***Jennie Eirian 1925-1982***

You will have seen the plaque outside the Church wall in Llanpumsaint dedicated to the memory of Jennie Eirian. Whilst one would expect all Welsh speakers to be aware of her achievements one suspects that many of you who have moved into the parish would appreciate an insight into her life.

The rounded inscription “***Cornel Coffa \*\*\* Un o ferched disgleiriaf Cymru***” records that here is a commemorative corner to one of Wales’ brightest female stars. She was brought up at the then ***Llandre*** farm a mere hundred yards away to the south and right opposite the village school which she attended. There the long serving headmaster Jack Johns quickly realised that he had a remarkably talented and erudite little girl in his class. Under his tuition she blossomed to read and write both poetry and prose during the early 1930’s and then fly through the 11+ to gain entry to the Queen Elizabeth Grammar for Girls in Carmarthen.

In those pre-War days there was no public transport through Llanpumsaint, so each morning she walked past Bodran Felin, Pandy and Bryn farm out to the Lampeter road to catch the bus to town. Each evening on the long trek back home she practised memorising and reciting poetry. That trek ended when she gained a scholarship to Aberystwyth University college in 1943 where she graduated with First Class honours. Then returning to teach at her old school, the Girls ’Gram, she inspired her pupils with her enthusiasm and energy in what was then a rather snobby environment. “*She was a born teacher with the knack of extracting the best out of each pupil”.*

You may now be wondering where the ***Eirian*** came in since she was a Howells originally. She married him in 1949, a minister of religion, so henceforth she balanced her busy life around that responsibility also. Passionately involved in Welsh language and culture she now entered politics, to stand as a no hope Plaid Cymru candidate against the iconic Liberal sitting member, Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, in the 1955 general election. She lost! But standing again in the 1957 by-election, won by Megan Lloyd George for Labour, Jennie upped the Plaid vote by several thousand, an achievement credited with laying sound foundations for Gwynfor Evans’ astounding victory in 1966.

In those days of pre-television politics Jennie addressed over two hundred public meetings in schools and village halls throughout Carmarthenshire during the campaign. The hustings were always robust, with awkward questions from the floor and loud heckling from those sent to disrupt, so every candidate had to learn to think quickly to survive. At one such meeting a heckler shouted from the back, “*If you go to Westminster who’ll look after the babies for you?”* ( Jennie was a mother of two young boys then). Quick as a flash came the reply, “*Sir Rhys, because he’ll be looking for a job!”.*

She was vibrant speaker, a challenging writer, a perceptive but fair adjudicator and a television critic who feared none. As President of Merched Y Wawr she inspired the organisation. Then in 1979 she took over the ailing Welsh weekly magazine ***Y Faner*** to quickly turn it around into a lively discussion forum for the issues of the day Her determination to encompass all points of view made the Faner sometimes controversial but always readable.

Her sudden death in Mold in 1982 saddened the whole nation, and led eventually to the erection of this plaque in her home village.

*Arwyn 2011*

**Jennie Eirian 2 -- 1925-82**

Though women had gained full voting rights by 1928 opportunities remained restricted, particularly in rural areas. On completing compulsory education a girl’s destiny directed her to the kitchen and cowshed until a successful marriage promised future stability. Well! For most! Born at Waunyrhelfa, Llanpumsaint, Jennie moved with her family down the hill to the larger Llandre farm opposite the church. Attending the village school next door Headmaster Jack Johns quickly realized he’d got an exceptionally talented pupil on his hands. He correctly insisted that this female should sit the scholarship examination for the Girls Grammar school in Carmarthen. She passed!

After farm work, Jennie Llandre often completed her homework as she walked the daily mile and a half out to meet the Lampeter/Carmarthen bus at Penrhewlgam. On rainy days she’d hurry along, umbrella in one hand and book in the other. All that effort ensured her a degree at Aberystwyth University, to return later to her old grammar school as an inspired and much loved teacher of Welsh. Jennie Eirian (now married) the politician, was committed to fight for Wales, addressing hundreds of meetings around Carmarthenshire as a candidate in the 1955 and 1957 Parliamentary Elections. She upped the fledgling Plaid Cymru vote by several thousand, laying firm foundations for Gwynfor Evans’ astounding victory in 1966. A vibrant speaker, a challenging writer, a perceptive but fair adjudicator and a television critic who feared none, now a literary giant. The President who inspired Merched Y Wawr, took over the ailing Welsh weekly ***Y Faner,***  turning it into a lively discussion forum. . So one can hardly doubt the words on the commemorative stone outside the church - “***un o ferched disgleiraf Cymru” (****one of Wales’ most dazzling girls)*

*Adapted from Llais y Llan 2011 article - Arwyn.*