WILLIAMS, EVAN (1749-1835), bookseller and publisher

Name: Evan Williams
Date of birth: 1749
Date of death: 1835
Spouse: Frances Williams (née Neat)
Parent: Dafydd William
Gender: Male
Occupation: bookseller and publisher
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Printing and Publishing
Author: Evan David Jones

He was one of the five remarkable sons of David Williams, a Calvinistic Methodist exhorter in Cardiganshire. The father was a blacksmith and he is said to have practised his craft at Swyddffynnon, Esgair near Llangwyryfon, and Pen-y-graig, Llanrhystud. He may have moved to meet the needs of the Mabws and Ffos-y-bleiddiaid estates. The children were probably born at Swyddffynnon, but in 1777 the father was living at Pen-y-graig, and the Calvinistic Methodists of that district used to meet at his house until their chapel at Rhiw-bwys was built. Reckoning from the record of his death, Evan Williams was born in 1749. He was educated at Ystrad Meurig grammar school under Edward Richard, like his brothers, John ('the old Sir,' 1745/6 - 1818), Thomas, DAVID (warden of Hungerford almshouse, rector of Heytesbury, and father of C. J. Blasius Williams, the expert on pulmonary diseases), and WILLIAM, rector of Llanstinan. He went to London and became interested in the Welsh movements in the city. In 1789 he became a member of the Gwyneddigion Society, but he does not appear to have held any of its offices. He was a trustee of the Welsh Charity School, and his name appears regularly in its minute books from 1795 until his death. He established a bookselling business with his brother Thomas at No. 13, Strand. The brother remained only for ten years or so in partnership, but Evan Williams continued for over forty years. The brothers began to publish books of Welsh interest. Up to 1800 the name of E. & T. Williams appears as booksellers in imprints (e.g. in 1791, in Walter Davies, *Rhyddid*; D. Thomas, *Awdlau*; John Williams, *An Enquiry ... concerning the Discovery of America*; M. Williams, *A Treasury of Knowledge*). In the following year E. Williams appears with J. Owen as publishers of W. Owen Pughe, *The Heroic Elegies of Llywarch Hen*. Other important books begun by the brothers, and continued by E. Williams alone, are *A Welsh and English Dictionary* by Owen Pughe, and the *Cambrian Register*, 1795-1818. In the second volume of the *Cambrian Register* issued in 1799, the brothers are described as E. & T. Williams (successors to Mr. Blamire), 11, Strand, and they had a warehouse at 156, Leadenhall Street. In 1803 the first batch of E. Williams's publications as 'Bookseller to the Duke and Dutchess of York, and successor to Mr. Blamire' appeared. They were Owen Pughe's *Cambrian Biography*, Coxe's *A Vindication of the Celts*, Sharon Turner's *Vindication of the genuineness of the Ancient British poems*, and Peter Roberts's *History of the Cymry*. All the books published by E. Williams on the history, poetry, philology, and antiquities of Wales, cannot be listed here, but the following should be noted: E. Pugh's *Cambria Depicta*, 1811; *The poetical works of Edward Richard*, 1811; Peter Roberts, *Cambrian Popular Antiquities*, 1815; and W. Owen Pughe's *Coll. Gwynva*, 1819; and *Hu Gadarn*, 1822. Evan Williams has a bad name in the letters of literary men of his period. He is called 'Mr. Skinflint' and 'Skin-devil Williams.' Nevertheless the publication of the kind of books for which he made himself responsible was a considerable venture, and it is right that a tribute should be paid to him on account of his valuable list of publications in Welsh or relating to Wales. He married Frances, eldest daughter of Robert Neat of Saltross, Wiltshire. She died in 1814 at the age of 52. He was 86 when he died at Penton Street, 25 August 1835. He was buried in the churchyard of S. James, Pentonville.

His brother

THOMAS WILLIAMS (1755 - 1839)

turned to banking and returned to his native county, taking a share, 13 September 1808, in the bank of Messrs. Jones, Davies, and Williams (formerly Jones, Morgan, and Davies) called 'Banc y Llong' ('the Ship Bank') in Bridge Street, Aberystwyth. This partnership also was dissolved in 1815-6, and it is believed that 'Banc y Llong' then ceased to exist, but Messrs. Williams, Davies, and Co. were keeping a bank in the same premises and were represented by the same London agents (Sir James Esdaile & Co.) in 1835. Thomas died 15 April 1839 aged 84. There is a memorial to him and his wife (Margaret, who died 25 December 1849) in the porch of S. Michael's, Aberystwyth, a church towards the rebuilding of which he had given £100 in 1830.

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

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