

Extremely Rare Recording of Wales Revivalist - sermonaudio.com
Evan Roberts – Own Voice recorded in 1905 cylinder record

Rare Recordings from the Past

By Evan Roberts

Preached on: Sunday, August 5, 2007

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Interviewer. Well, Evan here speaking and you find it difficult to make out the words here but a century ago this was a voice that set Wales alight.

[unintelligible recording]

Interviewer. Well, that was a recording, the only recording of the voice of the leader of the 1904-05 revival, religious revival in Wales, Evan Roberts, and that was recorded in 1905. The 26 year old miner, the blacksmith from Loughor was the central figure of the revival when pubs, theaters, playing fields were shunned and we all turned to the chapels. The recording's been described as one of the most important finds in the history of the National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales at the National Library in Aberystwyth, and Dafydd Pritchard is Assistant Curator of that collection. Good morning, Dafydd.

Dafydd Pritchard. Good morning.

Interviewer. Remind us of the events of '04-05 briefly because it was an absolutely extraordinary little period in our history.

Pritchard. It was, yes. Not many of us these days have any real idea of what a revival actually feels like, but I would imagine that it's something that as it swept through Wales in a fairly short time was really quite extraordinary.

Interviewer. And immense, huge crowds, and we're talking crowds of tens of thousands of people gathering for religious services, and committing themselves to a religious life.

Pritchard. Yes, and also, of course, in smaller groups as well, but chapels did fill up and it was for at least a period, a very different take on life in Wales.

Interviewer. And this recording that Roberts, who led the revival, not the only leader but the most prominent of them, how did that come to light?

Pritchard. Well, it was one of those lucky pieces, lucky things that happened to our archives and national library, I suppose, and Mr. Barrie Davies from Tredegar was kind enough to offer us a collection of six wax cylinders and amongst these was this particular cylinder which purported to be the voice of Evan Roberts. Unfortunately, it was broken, it was in about a dozen pieces at the time so we had to reconstruct the cylinder and hope that it actually was the cylinder which held the voice of Evan Roberts and we think it certainly is.

Interviewer. And you couldn't sort of do the reconstruction at the library itself. There's not a sort of expert on wax cylinders there, you had to search the world.

Pritchard. We did have to search the world and there are some people in Wales and even Britain who do it but not many people can [unintelligible] on this job because it just seems of the importance. But we did find somebody in Los Angeles, Dr. Michael K., who handled and eventually put it back together for us.

Interviewer. And we hear that voice but it's difficult to make out the words. We get some of the charisma but what does hearing the voice actually mean?

Pritchard. Two things, I think. The first thing of Evan Roberts talking, he was quite, he wasn't the Billy Graham type figure. He was a quiet, although charismatic character who almost very often lead congregations [unintelligible]. In fact, prod the congregations themselves to take part rather than him being the essential figure. But I think hearing the voice just does give you an idea of the feeling and of the mood of that particular time.

Interviewer. The sad thing is that you had Evan Roberts' yet for a long time after that revival. He supposedly had some sort of breakdown that no one went back to him in later years because, you know, he lived into an age where proper recordings, proper interviews could have been recorded.

Pritchard. Yes, that's true, I think until 1951. That's true but the difference with this particular recording, of course, is that it came from the period of the most important period in his life, the Oxford Revival. About the quality, I think the one thing that has to be said is that this hopefully isn't the end of the story, in other words, that we have a digital recording and we hope to have a copy made to improve the quality of the sound. The technological advances may still take place and we might still be able to improve it in the future.

Interviewer. That's true. It's a fascinating piece of artistry. Dafydd, thank you very much. Dafydd is the Assistant Curator of the National Screen and Sound Archives.

[unintelligible recording]