

VAUGHAN, HENRY (1621-1695), poet

Name: Henry Vaughan
Date of birth: 1621
Date of death: 1695
Spouse: Elizabeth Vaughan (née Wise)
Spouse: Catherine Vaughan (née Wise)
Parent: Thomas Vaughan
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet
Area of activity: Poetry
Author: Herbert Gladstone Wright

a member of the [Vaughan family of Tretower Court](#) - see the family article; born 1621 at Trewenydd (Newton), Brecknock, and educated by Matthew Herbert, rector of Llangattock. He appears to have gone up to Oxford in 1638 and to have been a member of Jesus College. He took no degree, but some two years later his father sent him to London to study law. Because of the Civil War he was summoned home and for a time acted as secretary to judge [Sir Marmaduke Lloyd](#). There is reason to think that he then fought for the king. He is known to have returned home by 1647. About 1650 he was converted to a religious life under the influence of [George Herbert](#). This inclination was reinforced by the death of his brother William; his own illness intensified Vaughan's gravity. As an ardent Royalist he was distressed by political events but found consolation in the scenery of the Usk Valley. He also turned to the reading of devotional works and occult philosophy and began to practise as a physician. He was twice married - (1) to Catherine Wise, and (2) to her sister Elizabeth. He died 23 April 1695, and was buried at Llansantffraed.

Vaughan's chief works are: *Poems*, 1646; *Silex Scintillans*, 1650; *Olor Iscanus*, 1651; *The Mount of Olives*, 1652; *Flores Solitudinis*, 1654; and *Thalia Rediviva*, 1678. The Gregynog Press printed *Poems* in 1924 and Vaughan's translation of Guevara 'r' 'Praise and Happiness of the Countrie-Life' from *Olor Iscanus* in 1938. Vaughan was bilingual, and there are traces of Welsh influence in his poetry, which also reflects his love of his tranquil native valley. In his fondness for solitary communion with nature and his reminiscences of childhood, he anticipates Wordsworth.

His twin brother was THOMAS VAUGHAN (1621 - 1666), alchemist and poet, who is the subject of an article in the *D.N.B.* and who has also been dealt with extensively in [Theophilus Jones](#), *History of the County of Brecknock* (3rd edn.), iii, 207, and in F. E. Hutchinson's book on [Henry Vaughan](#) (especially in chap. xi, but the index should also be consulted). He entered Jesus College, Oxford, at the end of 1638, and graduated in 1642, but there is no official confirmation of Anthony Wood's claim that he was elected a Fellow (see Hardy, *Jesus College*, 97-8, and the list at the end of the book). He was appointed rector of his native parish of Llansantffraed about 1644 - [Theophilus Jones](#)'s date, 1640, is too early. But he returned to Oxford to join Charles I, and fought for him in the Civil War. Partly because of this, partly because of his intemperance and long absence from his parish, he was deprived of his living in 1650 by the parliamentary commissioners ([Richards](#), *Puritan Movement*, 50-2, and *Religious Developments*, 490). He then studied alchemy, first in Oxford, and then in London. He died 27 February 1665/6 at Albury, Oxon., where he was buried. He regarded himself as a philosopher - but he was one who categorically repudiated the teaching of Aristotle and Descartes, for he was a kind of mystic, and his experiments were directed more towards analysing the secrets of nature than to finding the philosopher's stone. He published some eight books under the pseudonym Eugenius Philalethes (which has often led to his being confused with another mystic who called himself Eirenaeus Philalethes), and other books are attributed to him. He also wrote a fair amount of poetry in Latin and in Welsh. Not only did he account himself a Welshman, but he claimed that Welsh was his native tongue (Hutchinson, op. cit., 26).

Author

Emeritus Professor Herbert Gladstone Wright, (1888 - 1962)

Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

L. C. Martin (ed.), *The Works of Henry Vaughan* (Oxford 1914)

L. C. Martin (ed.), 'Henry Vaughan and the Theme of Infancy,' in *Seventeenth Century Studies presented to Sir Herbert Grierson* (Oxford 1938)

L. Imogen Guiney (ed.), *The Mount of Olives and Primitive Holiness set forth in the life of Paulinus Bishop of Nola* (London 1902)

F. E. Hutchinson, *Henry Vaughan. A life and interpretation* (Oxford 1947)

E. Blunden, *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan. Characteristics and intimations. With his principal Latin poems carefully translated into English verse* (Oxford 1927)

2nd edn. of *The Works of Henry Vaughan* (Oxford 1914) (ed. L. C. Martin, Oxford, 1958)

Further reading

ODNB: [Vaughan, Thomas, \(1621–1666\)](#)

ODNB: [Vaughan, Henry, \(1621–1695\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Henry Vaughan](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Thomas Vaughan \(philosopher\)](#)

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