


MORRIS, RICHARD (1703 - 1779), founder of the Cymmrodorion Society

Name: Richard Morris
Date of birth: 1703
Date of death: 1779
Spouse: Mary Morris (née Major)
Spouse: Elizabeth Morris
Child: Angharad Morris
Child: Margaret Morris
Child: Marian Morris
Child: Richard Morris
Parent: Margaret Morris (née Owen)
Parent: Morris Morris
Gender: Male
Occupation: founder of the Cymmrodorion Society
Area of activity: History and Culture
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born 2 February 1702-3 at Y Fferem, Llanfihangel-tre'r-beirdd, Anglesey, son of [Morris ap Rhisiart Morris](#) and brother of [Lewis, William](#), and [John Morris](#). He worked at first in his father's workshop, and we have (in his own hand) a list of implements made there by him at 15. According to the papers of the late [Iolo A. Williams](#), Richard went to London on 1 August 1722 and his brother [Lewis](#) on 7 May 1723. It was as a clerk and book-keeper that he appeared in London in 1721 or 1722 - he never returned to Anglesey, and once only to Wales at all, when in 1766 he visited his brother [Lewis](#)'s widow at Penbryn. Our knowledge of his early career in Town is extremely fitful, for only a small portion of the *Morris Letters* was written by Richard, and even so, the majority of his letters belong to the years 1759-63. But it is clear that in his early years in London he earned his bread by clerking and keeping accounts. In 1728 he speaks of hoping to get 'a place worth £100 a year'; in the same year, he was one of the stewards at the 'Antient Britons' S. David's Day dinner; he married in 1729; and in 1730 his brother [William](#) paid him a visit and was present at the S. David's dinner - altogether, it would seem that Richard was in a fairly good way. But then came adversity. He became surety for a man who became bankrupt, and he had to spend a twelve-month in 1734-5 in the [king's Bench] prison. He complains of his brothers' unhelpfulness - though not of his brother [John](#), who was with him in London in 1735, 'both nearly starving.' He writes to his parents in February 1739, very dolefully; he had had 'four very hard years,' but things were beginning to improve - [Meyrick](#) of Bodorgan had made him a small loan and had promised to do something for him; indeed, he had a four months' job as parliamentary clerk; we know also (*Llawysgrif Richard Morris o Gerddi*, cxx) that he was a Welsh interpreter in the law-courts. In 1742, his brother [William](#)'s friend [Thomas Ellis](#) (1711/12 - 1792) got the bishop of Bangor to employ Richard as press-corrector of Welsh pamphlets; and in 1744 he was chosen to superintend the S.P.C.K. edition of the Welsh Bible - this appeared in 1746 (reprinted 1752) and is even today well esteemed. Further, [Meyrick](#) got him the auditorship of the estates of lord Londonderry (apparently 1742-7), and in a letter of 1770 he gives quite a list of magnates whose stewards' accounts he audited. But in 1747 - probably through the influence of the [Meyricks](#) or Thomas Corbett (see under [Lewis Morris](#)) - he became a clerk in the navy office; by 1757 he was 'Chief Clerk for Foreign Accounts to the Comptroller of the Navy,' at a salary of £100, and an 'esquire,' to the great amusement of his brother [William](#). He held that post for the rest of his life, yet without abandoning 'my private agency. ... out of office hours.'

This industriousness (common to all three brothers) was no doubt innate - he tells us once that he was too busy to eat. But it was also a matter of compulsion, from his inability to husband his money. Unlike his brother [Lewis](#), he was unselfish and open-handed to excess. The disaster of 1734 was characteristic; and [Lewis](#) sourly complains that every London Welshman lived on Richard's back, and that he neglected his wife and children to help others. He was utterly careless of his own comfort and of his family's. It is difficult, indeed impossible, to chart his odysseys from lodging to lodging and from house to house; he slept (says [Lewis](#)) 'in a filthy hole which he called his office,' while his wife and children lived 'in a loft elsewhere.' In August 1757, [Lewis](#) put his foot down and insisted on Richard's taking a proper house in Stepney; but by 1763 Richard had insisted on moving to a house within the precincts of the Tower (to be near the navy office), and there he died. [Lewis](#) further complains of the bad influence of Cymmrodorion potations, and of their unreasonably long meetings, upon his brother's health.

Sociability and love of his kind, indeed, had been Richard's main motives when (September 1751) he founded the Cymmrodorion Society - and more especially his care for the 'Antient Britons' Welsh Charity-school, which was at that time rather in low water. But he was also in full accord with his brother's more ambitious projects; his literary interests, too, were the same, though he had not [Lewis](#)'s scholarship. Even as a lad, he had made a collection of countryside poetry,

mostly in the free metres (this, *Llawysgrif Richard Morris o Gerddi*, was published by [T. H. Parry-Williams](#) in 1931, together with verse written by Richard in his early London years). He had also been engaged in cataloguing the Welsh MSS. in the possession of [William Jones](#) (1675? - 1749); not to speak of his work as editor of the S.P.C.K. *Bible* and Prayer-book - much later (1770) he edited a large-paper illustrated Prayer-book. It was, therefore, natural that he should support [Lewis Morris](#)'s plans to make a sort of 'academy' of the Cymmrodorion and to publish Welsh poetry under its auspices. But hardly any of its members (until, late in Richard Morris's life, [Owain Myfyr](#), became assistant-secretary) was of any help to him in these matters; Richard, indeed, as the saying went, was the Cymmrodorion in this sense - and he was far too busy a man, especially after the Seven Years' War broke out. Yet, he corrected the text of *Diddanwch teuluaidd*  (1763), and read the proofs of [Evan Evans](#)'s *Specimens of Antient Welsh Poetry* (1764). He collected a large number of Welsh MSS., and on his brother [Lewis](#)'s death he hastened down to Penbryn to retrieve [Lewis](#)'s MSS., despite the opposition of his niece - so, thanks to him, they were not dispersed. He ruled the Cymmrodorion (of which he was president from the beginning till his death) as a monarch; he could lose his temper and speak harshly, but he showed forgiveness towards [Goronwy Owen](#), most remarkable patience towards [Evan Evans](#) (Ieuan Fardd), and much kindness to other men of letters.

Richard Morris married four times, but we do not know even the names of his first two wives. The first, whom he married in 1729, died c. 1740; of their children, much is said in his letters of a daughter Marian, who married badly and is lost to sight in 1763, but was still living when her father made his will. The second marriage was in 1741, and the wife died in 1750; of this marriage there were again several children, but all died before their father re-married. The third marriage (before 1754) was with an Elizabeth, of Worcester - Richard's two brothers speak of her with warm praises. Ten children were born of the marriage, according to Richard's will; seven of these are named in the letters, and three survived their mother (she died in October 1772) - two daughters, Angharad and Margaret (frequently mentioned in their father's correspondence, but lost to our sight after his death), and RICHARD MORRIS, born 31 January 1762. The lad was sent down to his aunt at Penbryn 'to be made a Welshman,' and indeed afterwards evinced much interest in the pursuits of his father and of his uncle, became a member of the Cymmrodorion (and also of the Gwyneddigion, which for some reason his father had never joined, although their founder, [Owain Myfyr](#), was a favourite of his), and planned to publish [Lewis Morris](#)'s *Celtic Remains*. This project came to naught, for Richard became a merchant in India, and is last heard of there in 1790 (see under [William Jones](#), 1675? - 1749, *ad fin.*).

At some time before 7 November 1773 (when he made his will), Richard Morris had taken a fourth wife, a widow named Mary Major, of Stepney. There are indications that things were not going too well, financially: in 1772-3 he wants to retire to Wales, but cannot afford to resign his post; and [Thomas Pennant](#) speaks of remitting to Richard's widow a sum of £63 which her husband owed [Pennant](#) in respect of the sales of *British Zoology*, because of her 'narrow circumstances.' His health, too, was not good; in 1776 he was readily granted permission to live in a room at the Welsh School (Gray's Inn Road), 'for the benefit of the air.' But it was 'within the Tower' that he died in December 1779; he was buried with his third wife and their children in S. George's-in-the-East; the will was proved on 1 January 1780. All his books and MSS. were left to the Welsh School, 'in hopes that they will be accompanied with the manuscripts of... my honoured friend [Sir Watkin Williams Wynn](#)' (the 'Chief President' of the Cymmrodorion - see the article on the [Wynn family](#)); Richard Morris thus dreamed of a national library for Wales. The MSS. (including those of [Lewis Morris](#)) remained at the School till 1844, when they were very prudently transferred to the British Museum.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

Sources as for Lewis Morris, together with Richard Morris's will, and the other references given above

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