

SMYTH, ROGER (1541 - 1625), Roman Catholic priest and Welsh translator

Name: Roger Smyth
Date of birth: 1541
Date of death: 1625
Gender: Male
Occupation: Roman Catholic priest and Welsh translator
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Robert Geraint Gruffydd

Born S. Asaph, 1541. Perhaps he graduated B.A. at Oxford in 1563. It is not known when he became a Roman Catholic, if indeed he was ever anything else, but he may be supposed to have fled to the Continent c. 1573. He joined the English College at Douai c. 1576. By the beginning of 1579 he was a member of the English College at Rome, and engaging in controversy, together with the other Welsh students, against the English (see under [Clynnog, Morys](#)). The English won, and Smyth was dismissed from the college because he refused to express his readiness to be ordained priest, and to return to England as a missionary. After this, his history becomes obscure; perhaps he was assisted by his friends [Gruffydd Robert](#) and [Owen Lewis](#). It is likely that there is some foundation for the statement made in *Y Drych Cristianogawl*, (1585), that he was then living at Rouen; he may have been the 'Doctor Smythy' who joined in signing a petition on behalf of the Bridgettines (formerly of Syon Abbey) at Rouen, c. 1587. He returned to England some time towards the middle of the nineties, and for a while was imprisoned at Newgate, but he escaped somehow. It is probable that he was ordained priest some time after this. It is not known where he graduated S.T.P. (= D.D.). It seems that he lived in Paris after his release from prison; [Gruffydd Robert](#) wrote to him there c. 1596. He is mentioned in reports from Cecil's spies in 1598 and 1601. It was in Paris that he published his three Welsh books, but a note in a copy of *Theater dv Mond* in N.L.W. proves that there was some connection between him and Monmouthshire as late as 1615. [Lewis Owen](#) in his *Running Register*, 1626, says that Smith died 'the last year,' i.e. 1625, but if the words were written in 1625, then the year he died would be 1624.

According to one of the spies, Smyth was a man of uncommon opinions: he disliked both the Jesuits and the English, and desired to see a republic, together with freedom of conscience, instituted in Wales and England. As an author he is hardly classed with the great masters of Welsh prose, but his work is by no means insignificant. Of especial interest is his attempt to enrich the vocabulary of the language according to the suggestions of his master, [Gruffydd Robert](#).

Here is a list of his published works: (a) *Crynnodeb o addysc Cristnogawl* (Paris, 1609) (S.T.C. 4569), a translation of the first two, and part of the third, chapters of S. Petrus Canisius's Latin catechism, *Summa Doctrinae Christianae*; (b) *Opus catechisticum ... sef yw: Svm ne grynoddeb o adysc Gristionogawl* (Paris, 1611) (S.T.C. 4570), a complete translation of the same catechism; (c) *Theater dv Mond sef ivv. Gorsedd y Byd* (Paris, 1615) (S.T.C. 3170a), a translation of a French work by Pierre Boaistuau, *Le Théâtre du Monde*, a treatise on the misery and the greatness of man. This is not one of the books which derives from the Counter-Reformation movement.

A short foreword at the beginning of *Y Drych Cristianogawl*, 1585, is also attributed to Smyth, but it is very difficult to determine whether or not this is genuinely his work.

Author

Professor Robert Geraint Gruffydd

Sources

Smyth's works

T. Parry's introduction to the 1930 reprint of *Theater du Mond - Gorsedd y Byd* (Cardiff 1930), and the sources there cited

Catholic Record Society, xxxvii

a book inscribed by Smyth in the possession of D. M. Rogers, M.A., the Bodleian Library, Oxford

J. R. Fletcher, *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* (Syon Abbey 1933), 1933

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