

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM, 'of Llandygái' (1738 - 1817), antiquary, author, prominent official at Cae-braich-y-cafn quarry

Name: William Williams
Date of birth: 1738
Date of death: 1817
Child: Edmund Williams
Child: Robert Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: antiquary, author, prominent official at Cae-braich-y-cafn quarry
Area of activity: Business and Industry; History and Culture; Literature and Writing
Author: Thomas Richards

Born 1 March 1738 at Trefdraeth in Anglesey, of poor parents. For some time he worked as a weaver, then followed his long apprenticeship as a saddler at Llannerch-y-medd. He became one of the bardic disciples of [Hugh Hughes](#) ('y Bardd Coch') and quite friendly with [Robert Hughes](#) (the bard Robin Ddu yr Ail); through his friendship with [Robin Ddu](#) he became a corresponding member of the London Gwyneddigion Society; he had also struck up an acquaintance with [William Morris](#) of Holyhead. The great turning-point of his life was his father's interview with Richard Hughes, the agent of the [Penrhyn estate](#) (and a squire in his own right, of Bodrwyn and Tre'r-dryw in Anglesey). William Williams was given work as occasional clerk in the estate office, filling up his spare time as a saddler. As time went on he learnt the mysteries of surveying and land-measuring, and maps are extant of his work at [Gwenynog](#) in Denbighshire, and Meillionydd in Llŷn; often, too, he was called in to act as arbitrator between master and tenant, and between farmer and farmer. The next development was the most important of all: the conviction of [Richard Pennant, 1st lord Penrhyn](#), that Williams was the ideal man to control the production of slates at his great quarry, their transport, and sale; this dispensation lasted from 1782 to 1802, and his twelve account-books for the last year bear eloquent witness to his comprehensive care, to his exact methods, each one of the twelve books having seven columns of meticulous detail. On his resignation he was allowed his full annual salary for the rest of his life. His retirement gave him leisure to indulge his literary tastes: in 1802 was published, at Oxford, his *Observations on the Snowdon Mountains*, which contains interesting notes on local customs and folk-lore, including (as was natural) a long chapter on the descent of the [Penrhyn family](#) (the author of this part of the work was [John Thomas](#), sometime of Beaumaris, 1736 - 1769); five years after his death was published *Prydnawngwaith y Cymry*, which was meant to be complementary to *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*. Besides these printed works, he left behind him, in manuscript, a considerable amount of literary work, such as 'Iolo o'r Cyffredin Glas,' in which William Williams takes opportunity, by means of story and song, of showing his contempt for the theology of Calvin, the extravagance of sectaries, and the Methodist societies; not unlike is his fanciful debate between two persons upon the doctrine of Predestination. By 1803 he had written a book on herbalism (still in a manuscript of 289 pp.), and a 'History of Caernarvonshire,' 106 pp., with particular contributions about the quarrying districts. It is not surprising to hear, in face of this cumulative equipment, that he was able (and very ready) to give of his store of knowledge to inquirers like [Richard Fenton](#), [Sir Richard Colt Hoare](#), and the Irishman Hyde Hall who wrote Bangor MS. 908 (published in 1952 by the Caernarvonshire Historical Society as *A Description of Caernarvonshire*, and ed. by E. Gwynne Jones). He died on 17 July 1817. The love of letters in the family did not die out with him; his son, Robert, was an author himself and a friend of literary men, and built up a *Corph o Dduwinyddiaeth*, that was published at Bangor in 1831; the author of a long obituary appreciation of the father in the *Gwyllyddydd* for 1828, in the form of a letter to [Gutyn Peris](#), was his son Edmund Williams.

Author

Thomas Richards, (1878 - 1962)

Sources

J. E. Griffith, *Pedigrees of Anglesey and Carnarvonshire Families* (1914), 289

Y Gwyllyddydd, vi, 97

Bangor Manuscripts at University College North Wales Library, Bangor (U.C.N.W.), 557, 2633-4, 2636, 5442

Penrhyn Manuscripts at University College North Wales Library, Bangor (U.C.N.W.), 1836-47

manuscript, in the possession of Canon E. G. Wright, Bangor

files of *The North Wales Gazette*, 1795-1817.

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Williams \(antiquary\)](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 23179B: Memorandum book in the hand of William Williams \(1738-1817\)](#)

VIAF: [6171747](#)

Wikidata: [Q17423834](#)

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