

PIERCE, ELLIS (Elis o'r Nant; 1841 - 1912), author of historical romances and bookseller

Name: Ellis Pierce
Pseudonym: Elis O'r Nant
Date of birth: 1841
Date of death: 1912
Spouse: Gwen Pierce (née Jones)
Parent: Elizabeth Pierce
Parent: Thomas Pierce
Gender: Male
Occupation: author of historical romances and bookseller
Area of activity: Business and Industry; History and Culture; Literature and Writing
Author: Evan David Jones

Born at the farmhouse of Tan y Clogwyn in the parish of Dolwyddelan, adjoining T Mawr, Wybrnant, 29 January 1841, the youngest but one of nineteen children of Thomas Pierce, five by his first wife, and fourteen, including Ellis, by his second wife Elizabeth. He received little formal education - the rudiments of the Welsh language he acquired under his father's tutorship at the Sunday school kept in Cyfyng chapel. The father died in 1851, and the widow and children removed to Tan-y-bwlch in the same parish. Even earlier Ellis had been obliged to take his share in the duties of two upland farms of 140 acres each, but during the winter following his father's death he was sent to a school kept by David Williams at Penmachno, which he attended for three years. In May 1854 he contracted a severe illness which confined him to bed for three years and left him with a crooked leg for the remainder of his life. During this period he read voraciously all the books which friends and neighbours brought him and so acquired a considerable amount of knowledge by self-culture. When he was able to walk again it was realized that he could not stand farmwork. He secured employment at 13s. 0d. a week as weight keeper at Cwt-y-bugail quarry, under Evan Evans, an enthusiastic local littérateur. Encouraged by his master Ellis began to contribute articles to *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*. He became the paper's correspondent for the Llanrwst district for fifty years. He took a prominent part in newspaper controversies on education and land and social reform, and wrote extensively on local history and antiquities. By his fearless writing he made many vindictive enemies. In 1870, he was forced to retire to Utica in the U.S.A., but he returned in 1874 to commence an itinerant business in books and general merchandise. In 1882 he wrote for the *Baner* an account of a notorious character called 'Cadwaladr y Clogwyn' who was buried at Betws-y-coed in 1804. The account bore such a close resemblance to a biography of a living person that the paper and author had to face a libel action which they lost. The costs were crippling to his meagre resources, but he persevered. For many years his bookstall was a notable feature of every national eisteddfod field. He was clerk to the Dolwyddelan parish council from its inception until within a few years of his death. He also served a term on the Llanrwst board of guardians and rural district council, and represented his district for many years on the Arfon Liberal Association, being a staunch supporter of [William Rathbone](#) and [William Jones. W. J. Roberts](#) (Gwilym Cowlyd) appointed him recorder of 'Arwest Glan Geirionnydd.' About 1891 he married Gwen, daughter of Owen Jones, Hafodfraith, Penmachno. He died at his home, Willoughby House, Dolwyddelan, 31 July 1912, and was buried, 3 August, in Bryn-y-bedd cemetery, of which he had been the chief promoter. The funeral was restricted to persons named by him, who were enjoined to say on leaving the graveside, 'Well, old Ellis is gone.'

As author of historical romances and sketches of rural characters he takes his place in the history of the Welsh novel. The following are his principal publications - *Nanws ach Rhobert* (Dolyddelen, 1880); *Yr Ymfudwr Cymreig* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1883); *A Guide to Nant Conway* (Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1884); *Rhamant Hanesyddol: Gruffydd ab Cynan* (Dolyddelen and Blaenau Ffestiniog, 1885); *Gwilym Morgan* (Bala, 1890); *Syr Williams o Benamnen* (Caernarvon, 1894); *Teulu'r Gilfach* (Caernarvon, 1897); and *Dafydd ab Siencyn yr Herwr, a Rhys yr Arian Daeaf* (Caernarvon, 1905). He contributed regularly to *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* from 1865 to 1900, and also to *Y Geninen*, [Cyfaill yr Aelwyd](#), *Cymru (O.M.E.)*, and *Ceinion Llenyddiaeth Gymreig*.

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

NLW Archives: [NLW MSS 8573-8612: Elis o'r Nant manuscripts](#)

Y Geninen, xxxi, 211-4

Baner ac Amserau Cymru, 7 August 1912

Further Reading

Vivian Parry Williams, *Elis o'r Nant: Cynrychiolydd y Werin* (Llanwrst 2014)

Wikipedia Article: [Ellis Pierce](#)

Additional Links

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