

David Thomas

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David Thomas was brought up in Pontarddulais and Port Talbot. After trials with Swansea Town and Cardiff City, he settled for Oxford and the LSE before working in community development in London. He now lives in Cilliau

Aeron, just outside Aberaeron, with his wife, the poet Stevie Krayner. He has published several books on the life of Dylan Thomas. He sold the film rights for his first Dylan book - *A Farm, Two Mansions and a Bungalow* - in 2003. This book was the inspiration for the film *The Edge of Love*, starring Kiera Knightley, Sienna Miller and Matthew Rhys. He's been answering a few questions about his work.



When and why did you start writing?

Early - my father and primary school teacher encouraged me. In my teens, I was lucky enough to have two very good English masters at school - Gilbert Bennett in Gowerton and Selwyn Davies in Dyffryn Grammar, Port Talbot. The first thing I ever got paid for was in my early teens, perhaps even before that - a short story in the *South Wales Evening Post*.

How many books have you written?

I've published six books about Dylan Thomas. I've also written, or co-authored, ten books about community development. The most successful has been *Skills in Neighbourhood Work*, first published in 1980 and now in its third edition, and translated into Dutch, French and Slovakian. It also sells well in America - it's good to see a former community developer as President-elect there.

What inspired you to write about Dylan Thomas?

Talking with local people in my area and realising that Dylan's biographers had written very little about Dylan's time in Ceredigion; then realising how important an inspiration New Quay had been in the writing of *Under Milk Wood*; then realising that there were so many corners of his life and death that had not been fully explored, even after all these years. I think there's been too much vilification of Dylan Thomas and not enough understanding.

Can you tell us how you conduct your research for your books?

It varies from book to book. Part of my academic training was in social science and social research so I use that a good deal. I spend a lot of time researching the Dylan archives in various American universities; and a good deal of time in the National Library of Wales, which is one of the true wonders of the world!

Ceredigion, specifically New Quay, played an important part in Dylan Thomas's life. Is this why you decided to

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settle here?

No. We ended up here in 1987 by a series of accidents and decisions which I can't remember now. But I was no stranger to Ceredigion: one part of my family came from Aberaeron and Aberystwyth, and I spent many childhood holidays here.

Can you tell us more about your latest book - Fatal Neglect: Who Killed Dylan Thomas?

It contains a good deal of new material that reveals the culpability of his New York agent, John Brinnin, who knew he was very sick. But Brinnin was deeply in debt and needed his cut of Dylan's earnings and so ignored his illness. In a way, Dylan was worked to death. There's a more detailed summary of the book at <http://www.freewebs.com/deathofdylanthomas/>

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Is it difficult making a living as a writer?

I don't make a living! My royalties pay for a couple of good holidays a year. Selling the film rights for *The Edge of Love* made my bank manager very happy, though I was disappointed with the film, and could hardly bear to watch it.

Do you have any advice for any budding biographers?

No, I'm only just learning. But they need luck in finding an encouraging publisher, as I did with Mick Felton. Wales should be proud that he's turned Seren into one of Europe's leading independent publishers.

Can you tell us more about your career in community development?

It started off as a mixture of experiences - as a teenager in Port Talbot, being outraged on finding a homeless family huddled in a doorway one winter's night, civil rights in America when I visited in the late 1960s, campaigns against the Vietnam war. I'd also long been interested in the Third World, and in the wonderful heroism of people who travel half way across the world to make a living in the UK, and in so doing also make an important contribution to community life and the economy. My first paid job was as a neighbourhood worker on a housing estate in Kentish Town in London, working for the local race relations council. Then on estates in south London. I later got a job as lecturer at the National Institute for Social Work and finally ended up as chief executive of a Home Office quango, the Community Development Foundation, responsible for promoting community development in the UK.

What is your next project?

Dylan Thomas: The Afterlife

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