

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM OGWEN (1924 - 1969), archivist, university professor

Name: William Ogwen Williams
Date of birth: 1924
Date of death: 1969
Parent: Margaret Williams (née Pritchard)
Parent: William Henry Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: archivist, university professor
Area of activity: Education; History and Culture
Author: William Keith Williams Jones

Born in Llanfairfechan, Caernarfonshire, 12 December 1924, the elder of the 2 sons of William Henry Williams and his wife Margaret (née Pritchard). He was educated at Llanfairfechan national school, 1928-35, Friars School, Bangor, 1935-42, University College of North Wales, Bangor, 1942-47 (B.A., 1st.-class hon. History, 1945), University of London, 1947-48 (diploma in archive elect studies, 1949); he was appointed archivist elect for Caernarfonshire 1 August 1947 and county archivist in 1949, part-time lecturer in archive studies at University College Bangor, 1954, lecturer in history (Welsh-medium) in Bangor, 1958-63, lecturer in Welsh history, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1963-65, senior lecturer, 1965-67, professor, 1967-69. He was assistant editor *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 1950-55, editor 1955-69. He possessed a sharp mind and was ready to accept responsibilities. He had the gift of gaining people's trust and was a person with natural courtesy who sought to avoid harm or hurt to any one. He enjoyed company and was gifted both as a lecturer and as a conversationalist.

As the first Caernarfonshire county archivist he succeeded in putting the fine archives of the county in order (as his *Guide to the Caernarvonshire Record Office*, 1952, shows) and also in popularising them. His article, 'County Records', which appeared as early as 1949 in *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* is testimony to his mastery of the archives and his gift for presenting them in an intelligible and interesting way to lay people. This was by no means his most important contribution, for he published in 1956 his *Calendar of the Caernarvonshire Quarter Sessions Records, 1541-1558* with a masterly introduction describing the historical background of the documents. This is arguably the best analysis of the Tudor administrative and social order in Wales and gained for Ogwen Williams his M.A.(Wales) in 1956. Large portions of the introduction were re-issued as *Tudor Gwynedd* 2 years later. The *Calendar* reveals Ogwen Williams at his best as historian and archivist. He published several articles after the *Calendar*, among them ' [The survival of the Welsh language, 1536-1642](#) ' (*Welsh History Review*, 2, 1964) and ' [The social order in Tudor Wales](#) ' (*Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1967) but as his horizons broadened and he lost contact with original archives his grasp as a historian slackened it is to be regretted that he did not seriously take up again the task of studying the Gwynedd gentry. He had a very important contribution to make in that field as his article, 'The Anglesey gentry as business men in Tudor and Stuart times' (*Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 1948) suggests.

His family background, before his father became a shop-keeper in Llanfairfechan, lay in the quarry and quarrying areas but it was the world of the gentry which attracted Ogwen Williams's interest. His parents were staunch nonconformists but he turned to the Anglican church (under the influence of Archdeacon Henry Williams and others) for spiritual sustenance. His mother and father were strong Liberals but he tended towards a conservative frame of mind. He was strong enough to stand his ground on matters of vision and principle. He overcame physical disability (he was born with defects in one eye and his hip, which kept him from military service though he volunteered in 1942) but he did not allow this to govern his mind, neither to detract one iota from his enjoyment of life nor to give the impression to others that it troubled him.

He died in sad circumstances; he was found drowned on Ynys-las beach, near Aberystwyth, 3 May 1969. He was not married.

Author

William Keith Williams Jones, (1926 - 1979)

Sources

Archives of Gwynedd county council and University College, Bangor

obituary notices in *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions* (1969)

Welsh History Review, 4 (1969)

Anglesey Antiquarian Society & Field Club Transactions, (1968-69)

Dr. J. Aled Williams and personal knowledge

Further reading

cymruffyw: [Drama am ddirgelwch o gyfnod Charles yn Aber](#)

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