



Dylan Thomas: Chronology

This document presents the key events in Dylan Thomas's life, including family background, publication of key works etc.

1. Family Background

1834

William Thomas born at Brechfa, Carmarthenshire, Wales. Educated at the University of Glasgow, he became a Unitarian minister and a Radical leader, ending his life as a schoolmaster. As Gwilym Marles, he wrote poetry and fiction in the Welsh language. Gwilym Marles was the uncle of Dylan Thomas's father and the source of the middle name of both Dylan Thomas and his sister.

1876

Dylan Thomas's father, **David John Thomas**, born at The Poplars, Johnstown, Carmarthenshire (now part of Carmarthen), one of at least four children. His father, Evan Thomas, was a railway guard.

1879

Gwilym Marles dies aged 45.

1882

Dylan's mother, **Florence Williams**, born at 29 Delhi Street, St. Thomas, Swansea, Wales, the youngest of seven surviving children. Both parents were from the Llansteffan peninsular in Carmarthenshire. Her father was a railway porter, then a railway inspector. Her aunt, Annie Jones, farmed **Femhill**.

1895

Dylan's father, David John Thomas enters the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. 1899, Graduates with First Class Honours in English. Becomes English master at Swansea Grammar School. 1900 Leaves for Pontypridd County School. 1901 Returns to Swansea Grammar School, where he remains until his retirement in 1936.

1903

30 December: David John Thomas marries Florence Williams. Their first home is in Sketty Avenue, Swansea

1906

Dylan's sister **Nancy Marles Thomas**, born. The Thomases live at 31 Montpellier Street in central Swansea. In the summer of 1914, move to 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, Uplands, Swansea.

2. The Swansea Years – 1914-34

1914

27 October: Dylan Marlais Thomas born in Swansea.

1922

Begins writing verses (aged 8 years)

1925

September: Dylan enters Swansea Grammar School, where his father is Senior English Master. Previously attended Mrs. Hole's private school at 22 Mirador Crescent, Uplands.

December: publishes his first poem, "*The Song of the Mischievous Dog*", in the *Swansea Grammar School Magazine*, which he is to dominate and edit.

1927

14 January: Publishes in Cardiff's *Western Mail*, "*His Requiem*" (signed "D. M. Thomas"). (In 1971 it was discovered that this poem by Lilian Gard had been taken from *Boy's Own Paper* of November 1923.)

1928

Begins friendship with **Daniel Jones**, later to become one of Wales' leading composers of the 20th Century.

1929

Becomes member of the school Dramatic Society; also prominent in the school's Debating Society (until 1931.)

1930

27th April: Dylan, 15 years old begins the first of the *Notebooks* into which he copies his early poems, with the poem *Osiris, Come to Isis*. (The Notebooks continue until April 1934)

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1931

Summer: Amateur acting with Swansea Y.M.C.A. Players.

Leaves school to train as a reporter on the local paper the *South Wales Daily* (later *Evening*) *Post*, in Swansea (until Dec. 1932).

1932

Begins meeting friends at the local **Kardomah Café**, these include the composer **Daniel Jones**, artist **Alfred Janes**, painter **Mervyn Levy** and others. Until 1934, amateur acting with Swansea Little Theatre. Meets and is befriended by Marxist scholar **Bert Trick**, and enters into intense political discussions. Thomas as journalist; writes fervently against fascists and campaigns against right-wing policies of a number of leading Swansea councillors of the time, whose leanings had sympathies with Hitler's New Socialist Party in Germany. Through Thomas's regaling in the *Post* and a small campaign with Trick they prevented the meetings from happening.
December: ceases being a journalist.

1933

February: Death of 'beloved' aunt Anne Jones of Fern Hill Farm, near Llangain, buried at Lanybri; Thomas writes poem "After the funeral"

September: Publishes first poem in London ("And death shall have no dominion", in the *New English Weekly*). Thomas's poem, "The Romantic Isle" broadcast. He had entered it in the BBC Poetry Competition. [As a measure of how important radio was to households in Britain in the 1930's, the competition launched on the air in December elicited 11,000 entries by the end of February. Thomas's poem was one of 30 successful poems.] The title of the poem is only known from the entry in the Radio Times for the 28th June 1933 and has not survived.

Summer: first visit to London.

27 August: Dylan's father is diagnosed with cancer.

September: Publishes first poem in 'Poet's Corner' of the *Sunday Referee* ("That Sanity be Kept"), leads to correspondence with Pamela Hansford Johnson.

1934

23 February: first meeting, in London, with Pamela Hansford Johnson.

25 March: awarded the *Sunday Referee's* second "Poets' Comer" prize, sponsorship of his first collection of poems.

April: Aberystwyth with Glyn Jones to visit author **Caradoc Evans**.

May: spends Whitsun weekend with Glyn Jones, visiting **Laugharne** (1st recorded visit) and Llansteffan.

July: with Bert Trick to hear Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of British Union of Fascists, address rally at the Plaza cinema, Swansea.

February - November: Several visits to London.

13 November: Moves from Swansea to 5 Redcliffe Street, Fulham Road, London SW10.

18 December: *18 Poems* published.

3. The War Years – 1934-44

1935

January: Leaves Redcliffe Street for Coleherne Road, London, before returning to 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, Swansea – his base until 1937.

March: begins friendship and correspondence with **Vernon Watkins**.

April: visits novelist Richard Hughes at Castle House, Laugharne.

May: stays in Derbyshire with historian **A. J. P. Taylor** and his wife Margaret.

Publishes poems and reviews in London magazines.

July-August: stays in County Donegal with poet Geoffrey Grigson.

1936

April: Meets **Caitlin Macnamara** in the Wheatsheaf pub, Rathbone Place, London.

April/May: in Cornwall with Wyn Henderson.

July: calls at Richard Hughes's home in Laugharne; altercation over Caitlin with painter Augustus John (ex-lover).

September: *Twenty-five Poems* published by Dent.

David Higham, then with Curtis Brown, later part of Peam, Pollinger & Higham, arranges the Dent contract and becomes Thomas's lifelong literary agent.

December: Dylan's father retires from Swansea Grammar School.

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1937

21 April: First radio broadcast (*Life and the Modern Poet*), plus reading poetry and his own.
April: Thomas's parents move from 5 Cwmdonkin Drive to Marston, Bishopston (near Swansea). They remained there until Spring 1941.
11 July: Marries **Caitlin Macnamara** at Penzance Registry Office.
Late summer (to spring 1938): Dylan and Caitlin stay with Mrs. Macnamara (Caitlin's mother) at New Inn House, Ringwood, Hampshire.

1938

May: First move to live in **Laugharne**, Carmarthenshire. Until July, 2 "Eros", Gosport Street, Laugharne then in July, move to Sea View, Laugharne (until July 1940).

1939

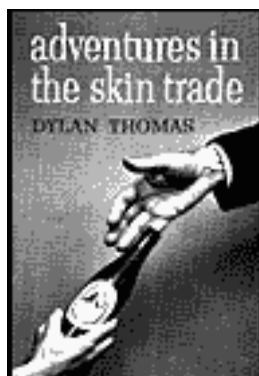
30 January: First son, **Llewelyn Edouard Thomas** born, in Cornelia Hospital, Poole, Dorset. Thomases staying at Caitlin's mother's house in Ringwood, Hampshire.
24 August: *The Map of Love* (poems and stories) is published by Dent.
October: Best man to poet & editor Keidrych Rhys' marriage to poet Lynette Roberts in Llansteffan, had borrowed money from Vernon Watkins to buy suit for the occasion.
20 December: *The World I Breathe* (a selection of poetry and prose) - Dylan's first publication in America - is published by James Laughlin's New Directions, Norfolk, CT.



Dylan, Caitlin and Aeronwy, Laugharne 1943

1940

April: Found unfit for military service.
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog (short stories) is published by Dent in London, U.S. edition is published by New Directions
July: Hounded by debtors in Laugharne, left Sea View and Dylan and Caitlin flee to John Davenport's at the Malting House, Marshfield, near Chippenham.
With John Davenport, wrote together *The Death of the King's Canary*, until 1941
21 August: Begins contributing to BBC Radio on an occasional basis (script-writing, acting, reading).



1941

Begins writing *Adventures in the Skin Trade*.
February: German air-raid on Swansea
April: sells the *Notebooks*: Now in the Lockwood Memorial Library, State University of New York, Buffalo, USA.
Summer: works, scripting propaganda films, for the Strand Film Company, Golden Square, Soho, Strand was succeeded by Gryphon Films, for whom Thomas also worked (until 1945). Became well known in London's wartime club and pub scene, centred in Soho.
Autumn: the first chapter of *Adventures in the Skin Trade* is published in John Lehmann's *Folios of New Writing*.
Late Autumn: lives at 13 Hammersmith Terrace, London W6.

1942

Summer: Caitlin and Llewelyn stay at Gelli, Talsarn, Cardiganshire. Thomas visits. Thomas's friendship with **Ruth Wynne Owen**.
Autumn: the Thomas family lives at 3 Wentworth Studios, Manresa Road, Chelsea, SW3. (for periods until early 1943)

1943

February: Broadcast: *Reminiscences of Childhood*.
New Poems (USA), published in the United States by James Laughlin's New Directions, Norfolk, CT.
3 March: Daughter, **Aeronwy Bryn Thomas** born in Chelsea.
Continuous work as broadcaster begins.
From 1943-53 Thomas gave approx. 145 separate engagements, an average of 1 a month for 10 years. He participated in 40 odd programmes for John Arlott, 15 each for Roy Campbell, Aneurin Talfan Davies and Douglas Cleverdon, 8 dramatic roles for Louis MacNeice, 8 productions for Patric Dickenson and 15 productions for R.D. Smith, plus 28 broadcasts of various sorts. (As can be asserted by Ralph Maud in his introduction to *The Broadcasts* (Ed. Ralph Maud. London: Dent, 1991), that Thomas became from this point on 'a professional radio broadcaster, whose services as a performer and scriptwriter were sought and appreciated', and which led to his eventual reading tours in the USA.)

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1944

Summer: stays with parents at Blaen Cwm cottage, Llangain, Carmarthenshire.

September (to summer 1945): the Thomases living at Majoda, New Quay, Cardiganshire

2 October: fails to turn up as best man at Vernon Watkins's wedding.

14 December: records "Quite Early One Morning" for the BBC (the talk was broadcast on 31 August 1945).

4. The Broadcast Years – 1944-49

1945

March: Majoda and its inhabitants machine-gunned by a drunken army captain jealous of his wife's friendship with the Thomases.

Summer: stays with parents at Blaen Cwm, writes poem "Fern Hill".

Autumn: lives in the basement flat of 6 Markham Square, Chelsea, SW3 (the home of Caitlin's sister Nicolette Devas).

December: is awarded the **Levinson Prize for Poetry**.

6 December: Records "Memories of Christmas" for the BBC (the talk was broadcast on 16 December).

1946

7 February: *Deaths and Entrances* is published by J. M. Dent, London.

Living in London.

March: Living in London. March, Thomases live in a one-room summerhouse in the garden of A. J. P. and Margaret Taylor's Magdalen College home at Holywell Ford, Oxford (until April 1947).

8 November: *Selected Writings* (USA), is published by James Laughlin's, New Directions, now in New York, with introduction by John L. Sweeney.

1947

April: **Society of Authors'** awards entire award for 1947 to Thomas, instigated by Edith Sitwell.

With Caitlin, Mother and sister in law visits Italy, first at Rapallo, then near Florence, finally in villa on Elba.

15 June: "Return Journey" broadcast.

September: Thomases' move to the Manor House, a small cottage in South Leigh, Oxfordshire, owned by Margaret Taylor. (until April/May 1949)

1948

March: works on what will later become *Under Milk Wood*.

Scriptwriting for feature films for Gainsborough Films.

1949

March: Visits Prague for a writers' conference, as the guest of the Czech government.

Becomes member of the **Savage Club**.

April/May: Margaret Taylor buys The Boat House at Laugharne for the Thomases Dylan, Caitlin, Llewelyn and Aeronwy move to the Boat House, Laugharne.

John Malcolm Brinnin invites Thomas to read at the Poetry Center, New York City, and offers to arrange a reading tour.

In great financial difficulties and failing to honour commissions

24 July: Second son **Colm Garan Dylan Thomas** born.

5. The Boathouse Years – 1949-53

1950

First American tour. 20 February, flies to New York for first U.S. tour: Poetry Center, also colleges and universities across the United States and in Canada.

Heavy drinking; scandalous behaviour.

1 June: sails back to Britain.

Despite substantial U.S. earnings, returns with little money. Serious problems with money.

November: continues work on *Under Milk Wood*.



Dylan Thomas in the USA

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1951

January: In Iran, writing film script for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company [later BP].

Summer: Very little writing accomplished, though working on variations of poems and sketches for *Under Milk Wood*. Last visit to Vernon & Gwen Watkin's, with Caitlin and Daniel Jones.

October (until 20 January 1952): leaves Boat House temporarily to live at 54 Delancey Street, Camden Town, NW1, owned by Margaret Taylor. Works in old gypsy caravan in the garden, brought over by Margaret Taylor from South Leigh; extensive work on BBC Radio scripts, *Under Milk Wood*, correspondences and preparations for *Collected Poems*.

1952

Second American tour. 20 January, sails to New York, with Caitlin, for second U.S. tour.

22 February: first recordings in New York for Caedmon Records.

16 May: Dylan and Caitlin sail home from New York.

Pursued by the Inland Revenue over unpaid income tax of £1,902.

Money trouble; marriage increasingly turbulent.

28 February: *In Country Sleep* published in New York by New Directions.

10 November: *Collected Poems 1934-1952* published by Dent, London

16 December: **Dylan's father dies aged 76.**

1953

31 March: *Collected Poems* published in New York by New Directions.

16 April: Dylan's sister Nancy dies in Bombay of cancer.

21 April: arrives in New York for third U.S. tour.

Begins affair with Elizabeth Reitell. Heavy drinking.

14 May: First performance of *Under Milk Wood* in New York.

May: *The Doctor and the Devils* - first of the film scripts to be published.

May: Meets composer Igor Stravinsky in Boston. Thomas agrees to write the libretto for a new Stravinsky opera.

Dr. Milton Feltenstein treats Thomas for a broken arm.

2 June: [QEII Coronation Day]: flies back to London from New York. Unhappy, struggling to write.

10 August: First solo TV performance for the BBC series 'Speaking Personally' – Dylan Thomas "telling one of his unusual stories" [Re-published later in *The Listener* as 'A Story' later re-titled as 'The Outing'. Re-broadcast on radio December 22 1953 Reginald Pound said: "Dylan Thomas' 'Speaking Personally' fell only just short of being a television tour de force."]

9 October: leaves on final American tour. Continues affair with Elizabeth Reitell.

19 October: attends New York rehearsals and performances of *Under Milk Wood*.

Heavy drinking; seems mentally disturbed. Generally unwell suffering from gastritis and gout. Possibly also suffering from delirium tremens.

4 November: Dr. Feltenstein injects Thomas with morphine, which exacerbates his condition.

5 November: Dylan Thomas, in a coma, admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital. Caitlin informed at Laugharne's Memorial Hall whilst listening to Dylan's broadcast '*Laugharne*' on the Welsh Home service.

8 November: Caitlin arrives at Idlewild Airport, given police motorbike escort to St. Vincent's.

9 November: Dylan Thomas dies in St. Vincent's Hospital, New York City.

13 November: Memorial service at St. Luke's Episcopal Church of Trinity Parish, NY. Caitlin returns with coffin on *SS United States*.

24 November: Dylan Thomas buried at St. Martin's Church, Laugharne.

1982

1 March: Memorial stone to commemorate Dylan Thomas is unveiled in 'Poet's Corner' in Westminster Abbey, (originally initiated by President Jimmy Carter.)

1994

31 July: Caitlin dies in Sicily;

10 Aug: interred in Dylan's grave at Laugharne.



Dylan Thomas' Grave St. Martin's Church, Laugharne

Compiled by Chris Ozzard