

REES, WILLIAM (Gwilym Hiraethog; 1802 - 1883), Independent minister, writer editor, and political leader

Name: William Rees

Pseudonym: Gwilym Hiraethog

Date of birth: 1802

Date of death: 1883

Spouse: Ann Rees (née Edwards)

Child: Henry Rees

Parent: Ann Rees

Parent: David Rees

Gender: Male


Occupation: Independent minister, writer editor, and political leader

Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Printing and Publishing; Religion

Author: Thomas Eirug Davies

Born at Chwibren-isaf, a farm nestling at the foot of Mynydd Hiraethog, in the parish of Llansannan, Denbighshire, 8 November 1802, the second son of Dafydd and Ann Rees - his elder brother being [Henry Rees](#). His paternal grandfather was a native of Llandeilo who came as an exciseman from Wenvoe, Glamorganshire, to Llansannan, where he married Gwen Llwyd, a descendant of Hedd Molwynog, who had inherited Chwibren-isaf. The only education William Rees ever had was at the village school during the winter months, and he began to work on the farm and as a shepherd at an early age. However, he proceeded to educate himself, and under the direction of Robert ap Dafydd of Cilfach Lwyd, an old bachelor who lived in a near-by farm, learned the rules of Welsh prosody and in 1826 won the prize at Brecon eisteddfod for a *cywydd* on the victory at Trafalgar and the death of Nelson - an achievement which brought him into public notice.

He was brought up as a Calvinistic Methodist, but when the Independents came to Llansannan in 1828 he was admitted a member of their church. It was not long before he was invited to preach and in 1831 he was appointed minister at Mostyn. In 1837 he went to Swan Lane, Denbigh, where he became famous for his preaching. In 1843 he succeeded his friend [William Williams](#) of Wern (1781 - 1840) at the Tabernacle, Liverpool. In 1853 he moved to Salem in the same town and in 1867 was responsible for building Grove Street chapel which replaced Salem. He resigned in 1875 and went to Chester where he lived until his death, 8 November 1883; he was buried in Smithdown Road cemetery, Liverpool. His wife was Ann Edwards (died 1874) of Waunddilen, Nantglyn.

Hiraethog influenced Welsh politics both through the press and from the platform. He founded [Yr Amserau](#)  in Liverpool in 1843 and remained its editor until 1852. It was the first successful Welsh newspaper, and it was his series, 'The Letters of an Old Farmer,' which breathed life into it. These were written in the dialect of the editor's home county and dealt with such subjects as religion, politics, the Corn Laws, education, the Oxford Movement, and the Papacy. They were inspired chiefly by

English radicalism. The political consciousness of Wales was awakened, thanks largely to the *Amserau* which, in 1859, was amalgamated with [Y Faner](#). He was also keenly interested in European politics. He supported Mazzini and Garibaldi in the Italian war of independence, and the Hungarian Kossuth in his struggle against Austria. Hiraethog met Mazzini, and the two corresponded for some time; and a deputation came from Hungary to thank him for his support. He pleaded for the abolition of slavery in the U.S.A. chiefly through his book [Aelwyd Ffewythr Robert](#), which was founded on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He was the 'father' of the popular lecture, and used this form of entertainment as a means of propagating his political views and also of affording instruction on scientific and literary topics.

He produced an enormous amount of verse. His collected works were published under the title *Gweithiau Barddonol Gwilym Hiraethog* in 1855 and include his *awdl* 'Heddwch' which contains the well-known *cywydd* to the blacksmith and the song 'Atgofion Mebyd.' This volume was followed by *Emmanuel*, i, 1862, ii, 1867, a vast epic in blank verse; *Twr Dafydd, sef Salmau Dafydd ar Gân*, 1875; and [Cathlau Henaint](#), 1878. His best known hymn is 'Dyma gariad fel y moroedd.' In prose we get [Helyntion Bywyd Hen Deiliwr](#), 1877, of which there was another impression in 1940; *Llythyrau'r Hen Ffarmwr*, 1878, selected from the *Amserau* - another selection appeared in 1939; *Cyfrinach yr Aelwyd*, 1878; *Cofiant y Parch. W. Williams o'r Wern*, 1842 - translated into English by [J. R. Kilsby Jones](#) in 1846; *Rhydd-weithiau Hiraethog*, 1872; *Y Dydd Hwnnw*, 1862, a play dealing with the expulsion of the two thousand in 1662; and *Darlithiau Hiraethog*, 1907. His religious works include *Y Cyfarwyddwr*, 1833, which is a catechism dealing with the main points of Christian doctrine; *Traethawd ar Grefydd Naturiol a Datguddiedig*, 1841; *Providence and Prophecy*, 1851; *Nodiadau ar yr Epistol at yr Hebraeid*, 1866; and *Koheleth*, 1881, a volume of sermons which was reprinted in 1910. In 1882 he was awarded the first medal of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion but died before it could be formally presented to him.

HENRY REES (1837 - 1908), minister

Son of William Rees. He began preaching in 1856. He attended Brecon College (1859-62), and became a minister at Chester (1862-85), and Bryngwran, Anglesey, from 1885 until his retirement in 1897. He died 24 February 1908. His biography and some of his sermons were published by R. P. Williams in 1909.

Author

Reverend Thomas Eirug Davies, (1892 - 1951)

Sources

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[Marwolaeth y Parch Henry Rees](#), *Y Dysgedydd*, Ebrill 1908, tt.185-186

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Further Reading

R. Prytherch Williams, *Cofiant a phregethau y Parch. Henry Rees, Bryngwran, Môn* (Merthyr Tydfil 1909)

Images

John Thomas, [Rev. William Rees, 'Gwilym Hiraethog'](#)

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John Thomas, [Y Parch. William Rees, D.D. \(Gwilym Hiraethog\)](#)

John Cochran, [Revd. William Rees Liverpool](#)

John Thomas, [Chwibren Isaf, Llansannan, old home of Henry & William Rees](#)

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