

I: Obituaries

1: Professor Dai Morgan Evans

1 March 1944 – 1 March 2017

by **Tony Wilmott***



Dai Evans was a friend and colleague for many years. I encountered him as a thorough Inspector of Ancient Monuments, as General Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London, as the originator and supervisor of the *Rome Wasn't Built in a Day* reconstruction of a Roman villa at Wroxeter for Channel 4 television, and more recently in his role as Visiting Professor at Chester University.

Dai was born at West Kirby on the Wirral and raised in Chester, a city for which he always retained a deep affection. He attended the King's School, where his interest in history and archaeology was encouraged by his history teacher. In 1960, at the age of 16, Dai was volunteering on Hugh Thompson's excavation of the Chester amphitheatre. In Thompson's report, the discovery of the timber seating framework (then interpreted as a timber amphitheatre) was attributed to 'Mr David Evans for his skilful trowelling'. The trowel which Dai used during this excavation remained a treasured possession.

From 1963 to 1966 Dai studied archaeology at the University of Cardiff, where he was one of a cohort which produced several others who were to become prominent in the profession. On graduating, he worked with his former teacher, Leslie Alcock, as Assistant Director of the famous excavation of Cadbury Castle (Cadbury-Camelot) in Somerset, which produced important evidence for sub-Roman reoccupation.

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Photograph of Dai Morgan Evans by the Pillar of Eliseg kindly supplied by Professor Howard Williams, University of Chester

In 1969 Dai became one of only three Inspectors of Ancient Monuments in the Welsh office. In this post he had to deal with sites and monuments from the prehistoric to the industrial periods and acquired great knowledge and expertise in all of them. The need for rescue excavation in Wales led him to champion the establishment of the Welsh archaeological trusts which are still active and flourishing today. From Wales Dai moved to London, where his casework responsibilities extended to most of southern England, including working and establishing excellent relationships with the Ministry of Defence on Dartmoor and Salisbury Plain. His grasp of detail and incisive decision-making in this role was key to his success in advocacy at public inquiries, where he won all fourteen cases with which he was involved. By 1986 the Inspectorate was part of English Heritage, and Dai led on the development of countryside policy, including among other things the Historic Battlefield Register and Countryside Stewardship. He championed the understanding, preservation and protection of archaeological and historic landscapes as opposed to sites in isolation.

In 1992 Dai was appointed as General Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London following the tragic death of Hugh Chapman. By coincidence he was thus successor-but-one in this post to his old Chester excavation director, Hugh Thompson. He took on the challenges of this job with characteristic gusto. He modernised the 300-year-old Society, installing the first computer network in its Burlington House headquarters. He set in place new financial management systems and placed the library catalogue online. He initiated the newsletter *Salon* in order to improve communication with the wider Fellowship. His time at Burlington House was marked by cheerful conviviality, initiating traditions such as the Christmas mulled wine party and the Summer Soirée, and ensuring the availability of afternoon tea before the regular Thursday general meetings. Crucially, Dai took a leading role in the long and successful negotiation with the government landlords over the future of the Society's tenure of Burlington House.

While still at the Antiquaries Dai also chaired the Butser Ancient Farm Trust. In this role in 2002–3 he participated in a Discovery Channel television programme following the construction of a replica Roman villa at the Butser site in Hampshire. This experience informed the more ambitious project to build a villa at Wroxeter based on evidence from earlier excavations. This project, undertaken in 2010, was presented on Channel 4 as *Rome Wasn't Built in a Day* and involved a team of modern builders using the techniques of Vitruvius. The programme showed Dai's good humour, his insistence on doing the job correctly, and his supportive nature. Few who watched will forget the wheelbarrow controversy or the six bewildered builders, sheets over their heads, taking the auguries before construction started.

Retirement from the Antiquaries in 2004 found Dai as active as ever. He served on the National Trust Archaeology Panel and the All Party Parliamentary Archaeology Advisory Group, and continued as Chairman of the Butser Trust. He also became an honorary lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology in London, and from 2006 an active and committed visiting professor at Chester. From Chester, together with Howard Williams, he initiated the project to understand the Pillar of Eliseg. In 2004 the Chester Amphitheatre Project was started, and Dai showed active enthusiasm for the project, memorably appearing on the BBC *Timewatch* documentary about the first excavation season arguing in favour of the

timber amphitheatre in a gladiatorial debate with Keith Matthews. Ultimately the existence of a timber amphitheatre was disproved, a fact which Dai readily accepted.

Dai was a friend and mentor to many, encouraging and promoting young talent wherever he could. His ready laugh and sparkling wit, combined with the deep wisdom and profound scholarship that he carried so lightly, made him a colleague and friend whose memory will be cherished.

Dai is survived by his wife, Sheena, their three daughters and five grandchildren.

