

WILLIAMS, THOMAS (Gwilym Morgannwg; 1778 - 1835), poet

Name: Thomas Williams
Pseudonym: Gwilym Morgannwg
Date of birth: 1778
Date of death: 1835
Child: Taliesin Williams
Parent: William Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Poetry
Author: Thomas John Morgan

Born at Melin Gallau in the parish of Llanddety, Brecknock, 20 November 1778, son of William Thomas. The family went to live at Melin Pontycapel, Cefncoedycymer, c. 1781. **Taliesin ab Iolo** says, in a letter, that when he was 7 years of age he began to work on a coal level owned by his father. Nothing much is said about his early education, but it is stated that he began to write when he was still a youth. When he was about 27 years of age he went to London where, however, he only stayed some six months. On his return he was employed by Rhys, son of **Hywel Rhys**, and it may be inferred that it was the teaching which he was given by, his master which enabled him to write, in co-operation with **John Jenkins** (1779 - 1853) of Hengoed, the first version of *Y Parthysllydd*, 1815-6. **Ioan Emlyn** in his introduction to the first volume of *Y Parthysllydd*, 1870, says that he has 'drawn extensively on the old *Parthysllydd*, the joint production of those eminent men, **Dr. John Jenkins** of Hengoed, and Mr. Thomas Williams' (Gwilym Morgannwg); moreover, in his introduction to the second volume (1875) **Spinther** says that the title *Parthysllydd* was coined by them. **Taliesin ab Iolo** does not say definitely when it was that Gwilym Morgannwg went to Pontypridd to keep a public-house, but he was certainly there in 1813. In *Awen y Maen Chwyf*, 17, there is a copy of a letter written by him in December 1813 to the publishers of *Seren Gomer* wishing the periodical good luck and offering to send some poetry for publication in it. He died at Pontypridd 13 August 1835, and was buried at Llanfabon.

Two books published at Merthyr Tydfil, the first in 1824 and the second in 1826, show how great the literary activity of that district was in the first quarter of the century, what the characteristics and qualities of that literary activity were, and how considerable was the importance of Gwilym Morgannwg; these books are: *Llais Awen Gwent a Morgannwg ...* published by **J. Davies** (Brychan), 1824, and *Awenyddion Morgannwg, neu Farddoniaeth Cadair ... a Gorsedd Pendefigaeth Morgannwg a Gwent ...*, 1826. Gwilym Morgannwg's work had already been seen in print: among the compositions sent in to the Carmarthen eisteddfod, 1819, and later published in *Awen Dyfed* (1822), were his ode 'on the death of the outstanding military officer, Sir Thomas Picton', this by the intervention of **Iolo Morganwg**, since Gwilym Morgannwg had broken the competition's rules by including his real name (rather than a pseudonym) with his entry. In the portrayal of **Picton's** career, reference is made to the period he spent in the West Indies, evidently ascribing to others the blame for his difficulties on the island of Trinidad ('The valiant man went towards the West./To his credit, to fight (it led to misfortune);/He retained his remarkably worthy reputation/In spite of cheats, traitors, and injury'). It is surprising to see Iolo Morganwg lending his support to a poem on this subject, especially one which plays down the accusations faced by Picton for his misconduct in Trinidad. Reflecting the positive relationship suggested by this support, however, it is clear that, in their turn, Iolo's ideas had an enormous influence on Gwilym Morgannwg. On pp. 7-8 of *Llais Awen* we find Gwilym Morgannwg's poem 'Heddwch' ..., 'which was declaimed from the Logan Stone in the presence of the Gorsedd of Morgannwg, at the second Assemblage, at the Summer Solstice, in the year 1814.' 'He and myself were initiated into the arcana of Druidism by my father,' says **Taliesin ab Iolo**, who adds that he was 'my only brother druid.' In the other book, Gwilym Morgannwg tells us the story of the society's fourth eisteddfod at which he appears to have been one of the adjudicators. An interesting feature of his adjudication is his uncompromising opposition to the use of blank verse. On pp. 63-4 we have an account of the fifth eisteddfod held on the day of the 'Feast of the Summer Solstice, 1825.' At this eisteddfod Gwilym Morgannwg won a prize for his *awdl* on the destruction of Caerphilly castle. **Taliesin** also says that he won a prize at the Cardiff eisteddfod, 1834, for an epitaph to be carved on **Iolo Morganwg's** tombstone, and that among his effects was a silver medal which he had won singing to the accompaniment of a harp. His works, *Awen y Maen Chwyf*, were published in 1890 at the expense of his son, Taliesin Williams. As poetry, the value of the book is slight, but it contains some interesting pieces, such as the 'election songs'; and the love songs, written in lyrical form, are not altogether devoid of skill and expertise. But it contains one wholly admirable poem, and that is the elegiac on **Iolo Morganwg**.

Authors

Professor Thomas John Morgan, (1907 - 1986)

Revised by the editorial team, 2024

Sources

Thomas Williams, *Awen y Maen Chwyf yn cynnwys awdlau, cywyddau, canïadau, ac englynion*(Merthyr Tydfil 1890), v-viii, i.e. the copy of Taliesin ab Iolo's letter which appeared in the *The Merthyr Guardian*, 22 August 1835

Hanes llenyddiaeth Gymreig o 1651 O.C. hyd 1850 (1893), 623

Awen Dyfed: sef, awdlau ac englynion a ddanfonwyd i Eisteddfod Caerfyrddin, Gorph.8, 1819; at y rhai y 'chwanegwyd hanes yr eisteddfod (Caerfyrddin 1822), pp. 49-55

Iolo Morganwg to David Saunders (Dafydd Glan Teifi), 15 March 1823, in Geraint H. Jenkins, Ffion Mair Jones, David Ceri Jones, *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff 2007), III, p. 647

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