

HARRIS, JOSEPH (1704 - 1764), Assay-master at the Mint

Name: Joseph Harris
Date of birth: 1704
Date of death: 1764
Spouse: Anne Harris (née Jones)
Child: Anna Maria Hughes (née Harris)
Parent: Susanna Harris (née Powell)
Parent: Howell Harris
Gender: Male
Occupation: Assay-master at the Mint
Area of activity: Economics and Money; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Authors: Robert Thomas Jenkins, Llewelyn Gwyn Chambers, Evan David Jones

Eldest son of Howel and Susannah Harris of Trevecka, and brother of [Howel](#) and of [Thomas Harris](#). He was christened at Talgarth 16 February 1703/4. After working as a blacksmith with his maternal uncle Thomas Powell, he went to London in 1724, was brought to the notice of Halley the astronomer-royal, and was sent on two voyages to the West Indies (1725, 1730-2) to test mathematical instruments used in navigation. He was then for a while private tutor, but in 1737 became deputy to the Assay-master at the Mint (with quarters in the Tower), and in 1748 Assay-master. He wrote some important works, among them *A Treatise on Navigation*, 1730; *The Description and Uses of the Celestial Globe and Orrery*, 1729, of which ten editions appeared before 1768; *An Essay Upon Money and Coins*, 1757; and *A Treatise upon Optics* (posthumous, 1775).

Joseph Harris was author of several anonymous works on astronomy and mathematics and invented the 'New Azimuth Compass' and 'Forestaff'. Government ministers were often advised by him (unbeknown to many because of his shyness) and he received a pension of £300 per annum from the king from 1753. To a great extent he was responsible for standardising the U.K.'s weights and measures mid - 18th c.

His contacts with his family and his countryside remained close; in particular he strove vainly to inculcate prudence into his brother [Howel](#) (e.g. he came down to Trevecka in 1735, expressly to convey [Howel](#) to Oxford for his matriculation), and there are 81 letters of his in the Trevecka collection at the National Library of Wales, besides 49 letters from [Howel](#) to him; it may be noted too that Joseph Harris was one of the promoters of the pioneer Brecknockshire Agricultural Society in 1755. There are two references to him in the *Morris Letters* (i, 183, ii, 46 - the latter noting a guinea given by him to [Goronwy Owen](#)); another letter by [Richard Morris](#) (*Y Cymmrodor*, xlix, 963) refers to Harris's part in the standardization of weights and measures; and he was a member of the Cymmrodorion Society. He died 26 September 1764; he was buried in the Tower. His wife (died May 1763) was Anne, daughter and co-heiress of his former neighbour Thomas Jones of Tredustan. Their daughter, ANNA MARIA HARRIS, married SAMUEL HUGHES (he was one of the witnesses of the marriage of [Elizabeth, Howel Harris's](#) daughter); to her was left the property of her uncle [Thomas Harris](#); and so it was that Samuel Hughes, 'of Tregunter,' became sheriff of his county in 1790. They had two daughters, AMELIA SOPHIA who died in 1794, and ELIZA ANNE HUGHES, who married firstly Roderick Gwynne, Buckland. He died 20 March 1808, and she married [William Alexander Madocks](#), 2 April 1818.

Authors

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Dr Llewelyn Gwyn Chambers

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

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