

POLITICAL LIVES  
#04

# SAUNDERS LEWIS

1893 • 1985



1936

Saunders Lewis was overwhelmingly voted by the Welsh people as their 10th greatest national hero in the '100 Welsh Heroes' poll, held in 2004.

GWENT JONES



# MAN OF SPIRIT AND NATION

## 1893-1985

The **political thought and actions of Saunders Lewis, represent a major strand in Welsh nationalism**, and Welsh political life. As a poet, playwright, academic, party leader, and political activist, Lewis shaped the life of his nation in many, often underestimated, ways.

For most of his working life he was active in Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales), and **he was the key strategist and philosopher of the party in its formative years.**

Lewis was **not a typical political leader or Statesman.** He was a maverick character, who had a weak voice and was never consider gregarious. A lover of good wine, a believer in the authority of the church, and a man who had little time for the plight of the proletariat, he was nevertheless **a man with a vision of a Welsh-speaking Wales**, where its people would be unbound from the clutches of British imperialism.



1916

Lieutenant  
Saunders Lewis,  
at First World War.

# THE EARLY YEARS

## 1893-1922

Despite being regarded as one of the **most famous Welsh people of the 20th Century**, John Saunders Lewis was actually born in England. On 15 October 1893 he came into the world as the second of three sons of Lodwig Lewis (1859-1933), a Calvinistic Methodist Minister, and his wife Mary Margaret Lewis (1862-1900). The family were living at that time at 61 Falkland Road, Poulton-cum-Seacombe, Wallasey, Merseyside, where Saunders was born.

Although Wallasey is in England, **Lewis' family spoke Welsh and there was a large and lively Welsh-speaking community across Liverpool and Merseyside**, with dozens of chapels at the heart of the community.

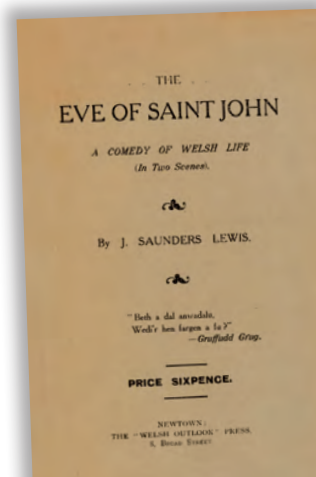
From the age of 6 Saunders Lewis attended Liscard High School for Boys. Though in England, the name Liscard derives from the Welsh Llys Carreg (Hall at the rock). So, Lewis surroundings, like his home life, will have **reflected Welsh language and culture**; areas that Lewis would master and promote throughout his life.

A bright young man, Lewis was accepted to read English and French at Liverpool University in 1911. During his time at university the First World War broke out, and he enlisted with the King's Liverpool Regiment in September 1914. The following year, Lewis joined the South Wales Borderers, where he became a Lieutenant. In 1916 he was sent to France.

During his time in France Saunders Lewis began to read avidly, and **he immersed himself in the work of Maurice Barres**. He also began to think of himself as a writer. Lewis **showed particular interest in the themes of geography, nationality and respect for religious authority**. Simultaneously, he rejected Romanticism, preferring instead to focus on pragmatic matters.

Saunders Lewis was wounded in battle in April 1917, and returned to Britain for recuperation. He later re-joined his regiment, and stayed in khaki until 1919.

Saunders Lewis completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1920. This was followed by his Masters of Arts degree in 1922, **His MA focussed on English poetry of the 18th Century, and the influence these poets had on Welsh writers of that age**. By this time, Lewis had also published his first work *The Eve of Saint John* in 1920.



## Swansea, 1926

Staff at the University College of Swansea including, in the back row: Saunders Lewis, E.A. Keeping, T.K. Rees...

RICHARD BURTON ARCHIVES - SWANSEA UNIVERSITY



# THE EMERGING ACADEMIC

## 1922-1926

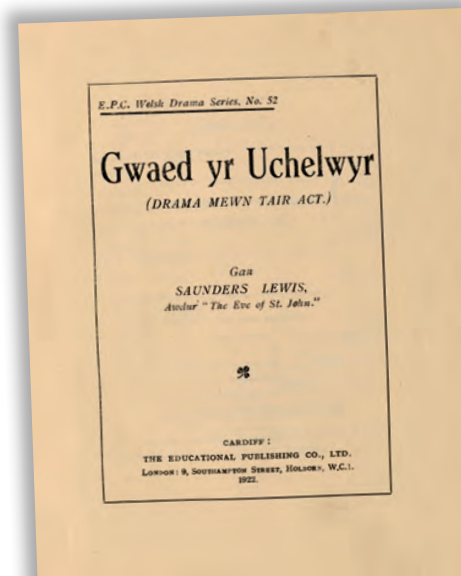
In 1922 Saunders Lewis was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Welsh at University College Swansea. The university had only been established two years earlier, so Lewis was one of its first academics and was given a certain amount of free reign to develop his subject and thinking.

**Saunders Lewis was forging his political philosophy alongside his academic and literary work.** In terms of his writing, his time at University College Swansea was his most productive. He wrote his first Welsh-language play *Gwaed yr Uchelwyr* (The Blood of the Highers) in 1922. Lewis contributed essays to the journal *Y Llenor* (The Curtain). These touched on social issues, including **perchentaeth (the distribution of property) which Lewis saw as essential to his evolving ideas about freedom.** He also criticised Protestant Liberalism, and its debilitating effect on Welsh religious society. This was a recurring theme throughout Lewis' life.

In July 1924, Saunders Lewis married Margaret Gilchrist (1891-1984) in a Catholic ceremony. They had one daughter, Mair, who was born in 1926. Lewis was formally received into the Catholic Church in 1933, shortly after the death of his father.

Whilst academic and literary work dominated this period in Saunders Lewis' life, there is no doubt that these years were crucial in allowing Saunders Lewis time to

reflect on the place of his nation. He saw Wales in trouble, on moral and political grounds, and this **led to him moving closer to political nationalism, and the need for a political party to promote the needs, aims and objectives of Welsh autonomy.**



**Machynlleth, 1926**

Participants in the Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru first summer school, including Saunders Lewis.



# THE BLOSSOMING WRITER

## 1926-1932

Apart from his emergence within Wales as a political and public figure, by the mid-1920's Saunders Lewis was also establishing a rapidly growing reputation as **one of the nation's finest young writers**. In 1926, he composed the pamphlet, *An Introduction to Contemporary Welsh Literature*. The following year, 1927, saw Lewis' brilliant study of Williams Pantycelyn, the hymn-writer.

In 1930 Saunders Lewis published the novel *Monica*. This is **arguably his finest and most well-known work. It is a great, provocative work in the modernist tradition and takes on controversial issues such as prostitution and venereal disease**. As a play, it is often performed, and is widely read by many students of literature in Wales and beyond.

By 1932 Lewis was widely acknowledged as an outstanding writer of plays, prose and essays. His politics was merging with his intellectual, academic style and he produced *Braslun o Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg Hyd 1536* (*Sketch of the History of Welsh Literature since 1536*). In this work, **Lewis contended that Wales was a European nation, with European culture, but that the English King Henry VIII had cut off Wales from this European heritage and civilisation**. He maintained that the English King's Protestant Rebellion had been disastrous for Wales.



## Llangollen, 1927

The Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru Working Committee at the second summer school.

From left to right: Lewis Valentine, Ambrose Bebb, David John Williams, Mai Roberts, Saunders Lewis, Kate Roberts, H.R. Jones and Prosser Rhys.

LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU



# THE BIRTH OF PLAID CYMRU

## 1925-1926

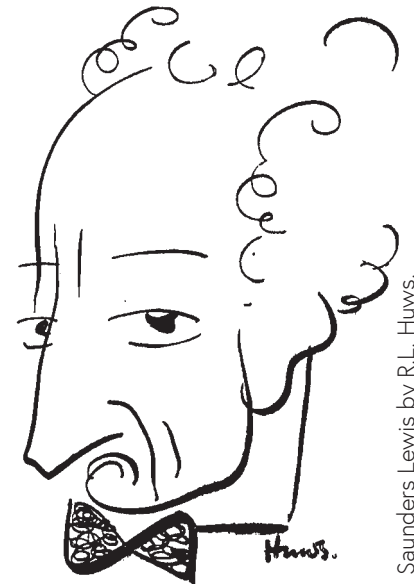
Since the 19th Century many people had suggested that **Wales needed a single, unified nationalist party**. After First World War, and the rise of the nation-states with the Treaty of Versailles, attention was paid to Wales and its constitutional status. Groups and organisation, such as Y Mudiad Cymreig (The Welsh Movement) and Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru (The Welsh Home Rule Army), existed but did not have broad support.

Lewis had observed all of this, and **was influenced by Irish independence**. In 1925 the National Eisteddfod, Wales' principal cultural gathering, met at Pwllheli, Gwynedd, one of the heartlands of the Welsh language. Together with H.R. Jones, Lewis Valentine and other militants, **Lewis proposed the establishment of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (National Party of Wales), which later became known by its current title, Plaid Cymru**.

Plaid Cymru was established in August 1925 with **the aim of creating a fully Welsh-language society, with aims and principles based in Wales' Christian history**, and as Lewis said "...to remove from our beloved country the mark and shame of conquest".

Plaid Cymru wanted people to turn their backs on the UK political system, and London-based political parties, and to **focus their attention on improving the social**

**and cultural lives of the people of Wales**. Saunders Lewis was instrumental in promoting this position and he soon became the party's foremost political philosopher, and party tactician.



Saunders Lewis by R.L. Huws.

THE  
**Welsh Nationalist**

ORGAN OF THE WELSH NATIONALIST PARTY

*Advertisements, etc.—Welsh Nationalist Party Offices, Caernarvon*

*Editorial.—75 Richards Terrace, Cardiff*

VOLUME I

JANUARY 15, 1932

NUMBER 1

## The New Nationalism in Wales: What It Means

By SAUNDERS LEWIS

THERE are many things that one might usefully discuss in the first number of a new political paper. Especially, the economic crisis and its Welsh aspects seem to press for illumination. But perhaps I shall do best of all if I try to show the change of meaning which the term "Welsh Nationalism" is acquiring today through the efforts of the Welsh Nationalist Party.

You know the old meaning—the wretched and poor and rather despicable meaning. You get it still quite regularly in obituary notices of successful politicians and business men and even trade union leaders, who were born in Wales and were, perhaps, Welsh-speakers. The English newspapers that circulate in Wales, after describing the career of such a respectable and successful man and how he rose from humble origins to positions of eminence and influence and control, end up by saying that "the deceased gentleman was also an ardent Welsh Nationalist, presided frequently on the platform of the National Eisteddfod, was a prominent figure in denominational assemblies, and attended regularly the annual dinner of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion."

Such was Welsh Nationalism. It was the spare-time hobby of corpulent and successful men. But we of the Welsh Nationalist Party want to extirpate that kind of "Ardent Welsh Nationalist." We want to sever the association of the adjective "ardent" with Welsh Nationalism. We want also to make it impossible for the Members of Parliament now in Westminster as representatives of Welsh constituencies, and obedient adherents to any of three English political parties, to meet together once a session or so and call themselves the "Welsh National Party." They are no

such thing. They are no party. They are anti-national and only some of them are Welsh.

Nationalism is for us a political faith. We refuse the name of Nationalist to anyone who denies or ignores the principle that a society possessing evident marks of being a nation should be required and enabled to take complete responsibility for its own government and administration. For us, the word Nationalism has no other meaning. A Welsh Nationalist is one who believes that Wales is a nation and that the Welsh Nation should manfully and delightedly take again the responsibility of building a Welsh civilisation. We are out to put the Dominion of Wales on the map of Europe.

I believe that this definition will clear the air. This paper will have the task in future of revealing, to those who through no fault of their own have lost the life-giving contact with Welsh history and tradition and speech, just what that loss has meant in the impoverishment of their lives and in the cruelty and hardship of their economic environment. It will have to try to revive in them the consciousness of nationhood. It will have to show them the advantage of belonging to a nation and to a historic society. It will even have to persuade them to strive to attain to the dignity of self-government and freedom. Let us, therefore, never lose our clear and severe apprehension of the main point: that it is our absolute duty to ourselves as adult men and women to demand and to insist on the responsibility of self-government. This great thing is not a luxury. It is not a caprice. To refuse it is to betray the Christian conception of Society. It is to repudiate the whole development of European history. That, and not the advantages of self-government, is what I wish to put first in this new organ of our Welsh Nationalist Party.

January 15th, 1932

"The Welsh Nationalist",  
 with an article by  
 Saunders Lewis  
 on the significance  
 of the new nationalism  
 in Wales.

LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

# PARTY PRESIDENT

## 1926-1939

In 1926 Saunders Lewis became President of Plaid Cymru. On assuming the presidency Lewis delivered a policy lecture, *Egwyddorion Cenedlaetholdeb* (The Principles of Nationalism). The core element of this was Lewis' calls for **freedom for Wales, but still retaining the monarchy.**

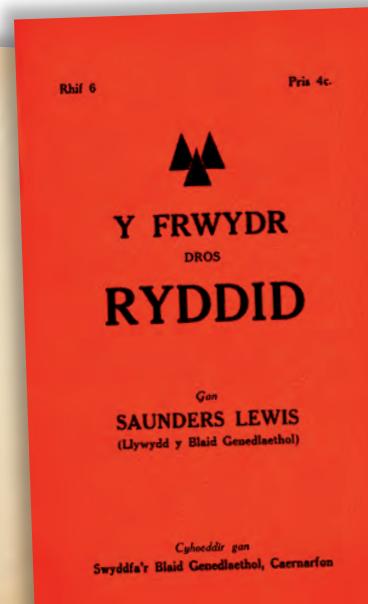
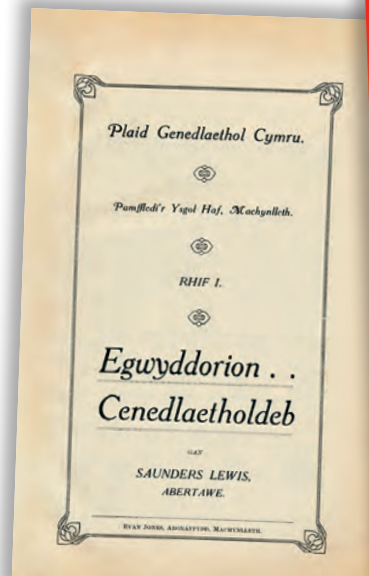
Saunders Lewis also assumed the editorship of Plaid Cymru's journal *Y Ddraig Goch* (The Red Dragon). This allowed Lewis space to build up the party's political ideology. In his column he advanced much of the party's early thinking. **Lewis highlighted issues such as cooperative living, promoting the rural economy at the expense of industrialisation, and self-sufficiency.** These became pillars of Plaid Cymru for the ensuing decades. Lewis also imagined a future Wales that rejected both Capitalism and Socialism, though many within his party would embrace Socialism over time.

In 1931 Saunders Lewis stood at the UK General Election for the University of Wales constituency. He gained 914 votes (24,6%) against Ernest Evans (Liberal Party), and was unelected.

Saunders Lewis battled throughout his life to promote the Welsh language and its culture through the media. In 1933, however, **he attacked the BBC by saying that it was seeking to destroy the Welsh language.**

In 1937 Lewis confirmed his, and as he saw it, Plaid Cymru's **commitment to conservative Christian nationalism.** But Plaid Cymru's ideology was changing as influential socialist like DJ Davies and Noelle Davies were beginning to shape the party's manifestos and pamphlets.

In 1939 having diversified into farming and Journalism, and having moved from Swansea to Aberystwyth, **Saunders Lewis resigned as President of Plaid Cymru.**



# Y DDRAIG GOCH

PAPUR PLAID  
GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

CYFROL 11. RHIF X.

HYDREF, 1936.

PRIS: DWY GEINIOG

## "Y TRI HYN"

**H**AWDD iawn a fyddai tybied, o edrych ar y llun hwn, ar ei lawenydd a'i ddireidi, mai mewn priodas neu ar ryw achlysur "difyr" cyffelyb y tynnwyd ef. Nid yn aml y gwelir mewn llun ar wyneb Mr. Saunders Lewis y fath ysgafnder bryd a boddhad rhadlon; ni welwyd erioed mo asbri a joie de vivre Mr. Valentine yn eglurach; ac y mae gwep Mr. D. J. Williams yn methu'n lan a chelu ei fod mewn hwyliâu noddedig.

Ie, ar achlysur arbennig y tynnwyd y llun, ond nid ar achlysur "difyr" chwaith. Ar y ffordd i Bwllheli i'r ail lys y tynnwyd ef, o fewn rhyw awr i adeg eu hildio'n hunain i fyny i'r plismyn am eu treial, pan na wyddent beth a fyddai eu tynged cyn nos. Buont ill tri ar de gyda chyfaill y pnaen cynt, a chywair eu meddwl oedd stori a adroddodd D.J.— "Rwy'n teimlo," meddai, "fel y gwas fiarm a gwypodd o ffenest uchel, ac a ddywedodd wrtho'i hun hanner ffordd i lawr. *Wel, diolch fod pethu'n iawn hyd yma. Ond wrth gwrs, oddyma i'r gwaclod yw'r gwaethaf.*"

Yn yr ysbryd yna y wynebodd y tri hyn y llys ym Mhwllheli ac yn yr ysbryd hyn y wynebant Llys yr Assize yng Nghaer-narfon ddydd Mawrth nesaf.

October, 1936  
"Y Ddraig Goch"  
(The Red Dragon),  
monthly organ of Plaid  
Genedlaethol Cymru,  
chronicling the events of  
Fire in Llŷn  
with the image  
of the Peniberth Three.

LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

Ond os gallent hwy chwerrthin yn wyneb y dyfodol, cofied pawb mai chwerrthin yr oeddynt mewn aungylchiadau lle na all ond y dewraf chwerrthin. Chwerrthin yr oeddynt yn wyneb posibilrwyddi carehar a cholli rhyddid, a'r rhywgo a ddwg hynny gydag ef. Chwerrthin, lle yn ôl safonau dynion cyffredin, nid oedd le i chwerrthin.

Paham, ynteu, y gallent, ac y gallant, wynebu dyfodol mor ansicr mewn ysbryd mor lawen-ddewr? Mae'r ateb yn ddigon syml.

*Am eu bod yn caru Cymru.*

### Y GWYNT YN TROI YM MHWLLHELI.

**U**N peth na soniodd y Wasg Seisnig ddim oll amdano wrth adrodd hanes yr ail lys ym Mhwllheli oedd y cynfnewidiad llwyr yn agwedd y dorff tuagat y tri gwron a'u cefnogwyr.

Fe gofir mai chwerrthin iawn oeddynt yn y llys cyntaf, ac mai anodd a fu achub hyd yn oed meichiafon y tri o'u gfael. Ond erbyn yr ail lys newidiwyd hynny oll. Yn lle digter cafwyd fwrddrydedd a fynnai hyd yn oed yn y llys ei hun dorri dros y terfynau i'w fynegi'i hun. A thuallan ar y diwedd, y dyrfa, a oedd y tro cynt mor gynddeiriog yn erbyn y tri, oedd yn awr eu gosgorddion balch.

Gymaint o wahaniaeth a wnaeth ychydig ddyddiau o hwyll a dealltwriaeth.

### 1536 YN LLEFARU ETO.

**F**EL y gellid disgwyl pan oedd Cenedlaetholwyr ger bron y llys, cododd pwnc yr iaith yn bur fuan. Adargraffwn adroddiad o'r drafofaeth a fu ar y mater, ac yna rhoddwn ddyfyniadau o Ddeddf Uno Cymru a Lloegr, 1536, er mwyn dangos i'n darllenwyr mai yr un egwyddor yn union sy'n llywodraeth gweinyddiad y gyfraith yng Nghymru heddiw a phedair canrif yn ôl.

Wela'n gyntaf hanes y llys. Yr oedd Superintendent Hughes yn rhoi ei dystiolaeth (yn Saesneg) ac yn adrodd yr hyn a ddywedodd y tri wrth eu rhoi eu hunain i fyny. Yn Gymraeg y siaradodd y tri wrth gwrs, ac, fel tyst cywir a da, yn Gymraeg y rhoddodd y Super. eu geiriau. Cododd Mr. Paling (dros yr Erynydd Cyhoeddus) a dywedyd, "*Cannot we have it in English?*"

Esboniwyd iddo gan Glerec y Llys mai er mwyn cywirdeb tystiolaeth y rhoddid y geiriau yn Gymraeg. Mr. Paling: "*There is no authority, as I know, of putting down evidence other than in English.*"

Y Clere: "But supposing the accused was a Frenchman replying in French?" Yna dyfynnodd Mr. Paling achos Vaquier, Ffrancwr, a gyhuddwyd o lofruddiaeth, ac a atebodd mewn Ffrangeg, am na fedrai Saesneg; eto, meddai Mr. Paling yn Saesneg y cymerwyd ei dystiolaeth i lawr.

Torrodd Mr. E. V. Stanley Jones, y cyfreithiwr amddiffynol, i mewn a phrotestio nad estroniaid, fel Vaquier, oedd y tri hyn ond pobl yn siarad eu hiaith eu hunain yn eu gwlad eu hunain.

Darllener yn awr eiriau Ddeddf 1536, adran 19:

(*Grw. td. 2.*)



SAUNDERS LEWIS, LLYWYDD Y PLAID GENEDLAETHOL (yn y canol); Y PARCHO. LEWIS VALENTINE, IS-LYW YDD Y PLAID (ar y chwth); D. J. WILLIAMS, ABERGWAUN, AELOD O'R PWY LLGOR GWAITH ER 1925 (ar y dde).

*Gweler td. 2.—fa fodd ichwi bryni'r llun hwn*

# FIRE IN LLŶN

## 1936

In 1935, exactly **400 years after the Act of Union** that tied Wales to the English State, the UK Government decided to establish the RAF Penrhos bombing school at Penyberth on the Llŷn Peninsula. This was chosen after other locations, across England, were rejected due to public opposition.

An ancient farmhouse stood on the site at Penyberth. This had been **home to poets and priests, and was seen as a forum for Welsh culture, and a scared place.**

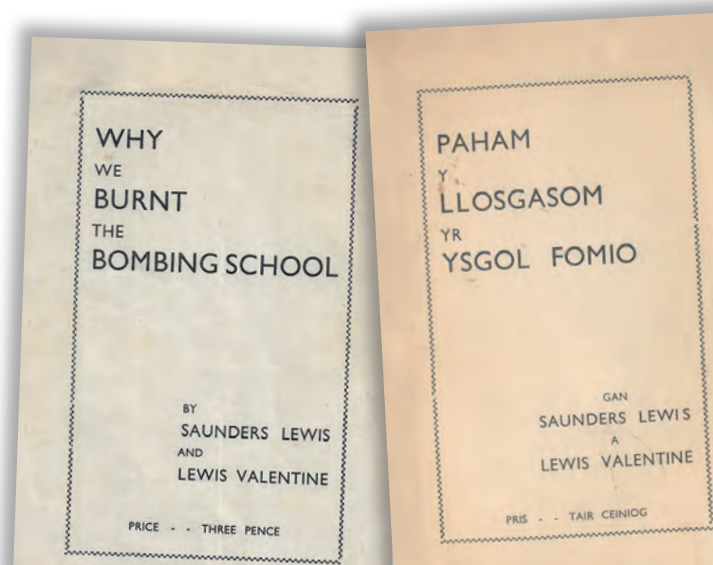
On 8 September 1936, in an act of non-violent-direct-action, Saunders Lewis, and two other senior Plaid Cymru members, the cleric Lewis Valentine and the novelist David John Williams, **set fire to the bombing school and then surrendered to the police.** Lewis said that he was protesting against a barbaric form of warfare.

The trial at Caernarfon failed to agree on a verdict and the case was sent to the Old Bailey in London. The "Penyberth Three", as the media labelled them, were sentenced to nine months imprisonment in London, and on their release they were greeted as heroes by a large crowd.

**Throughout the trial the Judge was dismissive of the Welsh language and Welsh society.** Many people

from all political parties were angered by this, as they were with the decision of University College Swansea to dismiss Lewis from his academic post.

**Tân yn Llŷn (Fire in Llŷn) became a catalyst for the Welsh national movement** and it emboldened militants to take action against the UK State in the years and decades ahead. The lexicographer Dafydd Glyn Jones wrote of the fire that it was **"the first time in five centuries that Wales struck back at England with a measure of violence"**.



## Dinbych, 1941

Meeting of the Welsh Catholic Circle.

Front row: Canon David Crowley, Father John Brennan, Cathrin Daniel, Mrs Wynne, Edna Hampson-Jones, Dean Pat Crowley, Father Maher.

Back row: Father Fenton, Tom Shannon, Father John Ryan, Canon Barrett Davies, R. O. F. Wynne, Father Pat Shannon, Thomas Charles Edwards, Father James Reardon, Saunders Lewis.



# THE WAR YEARS AND THE UNIVERSITY OF WALES BY-ELECTION 1939-1943

Plaid Cymru maintained a position of neutrality throughout World War Two, although many of its members ended up in an armed combat. Saunders Lewis maintained this position of neutrality, and through articles, argued that **people should have loyalty to the Welsh nation "over the loyalty to the British State"**. Lewis was convinced that war was a bad idea for all concerned and his public pronouncements became darker and depressing.

During this period, Lewis wrote a lot of political poetry. In 1939 he penned **Y Dilyw (The Deluge) which was highly critical of heavy industry, and also attacked Wall Street financiers**. He was picked on by those on the left and right who disliked his portrayal of the working and financial classes. One of his fiercest critics, Gwilym Davies, even accused him of wanting to create a Papist Wales.

**In 1943 Saunders Lewis contested the University of Wales parliamentary seat at by-election.** Interestingly, his main opponent was former Plaid Cymru deputy vice-president Dr William John Gruffydd, who took a different ideological position to Lewis, and who had left Plaid Cymru to join the Liberal Party.

Lewis fought hard to win people over to his views, but Gruffydd was well liked by the Welsh-speaking intelligentsia. He gained 1.330 votes (22,5%) and was

unelected. Gruffydd convincingly beat Lewis, who then became disillusioned by electoral politics. However, the by-election had ensured that **Plaid Cymru raised its public profile as a democratic political party**, and they subsequently saw a large increase in their membership.

**Ebbw Vale, August 4th, 1958**

Saunders Lewis addressing the Eisteddfod as its President and referring to a plan to build an atomic energy station in Trawsfynydd.

GEOFF CHARLES / LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU



## IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS

### 1945-1962

Saunders Lewis had been rocked by his defeat to WJ Gruffuyd in 1943. By the end of the Second World War he was drifting away from the Plaid Cymru frontline, mostly because **he disagreed with its new ideology of community socialism, decentralisation and pacifism.**

Lewis decided to concentrate on his writing and in 1946 he began to edit the journal Efyrdiau Catholig (Catholic Mural). In this he dedicated himself to literary criticism, focusing on the Early Modern and Baroque periods. He finally completed his stage play *Blodeuwedd* (The Women of Flowers) in 1948, over twenty years after he began it.

From 1952-1957 Lewis worked as a Lecturer at the University College Cardiff. Meanwhile, Saunders Lewis' writing, whilst adopting Welsh themes, also began to look at wider matters. **He started to compose light comedies with existentialist content and questions.** These include the regularly performed *Siwan* (1956), *Brad* (1958) and *Esther* (1960).

In 1960 Lewis moved into the world of opera when he wrote the libretto for Arwel Hughes' *Serch yw'r doctor* (Love's the doctor), based on Moliere's *L'Amour médecin*.

So **the post-war years saw Saunders Lewis divert from Plaid Cymru activity and the presidential post,**

and concentrate on his literary interests and academic tasks. But in the early 1960's emerging political events, and the threat to Welshness, would soon make sure that he re-entered the public sphere.





**Penarth, February, 1962**

Saunders Lewis  
at his home, shortly  
before broadcasting his  
lecture "Tynged yr Iaith".

LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

# THE FATE OF THE LANGUAGE

## 1962

In the mid 1950's Liverpool Corporation, and English municipality, were granted permission to **drown the scenic village of Cwm Celyn** in order to create a reservoir that would serve their city.

This was opposed by all Welsh politicians, from every party, but it went ahead and led to civil action by protestors, who included many Plaid Cymru members.

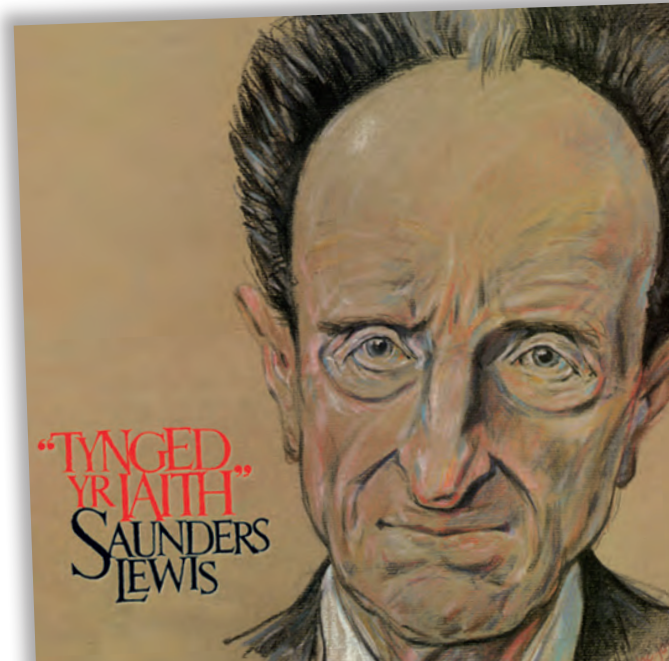
Added to this, **the 1961 Census showed a significant decrease in the numbers of Welsh speakers, even in the rural heartlands.** This stirred Saunders Lewis, and he returned from his years in the political wilderness to make a momentous declaration.

In 1962 Lewis delivered a radio lecture, *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language). **Saunders Lewis predicted that the Welsh language would become extinct unless some serious action was taken.** He said that the decline of the language had to be addressed through "revolutionary means not through policy papers".

The response to the radio lecture was immediate and bold. *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* (The Welsh Language Society) was established at Plaid Cymru's Summer School held at Pontardawe, Swansea Valley in 1962.

From 1962 to this very day *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg* are **vigorous campaigners for Welsh language rights, and the promotion of Welsh cultural life.** They also stage regular demonstrations and rallies against those companies or organisations who disrespect the language.

Saunders Lewis was now portrayed in a new light. Though nearly 70 years of age, he was heralded as a revolutionary prophet by the students of the 1960's.





1973

Saunders Lewis  
at a book launch  
of "Presenting  
Saunders Lewis".

JULIAN SHEPPARD /

LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

## THE PHOENIX

### 1963-1974

Though he never made it back to the frontline with Plaid Cymru, **Saunders Lewis continued to play an important part in the cultural and literary worlds of Welsh nationalism.** He also restated his belief that every aspect of Welsh life, from government to leisure, should be conducted through the medium of the Welsh language.

The BBC, with whom Saunders Lewis had had a love-hate relationship throughout his life, broadcast his plays, as did theatres outside Wales. In 1967 he produced *Cymru Fydd* (Wales Will Be). This was a **brutally honest work about the present-day political and social scene in Wales.** The following year, 1968, saw the debut of his ironically titled play *Problemau Prifysgol* (University Problems). In this Lewis commented on the degenerate nature of modern Wales, and he informed his audience that Wales' best days were in the past.

Lewis' reputation was spreading further and wider. This culminated in 1970 with his **nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature.** Unfortunately, he did not win.

Further religious and literary works appeared during this period. In 1974 **he described the Methodist Revival of 1904-5 as "the story of the rebirth of our nation".** By doing so, Lewis again displayed how

his political and religious philosophies overlapped, and this shows how Lewis can be described as a **cultural-theological nationalist.**





**Circa 1978**  
One of the last  
known pictures  
of Saunders Lewis.

## THE FINAL DECADE 1975-1985

Saunders Lewis witnessed the rejection of devolved self-government by the people of Wales in 1979. Sadly, he did not live to see its enactment in 1997, though this would have fallen short of his expectations for **complete freedom for the Welsh community**.

Saunders Lewis worked, off and on, up to 1980, even though he had suffered a stroke in 1979. Still voicing his concerns, Lewis noted in 1982 that Catholic services should conduct Mass in Latin rather than the "foreign language of English". Forever the Classicist, Lewis argued that English was "the later arrival". His **promotion of Latin, for religious ceremonies, and Welsh, for daily communication**, was maintained throughout his life.

In 1983 he was awarded a **Doctor of Letters by the University of Wales**. This went some way to heal the wounds after his dismissal from University College in Swansea half a century earlier.

Two late edited collections of his work were published. *Meistri a'u Crefft* (Masters and their craft) in 1981, and, posthumously, *Ati Wŷr Ifainc* (Go to it, young men) in 1986.

Saunders Lewis died at St Winifred's Hospital, in Cardiff, on 1st September 1985, after a long illness. At his funeral, reference was made to his political life and his

**existential theology**. It was also revealed that Lewis had been made a Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory. The medal from Pope Paul VI was placed on his coffin. This was a religious honour to celebrate a **multi-layered life of nationalist commitment**.



1987-2017

Since the death of Saunders Lewis, his figure has continued to arouse the interest of new generations, who have discovered his life and work through dozens of biographical books..

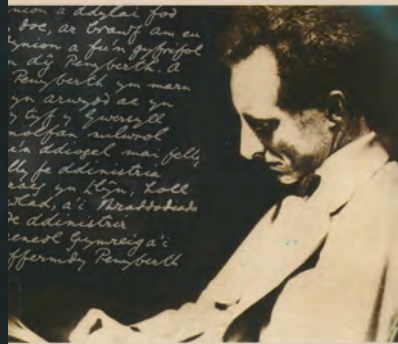
# Bro a Bywyd

Saunders Lewis 1893-1985



pigion 2000

# Saunders Lewis



'Sefwch gyda mi'

Cofio 75 mlynedd ers llosgi'r Ysgol Fomio

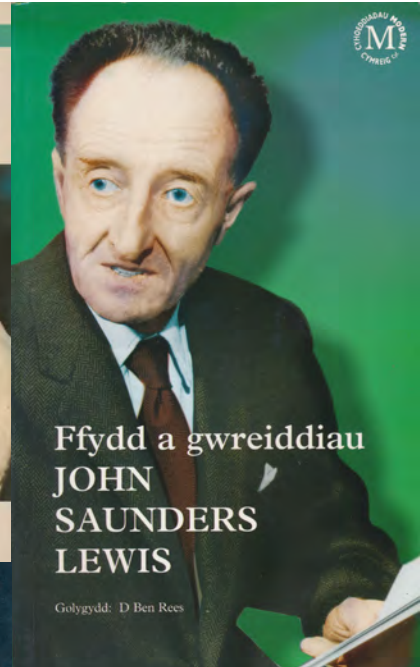
# 'CYTHRAL O DÂN'



ARWEL VITTE

Rhagair gan DAFYDD WIGLEY

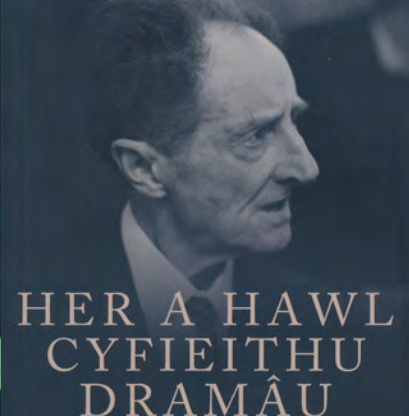
Y Lolfa



# Ffydd a gwreiddiau JOHN SAUNDERS LEWIS

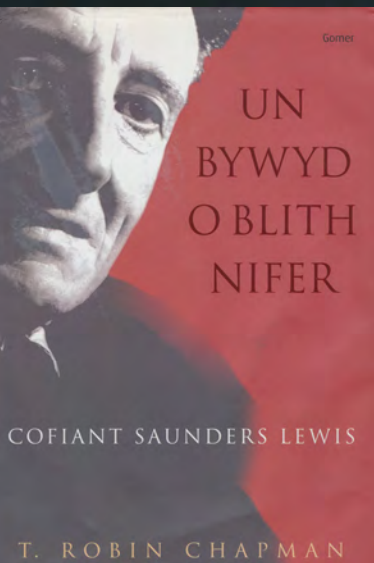
Golygydd: D Ben Rees

Y MEDDWL A'R DYCHMYG CYMREIG



# HER A HAWL CYFIEITHU DRAMÂU

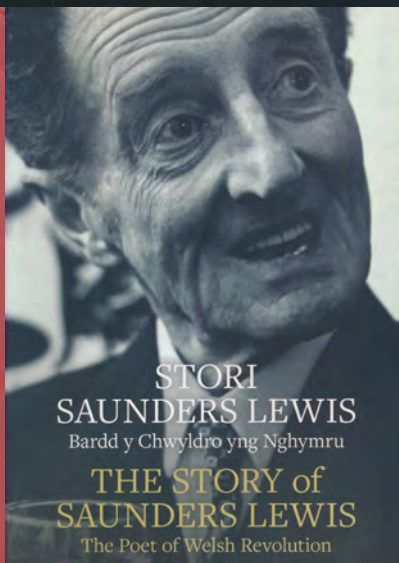
SAUNDERS LEWIS, SAMUEL BECKETT  
A MOLIÈRE



# UN BYWYD O BLITH NIFER

COFIANT SAUNDERS LEWIS

T. ROBIN CHAPMAN



# STORI SAUNDERS LEWIS

Bardd y Chwyldro yng Nghymru

# THE STORY of SAUNDERS LEWIS

The Poet of Welsh Revolution

# HIS LEGACY: A REJUVENATED WALES WITH A CULTURAL AND POLITICAL VISION 1985-2025

Saunders Lewis was **one of the most prominent writers and critics of the modern age**. Above all, his love of his nation, in its purity and with all its warts, shone through.

Without the thought and actions of Saunders Lewis, Welsh political and cultural life would be in a much weaker position than they are at present. **Lewis pointed the people in the direction of Welsh nationhood.**

The roots of the two Welsh Language Acts, in 1967 and 1993, can be traced to his *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language) lecture in 1962. His words **initiated and motivated a generation of activists and dissenters.**

Lewis combined his political, religious, literary and cultural writings to reflect his **unique ideology**. He was not a simple, straightforward person. Indeed, his complexity allowed him to act as a **free-floating intellectual**. Despite his central role within Plaid Cymru, certainly in its formative years, he never got stuck in humdrum, machine politics. His academic work allowed him to be **a student and observer of politics and society**, as much as he was a politico in any traditional sense.

Wales may have a more limited form of self-government when compared to other emerging European nations,

but it almost certainly would not have achieved even this degree of autonomy if it was not for the life and political engagement of Saunders Lewis.

**His legacy was to inspire and question the people of Wales** in equal measure. A playwright and philosopher by instinct and nurturing, but ultimately Lewis was a patriotic Cymro (Welshman) for every moment of the day.



Saunders Lewis by Roy Guy.  
WIRELESS IN WALES MUSEUM

"Saunders Lewis was responsible for restoring to his fellow citizens some sense of the vibrancy and cosmopolitanism their culture had enjoyed during the Middle Ages"

**Alexei Kondratiev**

French-American author, linguist and Celticist

