

WILLIAMS, JOHN (fl.1584-1627?), goldsmith

Name: John Williams
Child: John Williams
Parent: William Coetmor
Gender: Male
Occupation: goldsmith
Area of activity: Art and Architecture; Business and Industry

Son of William Coetmor and grandson of the John Coetmor who was an illegitimate son and twenty-third child of [Meredydd ap Ieuan ap Rhobert of Cesail Gyfarch](#) in Eifionydd - two of John Coetmor's half-brothers were [Humphrey Wynn of Cesail Gyfarch](#) and Cadwaladr Wynn of Wenallt in Nanhwynen (today, 'Nant Gwynant'); pedigrees are given by [J. E. Griffith](#), 280-1 and 393 - but on p. 393 he follows the usual practice of confusing successive John Williamses of this family, and therefore altogether skips the John Williams now under discussion. Tradition associates John Williams with Hafod Lwyfog in Beddgelert parish (a house which certainly belonged to the Cesail Gyfarch clan), and it is certain that in 1610 he gave the church at Beddgelert a silver chalice and paten-cover ([E. A. Jones](#), *Church Plate in the Diocese of Bangor*, 63-4, with illustration). [Pennant](#) (*Tours in Wales*, ed. [Rhys](#), ii, 341) further reports a statement that Williams 'founded' (more probably, restored) the Nanhwynen chapel-of-ease. These benefactions would be very naturally explained as those of a native of Beddgelert. But the record of John Williams's apprenticing styles him 'son of William ap John of Dolowthlane,' i.e. Dolwyddelan (a few miles away) - so too in legal proceedings in 1678 he is styled 'of Dolwyddelan' and credited with charitable intentions towards that parish. We learn from *Cal. Wynn Papers*, 463, that he had a brother named Humphrey, who was in business with him. When either of the brothers was born, and when they went to London, is not known.

On 25 July 1584, John was apprenticed to the goldsmith 'Mr. Richard Martin, Alderman' (see *D.N.B.*; goldsmith to queen Elizabeth, warden and afterwards master of the Mint, three times lord mayor), and on 7 September 1593 became a freeman 'by service' of the Goldsmiths' company. His business, 'at the sign of the Cross Keys in Cheapside,' was clearly very prosperous. The Inner Temple in 1609 ordered of him a gold cup costing £666 (*Cal. Inner Temple Records*, II, xix). On 6 August 1612, John Williams, 'goldsmith to the King,' was admitted into Gray's Inn - such honorary admissions were not uncommon. The first reference in *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series* to him as one of the king's goldsmiths is under 30 March 1604; in October of the same year he is mentioned for the first time in *Cal. Wynn Papers*; both Calendars (indexed) have frequent references to him during James I's reign. In December 1609 the king is advised to make Williams a justice of the peace, as Martin had been made in the previous reign. Warrants for considerable payments to him (of course, the cost of bullion was included - or an 'imprest' for bullion) are mentioned, e.g. in 1604 '£1,000 for chains of gold,' and in 1616 £6,733 to him and his associates; grants of land (of the value of £200 and £173 respectively) to him are twice mentioned. As was customary, the goldsmith was also a banker and a moneylender. The Wynn papers show that Williams lent money (as much as £500 at a time) to his kinsman [Sir John Wynn](#) of Gwydir, and that he had trouble in getting it back - the last reference to him in the papers (February 1626) shows [Sir John](#) appealing to him to be patient, but [Owen Wynn](#) reports to his father that 'Williams has grown very high since the [bishop of Lincoln](#) is fallen' - why the 'fall' of his namesake the future archbishop should have caused this hauteur is not clear. Again (Rug Deeds in N.L.W., no. 759, and *Cal. Wynn Papers*, 588 and 615), we find him in 1615 taking a mortgage on [Bachymbyd](#) and other lands from [William Salusbury of Rug](#). And we find from a codicil to John Williams junior's will that Henry Cary (first viscount Falkland, and father of the Civil War hero) had become bound 'in greate somme of money' to the elder John Williams. An even more exalted borrower appears in an entry in *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series*, 28 September 1621: 'grant and sale to John Williams, goldsmith, of certain jewels as security for a loan to the King of £3,000 and in discharge of a former loan of £2,000, to be redeemable on payment of £5,000 within the year' - on 9 November we learn that ten jewels had been 'mortgaged to John Williams.'

The Goldsmiths' company's record of the admission of the younger John Williams (1623) styles the father 'John Williams, Esq., late His Majesty's Goldsmith'; he must therefore have lost his official status by then. And in 1623, too, a certificate granted to him ([E. A. Jones](#), loc. cit.) by the earl of Suffolk and viscount Falkland states that 'there was no evidence that he sold deceitful plate to the king.' Was this just a formality on quitting office, or had there been trouble? - it may be noted that both peers were deeply embarrassed, and that Cary (at least) was heavily in debt to Williams. The date of Williams's death is uncertain - no will of his has been discovered. It was said in the 1678 lawsuit mentioned above that he died before [Sir John Wynn](#), i.e. before 1 March 1626/7, but the lapse of time forbids our being too confident in relying on this; and it is not impossible that the goldsmith was the 'old Mr. Williams' whose death is mentioned in *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series*, under 23 August 1628.

John Williams cared for other things besides money. He is credited by the attorney-general in 1678 with having founded, c. 1608, the well-known free school at Llanrwst, and the alms-houses there; the Crown averred that the original scheme was to set up these institutions at Dolwyddelan (qua the founder's birthplace?), but that this proved too expensive. The

execution of the project, says the Crown, was entrusted to John Williams the younger and [Sir John Wynn](#). The [Wynn s](#) in 1678 would have none of this story, and claimed that the benefaction derived entirely from [Gwydir](#). An involved account of the proceedings is printed in the 1838 *Charity Report (Denbs., pp. 54-9)*; the matter is discussed in *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions*, ii, 51-63, by A. H. Williams, who thinks it 'more likely' that it was John Williams who provided the money.

He concerned himself, too, with literature and history. The epigrammatist [John Owen](#) (1564? - 1628?) addressed two epigrams to him (in 1607 and in 1613). Michael Drayton, in a special preface ('to my Friends the Cambro-Britans') to *Polyolbion*, 1612, declares that 'the free and gentle companie of that true lover of his Country (as of all ancient and noble things) M. John Williams, his Majesties Gold-smith, my deare and worthy friend, hath made me the more seek into the antiquities of your Country'; another source ([Pennant](#), loc. cit. - but the ultimate source is Hearne's preface to Leland's *Collectanea*), tells us that Williams had given some of John Leland's papers to Drayton.

John Williams has been sometimes confused with a much better known namesake, the 'Sir John Williams, maister of the kinges jewels,' whose house, so Stow says (*Survey of London*, Everyman ed., 264), was burnt down in 1541. This 'Baron Williams of Thame' (1500? - 1569) is fully dealt with in *D.N.B.*; he was keeper of Henry VIII's jewels, 1531-44. He was of Welsh descent - from William ap Grono of Glamorgan ([Clark](#), *Limbus Patrum*, 127-8), but had no contact with Wales other than serving in the last year of his life as president of the Council of the Marches - he died at Ludlow.

John Williams had at least two sons and at least one daughter. His eldest son,

JOHN WILLIAMS (died 1637), a goldsmith

in Eastcheap (admitted freeman of the Goldsmiths' company, 'by patrimony,' on 7 November 1623), but with that a landowner at Marnhull, Dorset, married Joan, daughter of Edward Allen, alderman and sometime sheriff of London. He died 14 September 1637. His will (P.C.C., 127 *Goare*) describes his personal estate as 'very meane at this present' (he left £50 to the Goldsmiths' company towards building their hall, and various other legacies), but he evidently had a good deal of real property and much money due to him; he was buried 'at S. Peter's in Cheapside.' His heir was his son Edmund, but a younger (the fourth) son, John, was the executor. Their careers (both became baronets in 1642) do not concern Welsh history - Edmund's title died with his son John in 1680, and his brother John ('of Minster in Thanet' - a manor that had belonged to Henry Cary, lord Falkland), died unmarried in 1669. The younger goldsmith's will speaks also of a nephew, 'Doctor Morris Williams' - he was afterwards knighted, and was physician to the queen.

Sources

To the sources mentioned add *The History of the Gwydir Family* (1927) in Askew Roberts's ed. 87

D. E. Jenkins, *Bedd Gelert, its facts, fairies, and folk-lore* (Porthmadog 1899), 119-20, 269-70, 281-3

George Edward Cokayne, *Complete baronetage (1611-1800)* (Exeter 1900-09), ii, 168 (this will serve towards correcting J. E. Griffith's statements)

abstract of the second John Williams's will, communicated by Mr. A. H. Williams

information from the Clerk to the Goldsmiths' Company of London

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