

## REES, ABRAHAM (1743 - 1825), encyclopaedist

**Name:** Abraham Rees  
**Date of birth:** 1743  
**Date of death:** 1825  
**Parent:** Esther Rees (née Penry)  
**Parent:** Lewis Rees  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** encyclopaedist  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing  
**Authors:** David Williams, Llewelyn Gwyn Chambers

Born in the Old Independent Chapel House, Llanbryn-mair, the son of the [Rev. Lewis Rees](#) and Esther Penry. In his article on [John Penry](#) in his *Cyclopaedia*, Rees states: 'The editor of this *Cyclopaedia* traces his genealogy, by the maternal branch, to the family of [Mr. Penry](#)'. He was for a period before 1753 in Pencerrig, Llanelwedd, with John Evans, private tutor of [Thomas Jones](#), the artist (1742 - 1803). He was educated at the school kept at Llanfyllin by [Dr. Jenkin Jenkins](#). According to [Thomas Jones](#) who was a fellow-pupil of his in Llanfyllin in 1758 he was 'deeply engaged in Hebrew, Algebra, Logarithms and Fluxions' - at the age of 15!

In 1759 Rees entered Coward's Academy, becoming tutor in mathematics and natural theology at his old college in 1762, a post which he retained after the Academy had moved to Hoxton, until, on his resignation, it was dissolved in 1785. On 31 January 1775, he received the degree of D.D. from Edinburgh University. He was later (1786-96) tutor in Hebrew and mathematics at the short-lived New College, Hackney.

Meanwhile he had been minister of the Presbyterian church of S. Thomas in Southwark (1768-83) and of the Old Jewry congregation (1783 till his death), for which a new meeting house was erected in Jewin Street in 1809. He is said to have been the last nonconformist minister in London to wear a wig during services. He maintained his connection with Wales by attending Congregationalist festivals and preaching in Welsh.

He edited an enlarged edition of Chambers's *Encyclopaedia* (1781-6) in four volumes, quarto and in recognition of this work was elected, in 1786, a Fellow of the Royal Society. He then brought out a much more comprehensive work, *The New Cyclopaedia*, which appeared in forty-five volumes, quarto, between 1802 and 1820, much of it written by himself.

An Arian in theology, he retained his interest in Welsh Dissent, and as president of the Presbyterian Board, one of the trustees of Dr. Williams's Fund, administrator of the regium donum, and medium of private charity, he was able to render considerable assistance to indigent ministers in Wales. He died in Finsbury, on 9 June 1825, and was buried in Bunhill Fields.

### Authors

Emeritus Professor David Williams, (1900 - 1978)

Dr Llewelyn Gwyn Chambers

## Sources

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, with bibliography

*Public Characters of 1801-2* (London 1801-2), 549-75

*The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1825, ii, 181-4, has a lengthy obituary notice

Robert Williams, *Enwogion Cymru. A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Welshmen* (1852)

R. Williams, *Montgomeryshire Worthies* (1894)

A. P. Oppé (ed.), 'Memoirs of Thomas Jones, Penkerrig, Radnorshire', *Annual Volume of the Walpole Society*, 32 (1951), 4

S. Rees in *Cymru (O.M.E.)*, 25 (1903), 217

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Abraham Rees](#)

## Images

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