

MORRIS, LEWIS (Llewelyn Ddu o Fôn; 1701 - 1765), poet and scholar

Name: Lewis Morris
Pseudonym: Llewelyn Ddu O Fôn
Date of birth: 1701
Date of death: 1765
Spouse: Anne Morris (née Lloyd)
Spouse: Elizabeth Morris (née Griffiths)
Child: Ellen Morris
Child: Margaret Morris
Child: William Morris
Parent: Margaret Morris (née Owen)
Parent: Morris Morris
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet and scholar
Area of activity: Poetry; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Eldest son of [Morris ap Rhisiart Morris](#), and brother of [Richard, William](#), and [John Morris](#); born in 1701 (christened 2 March 1700/1) in the parish of Llanfihangel Tre'r Beirdd, Anglesey. Like his brothers, he learnt his father's craft; it would appear from his own words that he had little formal education, but in view of the attainments he displayed later, this may well be doubted. In his twenties, still living with his parents at Pentreirianell, he had a practice as land-surveyor, and was employed by the [Meyrick](#) family of Bodorgan, a connection which proved of great advantage to him and to his brothers. In 1729 he was appointed 'searcher' to the Customs at Beaumaris and Holyhead, still retaining his private practice during his tenure (till 1743) of that office. Through the influence of the [Meyricks](#) upon Thomas Corbett of the navy office, he was, from 1737, employed to make a survey of some of the Welsh ports, and though this project was temporarily suspended, it was resumed in 1741 - it was in 1748 that his *[Plans of Harbours, Bays, and Roads in St. George's and the Bristol Channels](#)* ^[2] was published (2nd ed ^[3] by his son William in 1801). Meanwhile, Morris had visited Cardiganshire (as early as 1742, says his brother [William](#)) to prospect for lead - he never returned to Anglesey. In 1746 William Corbett (brother of the above Thomas Corbett) appointed him his deputy in the stewardship of the Crown manors in Cardiganshire - Morris had already made a survey of Perfedd, one of these manors; and he became also collector of tolls at Aberdovey.

Thenceforth, he knew no peace. The squires of Cardiganshire challenged the Crown's rights to mine for lead, and their ire fell naturally upon Lewis Morris as the Crown's local representative - on one occasion (1753) they got him imprisoned for a short time in Cardigan gaol. He got little support from his headquarters, partly because of political pressure exerted in London, and partly because of his own omission to render accounts punctually - the authorities indeed claimed that he owed them much money. Then again, he engaged in private prospecting for lead - quite legitimately yet to some extent to

the detriment of his official duties. Altogether, he was perpetually in hot water. He had to visit London four times (1753, 1754, 1755, 1756-8) to defend his cause; he lost his post at Aberdovey (1756); and he almost had to 're-pay' large sums of money. The matter was settled in 1760, and he was appointed J.P. for Cardiganshire, but beyond doubt he suffered much financial loss, and though he spent much of his wife's money in attempts to recoup himself by private lead-prospecting, these attempts were not over-successful. It is sometimes said that he died poor; but his own words at the close of his life say that he was 'neither in want nor in great plenty'; true, his personalty at death was put at only £66, but his wife had a small estate and it is possible that the lead-ventures eventually brought something in. Yet at best this would not have compared with the days when (in his brother [Richard](#)'s words) he was 'rolling in money, bags full of thousands.' He died 11 April 1765 and was buried within his parish church of Llanbadarn-fawr - his wife's house was Penbryn, near Goginan. Llewelyn Ddu, as his pseudonym suggests, was of dark complexion, tall, ruddy, stout, healthy in appearance, but (like his brothers) perpetually bothered by asthma and gout and melancholia. He cannot be called a pleasant man - he was proud, scornful, boastful, and peppery.

With all this, he was an exceptionally patriotic Welshman, one of the foremost benefactors of his people. Remember as we may his vitriolic words about [Goronwy Owen](#) - words written in a blaze of anger which was not altogether unreasonable - we must also remember that throughout his life he gave vigorous and untiring support to Welsh literati, however caustic his judgements upon them may have been. His letters to them are evidence of the care and patience expended in advising them and in amending their work. It is often said that he and his brothers despised verse in the free metres, but this is a misunderstanding; the Morrises did indeed rank 'free' verse below verse written in 'strict' metres, but they quite appreciated it in its own right. Indeed, Lewis Morris was in advance of his age in his appreciation of the 'harp-verse' (*penillion*), and ironically enough he is today best remembered, as a poet, for his *penillion* in praise of Merioneth. For all that, the older *cynganedd* poetry was nearest to his heart (he composed a *cywydd* as early as 1720), and his chief contribution to Welsh literature lay in his success (and that of his 'school') in reviving that type of verse. His interest in the older technique involved an interest in the Welsh language itself and in Welsh antiquities. In grammatical and lexical studies, his patterns were [John Davies](#) of Mallwyd and [Edward Lhuyd](#), and his immediate project was an enlargement of [Davies](#)'s *Dictionarium*, which (as Morris very rightly said in 1761) was based on too limited a knowledge of the older poetry, seeing that [Davies](#) had been unable to command a sufficient range of older MS. texts. Morris, therefore, set to work to collect MSS. (or copies of them), and to arrive at meanings and forms and constructions scientifically in this way. With his rather parochial contempt for South Walians, he was not quite fair to the work of [Moses Williams](#) and [William Gambold](#) and [Thomas Richards](#), yet it should be noted that he and his brothers helped the publication of [Richards](#)'s Dictionary (1753). It is certain that Lewis Morris, by the middle of the 18th century, was the highest authority on the language, acknowledged as such in Wales and outside it.

Morris's projected Dictionary was drowned in the sea of his troubles. So too was another project of his - a dictionary of Welsh place-names, which he entitled *Celtic Remains*. He finished this in 1757, but the Cymmrodorion Society had no funds for its publication; the first part was not published until 1878 (by [Daniel Silvan Evans](#)), and the second is still in MS., at the National Library - on this matter, see [G. J. Williams](#) in the 1943 *Supplement to N.L.W. Jnl.*, 30-2. Then again, his private press (on which, see [Ifano Jones](#), *Printing and Printers in Wales*), from which he intended to issue reprints of the older literature, had to be abandoned after the issue of a single item, *Tlysau o'r Hen Oesoedd* (1753). When his brother [Richard](#), in 1751, founded the Cymmrodorion Society, Lewis conceived of this as a sort of 'academy' like the French Academy or the Royal Society, and drew up a long list (printed in the Society's 'Constitutions') of topics for inquiry. And disappointed as he was in the actual meetings of the Society (which he attended during his visits to London), he continued to send up learned papers to be read at them. Altogether, if we except the *Tlysau*, the *Plans of Harbours*, and the *Short History of the Manor of Creuthyn* (1756), the only work of Lewis Morris's published in his own lifetime was the poems of his which were included in *Didanwch teuluaid*, published in 1763 by [Huw Jones](#) of Llangwm. There are many volumes of his MSS. in the British Museum and in N.L.W.

Lewis Morris was twice married. In 1729 he married a young girl, Elizabeth Griffiths of Ty-wriddyn, Rhoscolyn, who died before 1741. Of their three children, two daughters survived to maturity: Margaret (1731 - 1761), who married rashly and died in misery, and Ellen (1732 - 1823), who married twice and had eight children of her first marriage and four of her second. On 20 October 1749 Morris (then living at Galltfadog, near Aberystwyth) married Anne Lloyd, heiress to the small estate of Penbryn (Goginan) - they moved to Penbryn in 1757. Anne Morris has been variously judged; she got on well with her two brothers-in-law, but their nephew, [John Owen](#), who had to live in her house, speaks of her in the most scathing terms. Ten children were born of this marriage (six survived their father) - a fact which can hardly have lightened Morris's burdens in his last years. The only one of these who calls for mention is the fourth son, William Morris (1758 - 1808), who married the heiress of Blaen-nant, Llanfeugan, Brecknock ([Theophilus Jones](#), *History of the County of Brecknock*, 3rd ed., iv 31), and republished his father's *Plans of Harbours*. He was the father of Lewis Edward William Morris, a lawyer at Carmarthen, who was the father of the poet [Sir Lewis Morris](#). In 1772, Anne Morris became the second wife of William Jones of Gwynfryn, Llangynfelyn, Cardiganshire, from whose first marriage was descended the bishop and antiquary [William Basil Jones](#). She died in 1785.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

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miscellaneous information in Hugh Owen, *The life and works of Lewis Morris (Llewelyn Ddu o Fôn), 1707-1765* (1951), 1951 and the references given in the article

Further Reading

Alun R. Jones, *Lewis Morris* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru 2004)

[Lewis Morris and William Morris' Sea Charts](#)

[NLW MS 11568B: Goronwy Owen's Cywydd Hiraeth in the hand of Lewis Morris](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Lewis Morris](#)

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