

THOMAS, CLARA (1841 - 1914), landowner and philanthropist

Name: Clara Thomas
Date of birth: 1841
Date of death: 1914
Parent: Henry Thomas
Parent: Clara Thomas (née Thomas)
Gender: Female
Occupation: landowner and philanthropist
Area of activity: Land Ownership; Philanthropy
Author: Huw Thomas Davies

Clara Thomas was born on 22 August 1841 at Pencerrig Hall, Llanellwedd, Radnorshire, the last of four children of Henry Thomas (1808-1863) of Llwyn Madoc, Llanfihangel Abergwesyn, landowner, solicitor and chairman of the Quarter Sessions, and his wife Clara (née Thomas, 1814-1877) of Pencerrig. The family owned extensive lands in the counties of Brecon, Radnor, Cardigan and Glamorgan, and could trace its lineage back to [Elstan Glodrydd](#), founder of the royal line of the kingdom of 'Rhwng Gwy a Hafren'.

Through fate and family tragedy Clara Thomas inherited the estates in mid-Wales and the south Wales valleys. Her two brothers and sister had passed away before they had a chance to inherit: Clara Gwynne Thomas (1836-1836), Evan Thomas Gwynne Thomas (1837-1838) and Evan Llywelyn Thomas (1839-1864). Evan Llywelyn Thomas was engaged in 1863 to [Elizabeth Amy Dillwyn](#), but he died of smallpox in Paris. By 1873, Clara Thomas was recorded as owning an estimated 14,333 acres of land in Breconshire, Radnorshire and Glamorganshire, with a annual rental value of £5,279.

This was the start of Clara Thomas taking over the responsibilities of the estate. She was recognised as a fair landlord who looked after the welfare of her tenants. She built numerous churches, often in memory of her family but also in the industrial valleys to provide for the spiritual needs of the population. Land and finance were provided for libraries, institutes, workmen's halls, hospitals, care homes, nurses' homes, youth centres and schools. Charitable organisations were supported, especially for widows and orphans following mining disasters. Many of the financial gifts were made anonymously under the name Miss X. She supported the building funds of the University College of South Wales and St. David's College, Lampeter and she was on the Board of Governors of the University of Wales.

Her Welsh identity was important to her, and she was able to speak and read Welsh. She supported the erection of a memorial to the death of [Llywelyn ap Gruffudd](#), Prince of Gwynedd, near Builth Wells, and was also supportive of plans to erect statue in Ynysangharad Park, Pontypridd to commemorate [Evan James](#) and [James James](#), the authors of the National Anthem. She gave financial support to national and local eisteddfodau, and as a member of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion she made regular subscriptions.

She considered both Llwyn Madoc and Pencerrig as her homes. She was a member of the Builth Wells Board of Guardians and the first female County Councillor, representing Llanfihangel Abergwesyn. Her close companions were Margaret Gertrude Lewis Lloyd (1830-1907) o Nantgwyllt, Cecilia Agnes Ann Turner (1851-1932) Dolyffin and Rosalind Margaret Phillimore (1881-1953). She travelled annually on the Grand Tour of Europe and even as far as Egypt in later years. A skilled teacher, she taught with Margaret Gertrude Lewis Lloyd in local board schools and Sunday schools. An Anglican in her faith, she also supported nonconformist causes.

Clara Thomas died of cancer of the kidneys at Bailey's Hotel, Gloucester Road, London on 12 June 1914. Her body was carried back to be buried at Eglwys Oen Duw, Llanfihangel Abergwesyn. Her will left £133,640, providing for her extended family, close friends and loyal staff.

Author

Huw Thomas Davies

Sources

Breconshire and Radnorshire Archive Services: Parish, Births, Marriages and Banns, Burials

Census Returns of England and Wales, 1841-1911

The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO)

General Register Office, England and Wales Civil Registration Indexes

UK and Ireland, Find A Grave Index

Wills and Probates Records, National Library of Wales

[Welsh Newspapers](#) - National Library of Wales

Llwyn Madoc family archive

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