

WILLIAMS, THOMAS OSWALD ('ap Gwarnant ' ; 1888 - 1965); Unitarian minister, author, poet and public figure

Name: Thomas Oswald Williams

Pseudonym: ap Gwarnant

Date of birth: 1888

Date of death: 1965

Spouse: Daisy Williams (née Thomas)

Parent: Rachel Williams

Parent: Gwarnant Williams

Gender: Male

Occupation: Unitarian minister, author, poet and public figure

Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Religion

Author: David Elwyn James Davies

Born 10 May 1888, one of the four children of Rachel and Gwarnant Williams, farmer, poet and public figure of Gwarnant farm, in the parish of Llanwenog, Cardiganshire. He was educated at Cwrtnewydd school and Dafydd Evans's school Cribyn (1901-02); he was apprenticed as a pupil-teacher and, for a period of ten years he was a deputy-teacher at Blaenau school, Gorsgoch and Cwrtnewydd school. In 1911, 'without an hour of secondary education' he went to the University College, Aberystwyth, where he graduated B.A. in Welsh (with first-class honours) in 1915, a student, in his first years, of [Professor Edward Anwyl](#). He graduated with an M.A. in 1923 for a dissertation on 'The literary movement in west Wales in the early part of the eighteenth century, together with its religious connections.' He had charge of Capel y Cwm for a short time after leaving college and then, for three years, the churches at Brondeifi and Caeronnen, before receiving, in 1918, an invitation to become their official minister. He stayed there until his death in 1965.

During his college days he edited *Y Wawr*, the magazine of the Welsh students at Aberystwyth; he was the editor of *Yr Ymofynnydd*, the Welsh-language magazine of the Unitarians in Wales, from January 1926 to December 1933 and in 1937, during the illness of his successor, Rev. T.L. Jones. He served on the consultative committee of *Yr Ymofynnydd* until the end of his life. He contributed frequent articles under his own name as well as 'T.O.W.', 'O', 'Ap Gwarnant', 'E.W.O.', 'Na N.', 'Gwalch Ogwr' etc. He wrote a series about denominational giants, denominational homes and denominational chapels, publishing the latter part of this series as *Hanes cynulleidfaoedd Undodaidd sir Aberteifi* (1930). In the same magazine he published a series of critical articles on his contemporaries, 'Gw r blaenllaw yr enwad' under the pen-name 'Gwalch Ogwr'. He published *Hanes Caeronnen* in 1954 and the comprehensive volume *Undodiaeth a rhyddid meddwl* in 1963. He delivered many public lectures and at least one of his plays, *Gwyntoedd croes* was performed. He participated frequently in eisteddfodau; he twice won the chair at the inter-college eisteddfod and he came close to winning the chair and the crown at the National Eisteddfod on more than one occasion. He won many prizes for poetry at the National Eisteddfod and one for his essay on freedom of thought in Wales. He was acknowledged as a scholar and the beauty of his language and his ease of expression were proverbial. However, he did not escape criticism as one of the editors of the revised volume of the Unitarian hymnal *Perlau Moliant* which appeared in 1929 (see *Ymofynnydd* 1928, 195). Although he was not a musician, the 'music of heaven' was in his soul and he composed many hymns. His style as a hymn writer was not dissimilar to that of [Iolo Morganwg](#) (Edward Williams), especially when his composition related to the world of nature or was for children, such as the hymns, 'Melys rhodio 'nglas y coedydd' and 'Anian wena 'nglas y dolydd'. He was the foremost historian of the Unitarians in Wales and no one succeeded in recording as much as he about the movement in order that 'the coming generation may know about our love for principle and truth'. As a good historian he was determined to get at the sources of information, but he kept an open mind when that knowledge was insufficient. He refused to believe that 'learned men had said everything' about [Iolo Morganwg](#) (*Ymofynnydd*, 1925, 139) and he looked forward to when he would have 'plenty of proof' to reveal another side of the expulsion from Llwynrhydowen church (*Ymofynnydd*, 1929, 111). He was a giant both physically and in terms of conviction. The same passion was displayed when he explained the logic of the arguments of his faith, as when he expressed his feelings about 'Jesus, the friend of a sinner'. He was never a student at a theological college, though there is reason to believe that he would have made a good teacher had he been given an opportunity, as he desired, at Carmarthen College. He was the president of the Unitarian Society of south Wales for two years (1923-25) and he was made an honorary member of the General Assembly of his denomination in 1963. He showed great ability during his public service in his town, his district and his county; he was a member of Lampeter Borough Council (1934-63) and mayor of the same local authority on four occasions (1940/41; 1941/42; 1950/51; 1959/60). He was granted the Freedom of the Borough in 1954. He represented the borough on the Court of Governors of the University of Wales and on Cardiganshire County Council in 1951, but he had previously been a co-opted member of the county education committee. He served as the chairman of many committees while a member of the county council including the benefits committee,

the Cardiganshire planning committee, the planning committee of the Aberaeron and Lampeter district, the finance and general purposes committee, the elderly persons voluntary committee and the governors of Lampeter secondary school. He attempted to persuade 'the secondary schools of Cardiganshire to teach every subject through the medium of Welsh' and he succeeded in establishing ' Hafan Deg ' home for the elderly to serve Lampeter and district.

His wife Daisy (née Thomas) died on 4 May 1965. They were the parents of two daughters. He died at Carmarthen hospital on 21 October 1965 aged 77 years and he was buried at Brondeifi graveyard, Lampeter.

Author

Dr David Elwyn James Davies, (1926 - 1997)

Sources

Yr Ymfynnydd (memorial edition), October-November 1965

T. O. Williams, *Cae'ronnen - Cellan, Ceredigion. Tri chan mlwyddiant, 1654-1747-1846-1954* (Llanbedr pont Steffan 1954), 47-8

Year book of the Unitarian General Assembly, (1966), 105

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