

THOMAS, WILLIAM (fl. c. 1685? - c. 1740?), secretary to Robert Harley, 1st earl of Oxford

Name: William Thomas
Parent: Thomas Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: secretary to Robert Harley, 1st earl of Oxford
Area of activity: Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Author: William Llewelyn Davies

son of Thomas Thomas, Llandovery, who is described as 'gent' by Foster (*Alumni. Oxon.*) in his account of the academic career of [Timothy Thomas](#) (1694 - 1751), brother of William Thomas. [John Davies](#) (*Bywyd a Gwaith Moses Williams*) suggests that he was self-taught, possibly because of what Thomas Hearne says of him - 'He never had any Academical Education' (T. Hearne, *Collections*). Nevertheless he had marked gifts of learning. A letter written by [Moses Williams](#), 16 April 1719, to [Timothy](#) refers to William as 'Gwilym Gwalstawd Ieithoedd,' which suggests an aptitude for learning languages (B.M. Harl. MS. 7526). Hearne adds that he was of help to 'Moses Williams's Design of printing some British or Welch Things, and he is mightily for having them only in yt Language' (Hearne, op. cit., vii, 50). It is Hearne who suggests that William Thomas was at first servant to [Harley](#), but it is certain that he later became the earl's secretary; the letters (Duke of Portland manuscripts) written by Thomas to [Edward Harley](#), son of the earl (and afterwards [2nd earl](#)), in 1708 and 1709 when the young man was at Christ Church, Oxford, and giving him parliamentary and other news from London were not those of a servant. There are numerous references to Thomas in the Portland manuscripts - see the indexes to the various volumes of the calendar prepared for the Hist. MSS. Comm. In B.M. Harl. MS. 7526 are two letters written by him to [Edward Harley](#) in 1730, i.e. after he had succeeded his father; these relate to early Welsh poetry and kindred subjects - but note that the second letter is a transcript by Thomas of a letter written by [Moses Williams](#). For his contribution to the important (folio) edition of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, published in London in 1721 - see the account of [Timothy Thomas](#); it is certain that it was William who corrected and enlarged the biographical account of Chaucer, originally written by John Dart.

Author

Sir William Llewelyn Davies, (1887 - 1952)

Sources

To the references already given add Edward Owen, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts relating to Wales in the British Museum* (1900-22), ii

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