WILLIAMS, THOMAS (1737 - 1802), attorney, outstanding figure in the copper industry at the end of the 18th century

Name: Thomas Williams
Date of birth: 1737
Date of death: 1802
Child: Owen Williams
Parent: Owen Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: attorney, outstanding figure in the copper industry
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Law
Author: Thomas Richards

As son (born 13 May 1737) of Owen Williams of Cefn Coch in Llansadwrn, who owned also Tregarnedd and Treffos, and his wife, the daughter of Hendre Hywel by Llangefni, it was comparatively easy for Thomas Williams to become intimate with the great men of Anglesey; it was he who straightened out the tangled estate of Bodior; he spent years in getting reason out of the stubborn people at Plas Coch, squire William Hughes and his son, the first W. Bulkeley Hughes; he drafted the deeds by which the earl of Uxbridge purchased Plas Llanfair from John Lewis of Llanfihangel Tre'r Beirdd (1791). Some years before that, about 1785, Williams had become chief agent of the copper mines of Mynydd Parys by Amlwch, mines that were owned partly by the earl and partly by the family of Llysdulas; for a time both parties entrusted the management to Williams alone. The success that followed was marvellous; not only were immense quantities of copper exported, but numerous subsidiary concerns grew up under the shadow of the main industry - huge buildings at Ravenhead and Stanley, smelting furnaces at Amlwch itself, a cluster of mills in the Holywell district, and there was a veritable fleet of coasters sailing out of Port Amlwch. Williams got the ear of the Board of Admiralty during the Napoleonic wars and made handsome bargains with the East India Company; he caused not a little consternation to the capitalists of Cornwall, the native home of the copper industry and the stabiliser of its standards; he was called before special committees of the Commons to give evidence as an expert; by 1800 he admitted that half the resources of the industry were in his hands, with a financial background of close upon a million pounds. Whatever the big capitalists of Cornwall thought of him, or the brass-founders of Birmingham, he was ' Twm Chwarae Teg ' (Tom Fairplay) to the Anglesey countryside.

Naturally enough, the Uxbridge connections brought him into close contact with the political life of the period and the intricacies of political management; he did as much as anybody to get the Pagets, sons of Uxbridge, elected for Anglesey and the Caernarvon boroughs from 1790 onwards; in his letters he emphasised again and again how necessary it was to have close co-operation between the earl and lord Bulkeley of Beaumaris. There was no good fellowship between that lord and bishop Warren of Bangor, more especially because the bishop had done his utmost in 1796 to prevent the election of Sir Robert Williams, Bulkeley's half-brother, as Member of Parliament for Caernarvonshire; Uxbridge was deeply offended with the bishop because of his provocative delay in building a new church at Amlwch; these are the main considerations behind the theory that it was Williams who wrote the savage pamphlet against Warren which appeared under the name of *Shôn Gwialan* in 1796, a pamphlet whose real authorship has remained a mystery to this day. That Williams actually wrote it is not likely; but it is very near certainty that the fierce diatribe and well-rounded phrases were the work of David Williams (1738 - 1816), founder of the Royal Literary Fund, at that juncture a clerk in London at the office of Williams. In a letter to Uxbridge in 1788, Thomas Williams gave a hint that he himself had ambitions to become a Member of Parliament; he was elected for Great Marlow in 1790, and held the seat till his death on 30 November 1802. His descendants gradually released their hold on the copper industry; they are now remembered as owners of the Craig-y-don estate and the founders of banks. Several were Members of Parliament; three of the daughters of Thomas Peers Williams, son of OWEN WILLIAMS (1764 - 1832), and grandson of Thomas Williams, were married to members of the House of Lords, two others to sons of lords; a brother to these daughters was Hwfa Williams, prominent (he and his wife) at the court of Edward VII.

Author

Thomas Richards, (1878 - 1962)

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: Thomas Williams of Llanidan

Images

National Museum Wales: Thomas Williams (1737-1802)

Additional Links

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