

## RHYS, JOHN DAVID (or 'Siôn Dafydd Rhys', and in his own day 'John Davies' only; 1534 - 1609?), physician and grammarian

**Name:** John David Rhys  
**Date of birth:** 1534  
**Date of death:** 1609?  
**Spouse:** Agnes Rhys (née Garbet)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** physician and grammarian  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Medicine; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Thomas Parry

Born in Llanfaethlu, Anglesey, of a humble family, but descended from 'uchelwyr.' After spending some time at Christ Church College, Oxford, he departed for the Continent about 1555 and travelled extensively - he himself states that he visited Venice, Crete, and Cyprus - finally becoming a member of the University of Siena, where he graduated as a doctor of medicine. He was also a teacher at a school in Pistoia. It is not known for how long he remained on the Continent, but he was back in Wales by 1579, and in 1583 he was practising as a physician at Cardiff. He later settled at Clun Hir in Brecknock. His wife was Agnes, daughter of John Garbet of Hereford, and they had seven sons. It is sometimes stated that he died in 1609, but certain sources seem to suggest that he was alive in 1617. Two books by him appeared during his stay on the Continent. One was *De Italica Pronunciatione* (Padua, 1569), which was probably intended for the use of Welshmen visiting Italy, and which proves the author's familiarity with all the principal European languages. The other work was a Latin grammar published at Venice, and said to have been very popular with students, but no copy seems to have survived. After returning to Wales and devoting some years to the collection of material Rhys published, in 1592, his famous Welsh grammar, *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve Linguae Institutiones et Rudimenta*<sup>[7]</sup>. The book was dedicated to [Sir Edward Stradling](#) of St Donats, Glamorganshire, who had defrayed the cost of printing. It consists of a grammar of the Welsh language together with a lengthy and laborious discussion of Welsh prosody. As a work of scholarship it has very little merit, because the author, who had none of the gifts of [Gruffydd Robert](#) or [Dr. John Davies](#) for analysing the structure of language, adopted the grammatical framework of Latin and forced the Welsh language into that. In the section on prosody, whole passages have been taken word for word from the bardic treatises, and time and again it becomes apparent that Rhys did not comprehend the meaning of these quotations. It should be observed however that the book contains items of knowledge which are not found elsewhere.

The author's aim was to make known outside Wales the peculiarities of the Welsh language and the main features of the bardic tradition, and this is the reason why the book was written in Latin. Other works by Rhys occur in manuscript. Pen. MS. 118 contains a long treatise by him on early British history, an attempt to refute the arguments of Polydore Vergil and others against the validity as history of [Geoffrey of Monmouth's](#) *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The same manuscript contains a Welsh translation, probably incomplete, of a Latin poem by Thomas Leyshon on S. Donats castle and its gardens. Everything considered, Rhys can be regarded as a characteristic example of the Renaissance Welshman.

### Author

Sir Thomas Parry, (1904 - 1985)

### Sources

W. J. Gruffydd, *Llenyddiaeth Cymru o 1450 hyd 1600*, Rhyddiaith, 155

T. Parry, '[Siôn Dafydd Rhys: I](#),' *Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol*, ix, 157-165

T. Parry, '[Siôn Dafydd Rhys: II](#),' *Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol*, ix, 234-41

T. Parry, '[Siôn Dafydd Rhys: III](#),' *Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol*, x, 35-46

'Gramadeg Siôn Dafydd Rhys,' *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, vi, 55, 255

G. J. Williams, *Iolo Morganwg a Chywyddau'r Ychwanegiad* (1926), 65

### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Siôn Dafydd Rhys](#)

## Additional Links

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