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Essays by Dai Morgan Evans

Edited by

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and Sheena Evans

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Dai Morgan Evans: A life in archaeology

Howard Williams, Chris Musson, Christopher Young,
Rosemary Cramp, Adrian James and Sheena Evans

Introduction, by Howard Williams

Born David Morgan Evans on 1 March (St David's Day) 1944 at West Kirby on the Wirral, Dai grew up in Chester, where the history master at the King's School encouraged his interest in local history (Figure 1). Summer holidays at St David's in West Wales, and participation in local digs in Chester, ignited his lifelong passion for archaeology. He studied the subject at Cardiff University (1963–1966) before pursuing postgraduate research on the archaeology of early Welsh poetry (Figure 2a), as well as acting as an assistant director of the South Cadbury excavations led by Professor Leslie Alcock (Figure 2b).

Dai's working life began when he joined the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings in Wales in early 1969. During his time there, he conceived and initiated the creation of the four Welsh archaeological trusts, as their 'true begetter'.¹ In 1977, he transferred to the English Inspectorate. Charged, from 1986, with developing countryside policies, he also became the English Heritage (as it now was) specialist in Public Inquiries. From 1992 to his retirement in 2004, Dai was a popular and active General Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London. He co-devised the APPAG (All Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group) from 2001 and for a number of years served as its secretary after his retirement (2004–2008).



Figure 1. Two images of Dai aged 4 participating in excavations in Chester.

¹ Anon. 2016, 5.



Figure 2. (a) Top-left, Dai at graduation, 1966; (b) Top-right, at South Cadbury; (c) Bottom-left, Dai with Richard Avent in 1980 (Photographs: shared by Sheena Evans).

From 2003, Dai was Honorary Lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology at UCL. Having opened University College Chester's new offices and teaching spaces in the Blue Coat School in 2003 to accommodate the Department of History and Archaeology, Dai served first as an honorary lecturer and then from 2006 as Visiting Professor of Archaeology, teaching and inspiring students and sustaining his research interests.

His active retirement also included a host of other activities including television appearances, serving on the National Trust Archaeology Panel, participating in the historic-period dimension of the SPACES project with Geoff Wainwright and Timothy Darvill, and initiating the first modern study of the unique early medieval Welsh monument, the Pillar of Eliseg, at Llantysilio yn Iâl, Denbighshire. After a lifetime contributing to the archaeology of England and Wales, Dai sadly passed away on his birthday aged 73, 1 March 2017.²

Stemming from the memorial event held at the Society of Antiquaries of London, 11 September 2017: 'Memorial for Professor Dai Morgan Evans FSA',³ this multi-authored introduction

² Williams 2017.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqlLEDDu9GU>

charts Dai's life in the service of archaeology. The authors cannot claim to cover all aspects of Dai's archaeological endeavours, and inevitably the discussion affords depth to some aspects while mentioning others more briefly. However, the perspectives sequentially address different phases of his archaeological career and combine to capture a sense of his overall achievements and legacy. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to this collection, which constitutes a celebration and memorial to Dai's archaeological career and research.

Early days in Wales, by Chris Musson⁴

In the valedictory notes on his own life in public service archaeology, Geoffrey Wainwright, reflecting at the turn of the millennium, described Wales as a 'tidy and well-ordered place'. In the late 1960s, in terms of rescue archaeology and heritage records, the situation could hardly have been described in those terms. The system, such as it was, was creaking painfully under the stress – not just in Wales but throughout Britain – of the increasingly rapid loss of irrecoverable archaeological evidence as a result of town-centre redevelopment, industrial and housing expansion, infrastructure projects and (less well appreciated at that stage) the depredations of increasingly aggressive agricultural practices in the countryside. Rescue archaeology was still some decades away from what we might now call 'pre-development archaeology', or in a broader sense 'conservation archaeology'. There was virtually no link, through readily available maps or records, between archaeologists and the national and local authority planners whose work often initiated and to some extent controlled – or at least moderated – the degree of physical, social and environmental damage caused by a country re-making itself in a rapidly changing world.

In Wales during the late 1960s, there was a small department of archaeology in University College Cardiff (as it was then) and another (even smaller) at Bangor in the far north-west. All four of the academic staff at Cardiff were involved in excavation: Bill Manning undertook large-scale rescue work at the Roman legionary fortress in Usk,⁵ while Richard Atkinson, Leslie Alcock and Mike Jarrett also worked on sites, in England rather than Wales, which matched their own academic interests (Atkinson at Silbury Hill, Wiltshire; Alcock at South Cadbury, Somerset; Jarrett at West Whelpington, Northumberland). The National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, and a number of small local and regional museums elsewhere, were focused almost entirely on managing, enriching and displaying their own collections. None of these parties were involvement in preventing or reacting to what was being lost in the processes of development and regeneration. Meanwhile, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, founded in 1908 and steadfast in its self-regard as the 'premier archaeological institution in Wales', was grinding its way at an increasingly glacial pace across the counties of Brecon and Glamorgan. The resulting (admirable) county Inventories drew together a mass of archaeological, historical and architectural information. However, at that time few staff had any conception of making its collected information more readily available through what in time became the National Monuments Record for Wales.

The Ministry of Public Building and Works (part of the Department of the Environment from 1970 onwards) had a brief that covered the whole of the UK. It maintained a small outpost of

⁴ With an additional final paragraph by Sheena Evans.

⁵ Manning 1981, 1989.