh* Ellen argued that a pupil's home language, whether Welsh or English, should be used as a medium of learning initially, and the second language introduced intensely via the Direct Method at a later stage. Despite being based on an academic thesis, the book is emotionally charged and, as one might expect, objectivity is not its hallmark, as evidenced by the dedication:

To my fellow teachers in whose hands lies the destiny of the Welsh language this book is dedicated, in the hope that they, through enthusiasm and continued effort, will hand on to the future generation the fair inheritance that is theirs.⁴⁴

Her faith in the influence of teachers is clear, as is her belief in the centrality of the language to ensure the survival of the 'fair inheritance' of Wales for the future. This phrase (*yr etifeddiaeth lân*) was common in the national discourse of the time, referring to the moral, almost sacred dimension of the Welsh cultural heritage, transferred from one generation to the next through the medium of the language. Characteristically, the historical overview of the teaching of Welsh in Ellen's book refers to the appeal by Evan Jones ('Ieuan Gwynedd', 1820–52) in *Y Gymraes* (the first periodical for women in Wales) to the mothers of Wales to uphold this 'fair inheritance' by teaching Welsh to their children. Ieuan Gwynedd, defender of Welsh nonconformist women's morality in the English press at the time of the furore caused by the 1847 Education Report (the 'Blue Books'), was one of Ellen's heroes. *Y Gymraes* promoted the ideal Welshwoman: religious, morally pure, hardworking, a knowledgeable educator of her children who would transfer the language and its associated religious values to them; one who was duty-bound to keep the home 'pure' for the good of society.⁴⁵ Ellen Evans's activities on behalf of the Welsh language can be viewed in the context of these ideas which defined women's role in nation-building in Wales. This provided an additional dimension to her cultural nationalism as a devotee of O.M. Edwards, and was an important part of her mission. After all, her students and the vast majority of Infant and Junior teachers were women; the best teachers in her eyes were those who held fast to these ideals, as she did.

The Teaching of Welsh was published at a time when considerable pressure was being placed on the Board of Education to set up a committee of inquiry in Wales to

42 Ellen Evans, 'Bilingual Education in Wales with Special Reference to the Teaching of Welsh', unpublished MA dissertation, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1924.

43 W. Gareth Evans, 'Y Wladwriaeth Brydeinig'; T. I. Williams, 'Patriots and Citizens: Language, Identity and Education in a Liberal State: The Anglicisation of Pontypridd, 1818–1920', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, Cardiff, 1989, pp. 243–8.

44 Ellen Evans, *The Teaching of Welsh: An Investigation into the Problem of Bilingualism together with a Discussion of Schemes for the Teaching of Welsh* (Cardiff and London: The Educational Publishing Company Ltd., 1924).

45 See Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The True Cymraes: Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth Century Welsh Periodicals', in *Our Mothers' Land*, ed. John, pp. 73–94.

report on the place of the Welsh language in education, a development which Ellen Evans strongly advocated.⁴⁶ In her book she argued that, as a result of the Newbolt Report on teaching English (1921), England now understood the importance of skilled teaching of the home language, and that similar guidance was needed in Wales.⁴⁷ In 1925, the annual conference of Undeb Cenedlaethol y Cymdeithasau Cymraeg, held at GTC, Barry, urged the government to act, adding its voice to those of the University of Wales, the Central Welsh Board, and other bodies. Ellen Evans was one of the Union's staunchest supporters and, given her stance on the teaching of Welsh, it was unsurprising that when the Departmental Committee was set up in 1925 she became one of a carefully selected group of members.⁴⁸ Although this occurred at a comparatively early stage in her career, she would always consider it to be the pinnacle of her achievements and was particularly proud of her contribution to it as the sole woman member.⁴⁹

The committee's report, published in 1927, draws on Ellen's research and has her imprint upon it; much of the evidence and several examples are drawn from schools under the management of the Glamorgan Education Committee and its training college. Its overall tone and recommendations are very much in accord with her views and priorities. It was not a particularly radical report, yet went too far for some. It was (and has been more recently) criticized for its propagandist stance and for leaning so heavily on the pro-Welsh lobby. Its recommendations were only partly carried out, for several reasons which are beyond the scope of this paper, but it lent official and intellectual support to Welsh teaching and firmly established Ellen Evans and her agenda on the national stage.⁵⁰

Despite her elevated status on the Departmental Committee, Ellen was not too proud to tackle the shortcomings which the report had identified and she continued to produce resources for schools. Her *Llawlyfr i Athrawon* ('Handbook for Teachers') had been published in 1926 and *Cynllun Cymraeg* (a plan for the teaching of Welsh) in 1927. Both books supported the implementation of a new approach to the teaching of Welsh and influenced the official guidance published in 1929.⁵¹ The annual conference of the Welsh teacher's union, Undeb Athrawon Cymru (UAC), hosted by Ellen Evans at the college in 1928 in the wake of the publication of the report, put pressure on the Board to act upon the recommendations. UAC had been formed to provide a voice for Welsh teachers on Welsh educational issues and to ensure that the language, literature, and music of Wales was prioritized in the curriculum. The Barry connection was strong: Ellen Evans took pride in the fact

46 W. Gareth Evans, 'Y Wladwriaeth Brydeinig', p. 338.

47 Ellen Evans, *The Teaching of Welsh*, p. 4.

48 Löffler, 'Mudiad yr Iaith Gymraeg', pp. 185–6.

49 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 35 (1950).

50 *Welsh in Education and Life*; Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Welsh for All', p. 43.

51 Ellen Evans, *Llawlyfr i Athrawon yn Cynnwys Cynllun Wersi i Blant Ysgol* (Wrecsam: Hughes a'i Fab, 1926); Ellen Evans, *Cynllun Cymraeg* (Wrecsam and Cardiff: Hughes a'i Fab, 1928); *Education in Wales: Suggestions for the Consideration of Education Authorities and Teachers: Awgrymiadau at Ystyriaeth Awdurdodau Addysg ac Athrawon (Memorandum 1)* (London: Welsh Department Board of Education, 1929). Ellen Evans had already published a collection of Welsh legends and nursery rhymes, *Y Mabinogion i'r Plant*, 4 vols. (Wrexham and Cardiff: Educational Publishing Co., 1929) and *Hwiangerddi Rhiannon* (Wrecsam: Hughes a'i Fab, 1926).

that it was in Barry in 1925 that the idea of a Welsh teachers' union was first mooted; the editorial board of the union's journal, *Yr Athro*, included Cassie Davies, Ellen's successor as Welsh lecturer, and many Barry teachers were active in it.⁵² The principal saw the union as an important force to carry out the recommendations of *Welsh in Education and Life*, as the report itself stated.

The UAC conference was one of several events Ellen either organized personally or was closely involved with in order to promote the report's findings, and Marion Löffler comments on the extraordinary energy and enthusiasm with which Ellen approached the task of driving forward its recommendations.⁵³ She organized meetings in various parts of Wales, including at Harlech at a meeting of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (the National Party of Wales) on the occasion of the opening of Coleg Harlech in 1927, and at Tonypany in 1928.⁵⁴

The publication of the report also gave Ellen the opportunity of linking her interest in child development and nursery education with her longstanding desire to try to halt the abandonment of Welsh by Welsh-speaking families in the industrial districts by establishing Welsh playgroups for pre-school children. Although her work on behalf of the nursery school movement was partly driven by her vision of saving the Welsh language, it was not the only inspiration for action. She had met Margaret McMillan at the 'New Ideals' conference in 1923 and was invited to the Deptford Camp School in 1927, the first of many visits until Margaret's death in 1931.⁵⁵ Margaret visited Barry and addressed the students in 1929 when the South Wales section of the Nursery School Association was established under Ellen Evans's chairmanship.⁵⁶ Ellen's work in this role requires further research, but it is clear that she actively supported the nursery schools established in 1929–30 with the assistance of the Society of Friends in Dowlais and in Ynyscynon, Rhondda (located close to the hospital where Ellen's sister was matron). She organized visits for students (which included tea at the hospital!) in the years which followed and campaigned for more nurseries to teach through the medium of Welsh. Her one great disappointment as principal was the failure to build a nursery school on the college campus due to a lack of funding, despite the project having been approved by the governing body in 1931.⁵⁷

Although Ellen delighted in the various experiments in bilingual teaching which took place in some Glamorganshire schools in the 1920s and early 1930s, overall the high hopes she had in 1927 did not materialize in the years of economic depression and war which followed. She was deeply saddened by the lack of progress in education and the continuing decline of the language, especially in the Rhondda valleys which experienced large-scale out-migration. Like other Welsh-speaking, chapel-going patriotic women, she was concerned at the decline in 'traditional Welsh' moral values which, for her, went hand in hand with the loss

52 *Yr Athro*, 4 July 1928; Principal's Address, *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 20 (1935).

53 Löffler, 'Mudiad yr Iaith Gymraeg', p. 186.

54 Ibid.; Gareth Evans, 'Y Wladwriaeth Brydeinig', p. 341.

55 Evans was proud of her friendship with Margaret McMillan and claimed to have deputized for the Duchess of York at the opening ceremony of McMillan House in 1936. Ten years later, she was nominated chairman of the McMillan Fund in Wales. See *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 33 (1948).

56 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 14 (1929).

57 *Y Ddraig Goch*, 7.11 (1933), p. 3.

of Welsh. There is some evidence that she was involved with Cymdeithas Mamau a Merched Cymru ('Society for the Mothers and Women of Wales'), established by a small group of women in 1920 (in the wake of centenary celebrations of the birth of Ieuan Gwynedd) to promote the teaching of the Welsh language and of religious values to children by mothers at home.⁵⁸ Given the importance she placed in her writing and lectures on the centrality of 'the hearth' (*yr aelwyd*) and on the role of mothers in safeguarding the future of Welsh, Ellen's views were in tune with those of the Society, as shown in her address to students on the occasion of the centenary of Ieuan Gwynedd's death in 1952.⁵⁹ By the late 1930s, the Society's main focus was fundraising in aid of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary, an effort which she also supported.⁶⁰

Another concern of Ellen's from the mid-1920s onwards was the out-migration to England of teachers who had been trained to teach Welsh.⁶¹ She steadfastly adhered to the strong Welsh ethos at Barry despite recruiting a higher proportion of students from English-speaking homes. She was particularly pleased when, in the 1950s, the regulations for admission were relaxed and she was able to recruit young women from Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire, a development which gave the Welsh life of the college a timely boost, since a recent inspection report had revealed a decline in the number of students studying Welsh.⁶² Her pro-Welsh stance made the college unattractive to some potential students but was seen as a positive feature by others.

The First World War had made Ellen Evans a committed pacifist, so having to face another war in 1939 was particularly difficult for the principal who had promoted the League of Nations Society so ardently among her students. She regularly invited leaders of the Peace Movement in Wales, such as George M. Ll. Davies and Gwilym Davies, to address the college branch. During the 1930s, after many years of fundraising, a long-planned project, the 'Quiet Room' (*Yr Hedd-dŷ* or 'House of Peace'), a chapel-like building, separate from the main college, was completed. She had it furnished with Brynmawr furniture, made by unemployed workers under the auspices of a work creation project run by the Society of Friends, whose pacifism and social initiatives she passionately supported. This oasis for reading and reflection also housed a valuable collection of books printed at Gregynog, where Ellen's friend Dora Herbert Jones, an occasional visitor to the college, was based. The Quiet Room was symbolic of her hopes for world peace. In a typically forward-looking message in 1940, she urged her students to reject 'the futility of hate' and to look beyond the present situation:

58 Interview with Miss Norah Isaac, Carmarthen, March 2001; personal letter from Judge Dewi Watkin Powell, 24 May 2007. For information on the society, see Mari A. Williams, 'Y Ferch a'r Gymraeg yng Nghymoedd Diwydiannol De Cymru, 1914–45', in *Eu Hiaith a Gadwant*, ed. Jenkins and Williams, pp. 157–9.

59 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 37 (1952).

60 Interview with Miss Norah Isaac; personal letter from Judge Dewi Watkin Powell.

61 Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Teacher Supply and the Wales-England Border, 1922–1950: A Gendered Perspective', in *Gendering Border Studies* ed. by J. Aaron, H. Altink and C. Weedon (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010) p. 99.

62 Glamorganshire Archives, E Coll B B38, *Report by HM Inspectors on Glamorgan Training College, Barry, 1948–9* (1950).

We as teachers are builders of the future and for this reason we must turn away from despair and refuse to become enveloped in darkness.⁶³

One ray of light which shone for her during the Second World War was the success of the first Welsh-medium school, established in Aberystwyth under the auspices of Urdd Gobaith Cymru. She had worked closely with Ifan ab Owen Edwards in the Urdd movement for many years, and, in 1939, at his invitation, she joined other prominent figures in the national movement, including Saunders Lewis and Ambrose Bebb, as a member of Pwyllgor Diogelu Diwylliant Cymru ('Committee for the Protection of the Culture of Wales'). The arrival of evacuees from England had started to affect the language of the classroom in the school attended by the sons of the Urdd's founder; consequently, an independent school teaching entirely through the medium of Welsh was set up. Miss Evans provided the school with its first teacher, an able former student and favourite of hers, Norah Isaac, who had been working for the Urdd. Miss Isaac subsequently returned to Barry to lecture in Welsh, and, with the principal herself, played no small part in helping to establish the first Welsh-medium schools in south-east Wales, including a nursery school in Maesteg in 1947 and a school in Barry in the early 1950s.⁶⁴

Although the majority of Barry-trained teachers, much to their principal's disappointment, had to cross the border to gain their first post due to a lack of jobs in Wales, several former students taught in the first generation of Welsh-medium schools. The creation of separate schools had not been the intended outcome of the future of bilingual education as envisaged by Ellen Evans and others in the 1920s, but the author of *The Teaching of Welsh* seems to have embraced the new movement enthusiastically. It is noteworthy that it was none other than Ben Bowen Thomas, in his capacity as permanent secretary of the Welsh Department of the Board of Education, who was largely responsible for facilitating the operation of Butler's Education Act in Wales and for securing a place for the Welsh language in the new post-war system, which included Welsh medium schools.⁶⁵

There were other aspects of post-war life which were not welcomed by Miss Evans. Her failure to adjust to changing social attitudes to gender relationships and even to post-war prices are proverbial. Very little changed with regard to college rules and regulations during her long reign as principal. Ironically, in 1944, she gave evidence to the McNair Committee on Teachers and Youth Leaders which advocated the modernization of training colleges, but students at GTC continued to be disciplined for minor transgressions. It is true to say that she did not command unforced respect from all staff and students, and for some of my informants she

63 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 25 (1940).

64 Interview with Miss Norah Isaac; Elen Lloyd Roberts, 'Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin', in *Addysg Gymraeg, Addysg Gymreig* ed. by Gareth Ff. Roberts and Cen Williams (Bangor: University of Wales Bangor, 2003), p. 116; *Addysg Gymraeg y Barri: Welsh Education in Barry, 1952-92* (Barry: St. Ffransis Parent Teacher Association, 1992), p. 1.

65 Elwyn Davies and Goronwy Daniel, 'Sir Ben Bowen Thomas 1899-1977: Anerchiad Coffa: Memorial Address', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1978), 42-7.

became a figure of ridicule. One of her best-known sayings in her weekly Ethics Class was, ‘Nice girls don’t wear pink!’ Yet, though her world view was outdated by the 1950s, many continued to admire her energy and determination and to acknowledge the debt they owed her.⁶⁶

There are several aspects of Ellen Evans’s life and work which require further research, not least her personal and family life and also her politics. There is no evidence at present that she joined a political party, though it is likely that her political views, moulded by ‘Cymru Fydd’ Liberalism, were influenced by both Fabian socialism and Welsh nationalism. Her links with Mary and Silyn Roberts and the politician E. T. John (campaigner for a Welsh parliament, who moved from Liberal to Labour) and her admiration of Margaret McMillan and Ellen Wilkinson MP, point towards possible support for Labour. She was also close to several prominent figures in Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, including Cassie Davies, lecturer in Welsh at the college. That Party’s summer schools were attended by Miss Davies and some of her students and reported in the college magazine. If Ellen was in favour of separatism, her nationalism was compatible with acceptance of the British honour of CBE, of which she was very proud.

Neither is there evidence that she ever joined a women’s suffrage group, although her friendship with Annie Gwen Jones, an active campaigner for the vote, would suggest that she supported the movement’s aims. More detailed investigation is also needed into the contribution made by Ellen Evans to the various boards and committees on which she served and the societies to which she belonged, as well as a more detailed assessment of her role as principal of a women’s college.

In her first written address to the staff and students as principal, Ellen Evans set out her vision for the future:

I feel that the college should play a very important part in the life of Wales; it should turn out women who, in a true sense, are nationalists, women who know that the words of Mazzini are true, ‘the only road to internationalism lies through nationalism’ and that the only way in which Wales can contribute to the life of the world is through looking back at the past of Wales, grasping the best of its traditions and inspirations and applying them to the problems of today, so as to make Cymru Fydd [the Wales of the future] indeed a good place for children to live in.⁶⁷

Prior to her final illness, Ellen referred her audience of students and staff back to this original objective and reminded them how, under her leadership, the college had, in her view, made an important contribution to Welsh life.⁶⁸ It can be said that she did not deviate from this aim throughout her years in the post, even though the linguistic and social context in Wales was changing rapidly.

For almost forty years, Ellen Evans made the most of her position as principal and the contacts she had made to further the aspirations she held for ‘her’ college

66 Questionnaires and interviews.

67 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 9 (1924).

68 *Tan y Ddraig Goch*, 35 (1950).

and for the youth of Wales. In all spheres of her work, she spoke with a distinctively Welsh voice; she candidly and confidently expressed her very firm belief in a Welsh-speaking Wales which valued its own literature, history, and culture; one which had a contribution to make in an international context. She was well-travelled and her personal and professional networks extended far beyond Rhondda, Cardiganshire, and Barry, but these places and the values they represented largely formed her professional and public character, with service to Wales at its core. She had her weaknesses: she held an overly romanticized and sentimentalized view of the past and its influence on the present; she had a tendency to exaggerate, in a grandiose fashion, her own and others' achievements. However, she was a shrewd manager and delegator, an effective operator who used her limited power to move events forward, and her capacity for work was phenomenal.

Despite her conservative view of motherhood, Ellen Evans firmly believed in women's agency and the importance of their active involvement in public life and politics. She commanded respect in her time, not so much for her contribution to intellectual debate but rather for her genuine and heartfelt enthusiasm and faithfulness to her values and for her efforts on behalf of education and the Welsh language. She was one of several women of influence in Welsh education in the inter-war years and is deserving of further study.