

WILLIAMS, NATHANIEL (1742 - 1826), Baptist (Particular, afterwards General) minister, theological controversialist, hymn-writer, and amateur doctor

Name: Nathaniel Williams

Date of birth: 1742

Date of death: 1826

Child: Thomas Williams

Gender: Male

Occupation: Baptist (Particular, afterwards General) minister, theological controversialist, hymn-writer, and amateur doctor

Area of activity: Medicine; Poetry; Religion

Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

A native of Llanwinio, Carmarthenshire. He was originally an Independent, but later joined the Baptists at Salem, Meidrym, where he began to preach. In 1777 he edited the 2nd edition of someone's translation of Whitefield's sermon, *Ynghylch Rhodio gyda Duw*, adding a few hymns written by himself. He acquired great notoriety among the Baptists in 1778, when he published his *Dialogus*, in which he professed disagreement with the Athanasian theory of the Trinity, and suggested instead that the Trinity represented the three functional (or 'economical') aspects of the Godhead and not three 'persons' - a point of view which he reiterated in the 'Address' at the beginning of his *Ychydig o Hymnau Newyddion*, 1787, while at the same time protesting that he believed in Christ as God incarnate and as the Son of the Father. The Baptist Assembly (Glynceiriog, 1779) dissociated itself from the opinions expressed in the *Dialogus* ([Joshua Thomas](#), *A History of the Baptist Association in Wales*, 68).

According to [Joshua Thomas](#) (*Hanes y Bedyddwyr ymhlith y Cymry*, 574), Williams had by this time become unpopular at Salem, and left it to go to Priory-street, Carmarthen; in the next few years his name is connected with the group of churches round Ffynnon-henry. [David Jones](#) (*Bed. Deheubarth*, 496) says that he was the first to preach at Cwmmefllynach, and that he intended to build a church there but that the church at Rhydwylym intervened, and that he then left the place. He was ordained at Ffynnon-henry in 1785, apparently as a peripatetic preacher and minister and not to any particular church. In 1785 he published a medical book, *Darllen Dwfr a Meddyginiaeth*.

During the next few years ([Spinther](#), iii, 241-2) he was on mission in Anglesey, preaching (and doctoring) there until about 1790 (he was certainly there in 1788) when he returned to his native county. By this time, the [Peter Williams](#) controversy was boiling up, and an anonymous book, *Dialogous [sic]*, appeared, defending [Peter Williams](#); this book was attributed to [Peter Williams](#) himself (which is most unlikely), to [William Williams](#) of Cardigan and [William Richards](#) of Lynn, and to Nathaniel Williams, and [J. J. Evans](#) (*Morgan J. Rhys*, 148-50) gives strong reasons for supposing that the last-named is the most likely.

In 1796, Nathaniel Williams published, from the Trevecka press, *Pharmacopoeia, or Medical Admonitions in English and Welsh ... The Second Part* (the 1785 book was probably the 'first part'); in 1797 (again from Trevecka) he published *Pregeth a Bregethwyd yn Llangloffan ar Neilltuad ... Joseph James a James Davies* (Joseph James at least held the same opinions as [Peter Williams](#)); and in 1798 a new edition with additions of [William Williams](#) of Cardigan's *Sylwadau ar y Dirywiaeth mewn Pregethu a Chanu ...* When the 1799 schism occurred Nathaniel Williams had to leave the Particular Baptists - it is significant that he had never been invited to preach in any of their Assemblies. The *Monthly Repository*, 1806, 610, records the fact that he preached at the Assembly of the General Baptists in Swansea, May 1806, but that he was a peripatetic preacher. The [Rev. T. Oswald Williams](#) discovered that he was connected with the General Baptists of Newcastle Emlyn in 1816-7 - but it should be noted that the other two ministers mentioned in the same connection, Joseph James (above) and [Evan Evans](#), had joined the Particular Baptists. There is, in fact, nothing to prove that Nathaniel Williams's theological views moved further 'to the left' than they had been in 1787: he was not a member of the Unitarian Society in 1802; nor does his name appear on a single occasion in the *Monthly Repository's* reports of the Unitarian conferences, nor of the joint conferences of the Unitarians and General Baptists (nor, for that matter, of the separate conferences of the General Baptists, apart from the 1806 Assembly). The probability is that, try as he would, he did not count for much among his brethren, whether 'orthodox' or 'unorthodox'. He is said to have died in obscurity and poverty.

By today he is barely remembered except as a writer of hymns ([Shankland](#) in *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru*, 1922), some of which are so good that they have been later attributed to [Ann Griffiths](#). He died in a cottage in Llanfyrnach, Pembrokeshire, 28 December 1826, 'aged 84,' says his tombstone in the Baptist burial ground of Hermon in that village; the inscription bears witness to the fact that he was a 'Minister of the Gospel to Jeneral [sic] Baptism.' His two medical books were republished by T. Price, Merthyr Tydfil, 1835 and 1839.

The ballad-monger 'Twm Nathaniel' was his son.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

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A History of Carmarthenshire, ii, 251-4

Gomer M. Roberts, *Bywyd a Gwaith Peter Williams* (Cardiff 1943), 108-11

Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol, 1942, 71-4

J. Thickens, *Emynau a'u Hawduriaid* (1945)

and the other references mentioned above

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Nathaniel Williams, *Pharmacopoeia, or, Medical admonitions, English and Welsh containing a select body of useful and elegant medicines for several disorders incident to the human body The first part* (Trevecka 1793)

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Nathaniel Williams, *Gorchfygedig-gan, er coffadwriaeth am Dafydd William o Lanbedr-ar-fro; Sir Forganwg, yr hwn a ymadawodd â'r byd Tachwedd 5, 1794. Yn 79 mlwydd o'i oed* (Trefecca 1795)

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