

Dan Davin 1913-1990

Novelist, short-story writer, soldier, editor, publisher, critic

Born in Invercargill, Dan Davin showed his gift for words at an early age. Brought up among the oral tradition of his Irish parents, he taught himself to read at the age of four.

At Otago University he obtained a first class honours degree and a reputation for 'running with the fast set' that may have cost him the Rhodes scholarship the first time he applied. He applied again in 1935 and was successful.

In 1939 Davin married Winnie Gonley in Oxford. They had met at Otago University where she had encouraged Davin's raw writing talent and introduced him to modern European writers.



Winnie and Dan Davin. (Alexander Turnbull Library, Ref: C-009557- 1/2)



Dan Davin outside the Gardeners Arms, Oxford. James McNeish observed in *Dance of the Peacocks*: 'Davin used the college dining halls to gather intelligence about potential authors and publications, but he used the pub to barter ideas. In the pub both the writer and editor were at work...!' (Anna Davin collection)

When war broke out Davin joined the British Army but then transferred to the 2nd NZEF at his own request. He served in Greece and Crete as an intelligence officer with General Freyberg before being wounded and evacuated to Egypt.

After the Second World War he was recruited into Oxford University Press by former Rhodes scholar, Kenneth Sisam. For the next 33 years Davin presided over the Press and earned an international reputation as an academic publisher. As an author he made a major contribution to New Zealand literature with many novels, short stories, essays, and a history of the Crete campaign for the Official War History.

In his retirement he often visited Kenneth Sisam in the Scilly Isles and spent his days writing and fishing. In a letter to Frank Sargeson he wrote of the place, 'One is almost home again'.

Dan Davin was awarded an honorary doctorate by Otago University in 1984.

'The greatest academic publisher of all time' – Jon Stallworthy
