


WILLIAMS, DANIEL (1643? - 1716), Presbyterian divine, and benefactor to Nonconformity

Name: Daniel Williams
Date of birth: 1643?
Date of death: 1716
Gender: Male
Occupation: Presbyterian divine, and benefactor to Nonconformity
Area of activity: Philanthropy; Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born at Wrexham or nearby, but neither the date of his birth nor the names of his parents are known; he had, however, a sister, Elizabeth (died 1728), the wife of Hugh Roberts, a currier and landowner. Nothing is known about his education, but he was a regular preacher before he was 19 years of age. The whole of his career was spent outside Wales - it is difficult to believe that he was the 'Daniel Williams' who took out a Presbyterian licence in Wrexham in 1672 under the Indulgence of Charles II; for one thing he was in Ireland at that time, and for another [Philip Henry](#) does not mention it. It is, of course, possible that Williams took out the licence when he was visiting the town. His biography is given in some detail by Alexander Gordon in the *D.N.B.*, so that in this volume a brief outline is all that is necessary. His ministry in Ireland lasted from 1664 to 1687, when he went to London as minister of Hand Alley, Bishopsgate, occasionally deputizing for Richard Baxter as 'lecturer' (preacher) at Pinners' Hall. When Baxter died (1691) Williams was appointed to succeed him, but was deprived of the post in the storm which followed his attacks on the higher Calvinism of Crisp and Chauncy. One of the results of this brawl (Williams having already established a collateral 'lecture' at Salters' Hall) was the dissolution of the 'Happy Union' formed in 1690-1 between the Presbyterians and the Independents. Williams was fiercely attacked because of his 'Arminianism' (which, in fact, was merely 'Baxterism'), and in the heat of the battle an unsuccessful attempt was made to smear his moral character. He became the acknowledged (indeed, the official) leader of the 'Three Denominations' in their dealings with government, and led their deputations to Anne and George I respectively, on their succession to the throne. In 1709, both Edinburgh and Glasgow conferred on him the degree of D.D. He died 26 January 1715/6 'at the age of 72,' and was buried in Bunhill Fields. His two marriages brought him considerable wealth. He was a prolific writer (a list of his works is given in the *D.N.B.*); one of his books, *The Vanity of Childhood and Youth*, 1691, was translated into Welsh in [February 1728/9] under the title, *Gwagedd Mebyd a Ieuencid*  [other eds. 1739, 1759]. The general impression left on one's mind is that he was not a particularly amiable man.

In his will he left nearly all his money (about £50,000) to charity. But, because of certain legal flaws, litigation followed, and it was not until 1721 that a decision was reached after some changes had been made in the dispositions. Three of the results may be noted here: (1) the founding of seven charity schools in North Wales, with a provision for the apprenticing of the pupils later on - these were converted into British schools about 1850, but when the Act of 1870 laid down that elementary education should be a charge on the rates, the endowments of the Daniel Williams schools were diverted to the founding of a boarding school for girls at Dolgellau, which is still known as 'Dr. Williams's School'; (2) the establishment of scholarships for candidates for the Nonconformist ministry to enable them to go to Glasgow University, and lesser awards to enable them to go to Carmarthen Academy; (3) the founding of the wellknown Dr. Williams Library in London - but in this respect the trustees developed the institution on a much more comprehensive scale than Daniel Williams had contemplated.

As his will indicates, Daniel Williams had not forgotten Wales - but it was his sister, Elizabeth Roberts, who insisted on setting aside part of the estate to pay small annuities (which are still paid) to some of the ministers of the oldest Nonconformist churches in North Wales. It was he who, in 1690, was responsible for drafting the report on Wales which was intended to secure grants for Welsh ministers from the 'Common Fund' (see Gordon, *Freedom after Ejection*). Many Welshmen went to Glasgow on the Daniel Williams endowment. It should be noted that one of the effects in Wales of his quarrel with the higher Calvinism was a split in the celebrated old congregation of Wrexham. Angered by the attacks of [Thomas Edwards](#) of Rhul on Daniel Williams, the Wrexham Presbyterians left the congregation, and founded the 'New Meeting'; Daniel Williams built them a chapel in Chester Street, which he also endowed. And the Henllan Amgoed controversy (see under [Owen, Jeremy](#)) may be regarded as another consequence of the dispute.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

A. N. Palmer, *A history of the older nonconformity of Wrexham and its neighbourhood being the third part of 'A history of the town and parish of Wrexham'* (1888)

the full account of Daniel Williams's will in W. D. Jeremy, *The Presbyterian Fund and Dr. Williams' Trust* (1885), 81-94
Y Cofiadur, 1957, 35

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Daniel Williams](#)

Works

Daniel Williams, Thomas Baddy (trnsl.), *Gwagedd mebyd a jeungctid: yn yr hwn y dangosir natur lygredig pobl jeuaingc, ac y cynhygir moddion er eu diwygiad* (Caerlleon 1728?)

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