

BOWYER, GWILYM (1906 - 1965), minister (Congl.) and college principal

Name: Gwilym Bowyer
Date of birth: 1906
Date of death: 1965
Spouse: Prydwen Bowyer (née Harrison)
Child: Ann Bowyer
Child: Mair Bowyer
Child: Gwynn Bowyer
Parent: Sarah Bowyer
Parent: William Bowyer
Gender: Male
Occupation: minister (Congl.) and college principal
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Authors: Robert Tudur Jones, Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

Born 7 February 1906 at 74a Chapel St., Ponciau, Rhosllannerchrugog, Denbighshire, son of William Bowyer, miner, and his wife Sarah. He was the fifth of their six children. He received his primary education at the Council School, Ponciau, and then from 1920 to 1928 he worked in a grocer's shop, an experience that he greatly appreciated, but received further education under the guidance of J. Powell Griffiths, minister of the English Baptist church, Grenville Williams, a teacher at the Council School, and especially R.J. Pritchard, his minister at Mynydd Seion Congl. church, Ponciau, where he began to preach in 1923. Gwilym Bowyer entered Bala-Bangor College, where his elder brother Frederick had already been a student for three years and where [John Morgan Jones](#) and [J.E. Daniel](#) were lecturers, 27 September 1928 and he graduated B.A. with first-class hon. in philosophy in 1932 and B.D. in 1935 with Church History and Christian Doctrine as his main subjects.

He was ordained in Soar, Cwmclydach, Rhondda, 12 September 1935 and was subsequently minister of three very different pastorates, in Cwmclydach, 1935-39, at the Borough, London (1939-43) and Ebeneser, Bangor (1943-46). He married Prydwen Harrison of Penmaen-mawr on 1 October 1935 and they had three children, Gwynn, Mair and Ann.

Whilst living in the Rhondda Valley, Bowyer became very aware of the crisis of Wales in the context of the world's anguish, and there were few who could understand or appreciate their minister's strong convictions, especially with regard to the cause of peace and the safeguarding of the Welsh language. He moved to the Borough at the painful and difficult period of war - a period of bombing when women and children were compelled to return to Wales on account of the dangers, as his wife and his son Gwynn were obliged to do. He found in Bangor conditions that were more congenial to his intentions. And when his time as minister came to an end, he continued to serve as a valuable deacon at Ebeneser.

He began his work as principal of Bala-Bangor College in October 1946 and remained in post until his death following a heart attack in October 1965. This was the period of his great contribution, not only to his own denomination but to his nation as well. He lectured on Christian Doctrine to his students at Bala-Bangor, and he also was in charge of the student hostel. The wide span of his interests - from women's magazines to the most recent films at the local cinemas - became obvious when he shared the lunch table with his students; he enjoyed reading detective novels. On one particular Sunday, it had been arranged for him to travel with me (Ioan Wyn Gruffudd) to his preaching appointment, but when that became common knowledge amongst the students, there was no end to teasing the Principal what a dangerous driver I was!

Gwilym Bowyer's literary output was not extensive though he was a master of a lively Welsh style. He published *Yr eglwys wedi'r rhyfel* (*Welsh Pacifist Pamphlets*, 1944) and *Ym mha ystyr y mae'r Beibl yn wir?* (1954) and about 25 articles, sermons and reviews. His strength lay in the spoken word. He spoke quickly, forcefully and clearly and he was one of the most popular and influential preachers of his generation. His respect for the pulpit, for the congregation and especially for the Saviour was such that he never stood to preach without having a message that was the result of an honest meditation and a disciplined preparation. He came to national prominence as an able broadcaster, gaining the ear of the public on radio with concise statements and keen reasoning in series such as *Seiat Holi* (1946-49) and *Problemau bywyd* (1957-60), and he showed the same skills as one of the chairpersons of the series *Codi testun* produced by the television company T.W.W. between September 1961 and March 1962. It was said of Gwilym Bowyer 'that he was the best off-the-cuff speaker that we ever heard.' On the assembly floor, in discussions on radio and television, his mind worked so swiftly that he preferred not to know the questions beforehand. He contributed almost 100 broadcasts during his career, a severe strain on his physical resources.

He possessed a brilliant mind and a quick tongue. He was stronger in analysing and criticising than in constructing. As a theologian he tended towards rather conservative views and the thinkers who influenced him most were Augustine,

Luther, Kierkegaard and his professor, [J.E. Daniel](#). He was an interpreter of the Barthian viewpoint, and he valued the individualism of Kierkegaard which explained many aspects that he considered of great importance - his suspicion of every ecclesiastical body, his constant stress on personal responsibility, his unwillingness to be associated with any political party, his fear of the interference of the state. Christianity for Gwilym Bowyer meant an allegiance to Jesus Christ - an unquestionable allegiance. Politically he was a radical, a convinced pacifist and a strong advocate for Welsh-medium education. He made a substantial contribution towards making it possible for theological students in the University of Wales to follow courses and take their examinations in Welsh.

Gwilym Bowyer died in Bangor on 5 October 1965 aged 59. He was buried 8 October at New Cemetery, Bangor.

Authors

Reverend Principal Robert Tudur Jones, (1921 - 1998)

Ioan Wyn Gruffydd

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Portreadau'r Fficer, ii, 36-8

Y Dysgedydd, November/December 1965

Y Tyst, 4 November 1965

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