

EDWARDS, WILLIAM (1719 - 1789), Independent minister, and architect



Name: William Edwards
Date of birth: 1719
Date of death: 1789
Child: William Edwards
Child: Edward Edwards
Child: David Edwards
Child: Thomas Edwards
Parent: Edward Dafydd
Gender: Male
Occupation: Independent minister, and architect
Area of activity: Art and Architecture; Religion
Author: Edward Ivor Williams

Born at Ty Canol, Groes-wen, a farm in Eglwysilan parish, Glamorganshire; christened 8 February 1719, son of Edward Dafydd who died 6 January 1726, after which the family moved to Bryn-tail, another Groes-wen farm. Here Edwards lived until his death, 7 August 1789; he was buried in Eglwysilan churchyard.

Edwards began preaching when about 22, having come under the influence of [Edmund Jones](#) and that of Harri Smith, his labourer at Bryn-tail, whose eloquence had astonished that ' [Old Prophet](#).' In 1743 a small meeting-house was built beside a field named Waen-fach, near the site of the present Independent chapel at Groes-wen. The congregation, originally a Methodist society, incorporated itself as an Independent church in 1745 and ordained Edwards and [Thomas William](#) (1717 - 1765) as its joint pastors. It is not absolutely certain that the church at Groes-wen ordained its ministers in 1745 - (see [Thomas William](#)), where it is said that William Edwards was given some kind of ordination about this time. His name appears as William Edward on the letter in support of the ordination of exhorters which was sent to the Caeo Association. This was dated 30 March 1745 at Eglwysilan. [Thomas William](#) died twenty years later; Edwards remained sole pastor until his death.

He is, however, best remembered as a builder of bridges, or more precisely, as the architect of Pontypridd bridge, one of the most dangerous and least serviceable of large bridges in Wales, so much so that the nearby ford was still used until the middle of the 19th century. The appeal of the bridge was indeed purely aesthetic and scientific. Its unique design, rare beauty, and technical secrets, have made it the most controversial bridge in Britain, and brought its designer lasting fame. He had constructed industrial buildings before he contracted, in 1746, to build a bridge at Pont-y-ty-pridd, a tiny hamlet, so named long before Edwards was born and therefore before its famous bridge became associated with it. Nothing is known of the original ' Pont-y-ty-pridd.' For the history of Edwards's endeavours at Pontypridd, we are chiefly indebted to his friend and former neighbour, [Thomas Morgan](#) (1720 - 1799). [Morgan](#)'s account was amplified and slightly corrected by the architect himself. Edwards made four attempts (1746-54) before he succeeded in completing his contract to build, for £500,

a bridge that would stand for seven years. Finally, he lessened the pressure on the haunches of the arch by providing three cylindrical holes in each of them and by varying the thickness of the parapets. These bridges cost, in all, £1,153 18s. 2d. This, with attendant expenses, resulted in a loss to the builder of about £600.

He erected bridges also at Usk, Pontardawe, Betws Glamorganshire, Dolau-hirion, Wychtree, Aberavon, and Glasbury. Some of these were single-arched, and less steep than Pontypridd bridge. He did much bridge work in Monmouthshire, and contracted to rebuild Chepstow bridge, but did not do so. So numerous were the demands for Edwards's engineering services, that building and repairing bridges became the occupation of three of his sons - THOMAS, DAVID, and EDWARD. The fourth, WILLIAM, was killed at Gibraltar, a war victim. The first two built Newport bridge, finished in 1801. Among others constructed by them were Llandilo, Edwinstow, and Bedwas.

William Edwards wrote but little. Six of his hymns were published in 1747. [These hymns are now thought to be by William Edwards of Cwm-du, Breconshire, see the biography by H. P. Richards below.]

Author

Edward Ivor Williams, (1885 - 1958)

Sources

The Gentleman's Magazine, December 1764

B. H. Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities, and Biography, of South Wales from materials collected during two excursions in the year 1803* (London 1804)

E. I. Williams in *Transactions of the Newcomen Society* (1770), 1943-5

W. Williams, *Aleluia, Y Chweched Ran* (1747), pp.24-32

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 17B: Llythyrau, trioedd ac officium B. Mariae](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 5457A: Notebook](#)

Further Reading

H. P. Richards, *William Edwards, Architect, Builder, Minister: A Builder for Both Worlds* (Pontypridd Museum 2006)

Coflein: [Pontypridd Old Bridge, Pontypridd](#)

Wikipedia Article: [William Edwards](#)

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