

## THOMAS, THOMAS LLEWELYN (1840 - 1897), scholar, teacher and linguist

**Name:** Thomas Llewelyn Thomas

**Date of birth:** 1840

**Date of death:** 1897

**Parent:** Thomas Thomas

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** scholar, teacher and linguist

**Area of activity:** Education; Poetry; Religion; Scholarship and Languages

**Author:** Gwilym Arthur Jones

Born 14 November 1840 at the old vicarage, Caernarfon, the eldest son of a family of three daughters and five sons of **Canon Thomas Thomas** (1804 - 1877) and his wife. The father was appointed vicar of Caernarfon in 1835 and he threw himself into the religious and educational life of the town which suffered heavily at the time from poverty and visitations of the cholera. ' **Thomas** of Caernarfon ', as he was known, succeeded in starting elementary schools and laying the foundation for training teachers in the town.

Thomas Llewelyn, who was not a strong boy, was educated privately until the age of nine. After six years of schooling and attending a Welsh-medium Sunday school, he became in October 1860 a scholar of Jesus College, Oxford. The college did not have a good academic reputation at the time. J.R. Green, the historian, had drawn attention to this and emphasised that the college showed little respect towards Wales. In 1863 Thomas won the Newdigate prize (and the praise of Matthew Arnold) for an English poem on the subject of ' Coal mines '. He graduated B.A. in 1864 and M.A. in 1868. After leaving Oxford, he taught for a while at Rossall School and after two years at Llandoverly College moved to Ruthin school where he stayed for five years. He was ordained deacon in 1867 and in 1868 received holy orders from the Bishop of St. Asaph. He spent time as a curate in Llanrhaeadr (1867-70), Llanfwrog, Vale of Clwyd (1870-1) and Ruabon (1872). He accepted the rectorship of Nutfield, Surrey, which was a college benefice and stayed there for two years from 1880 to 1882.

He won a prize at the national *eisteddfod* in Ruthin for a poem, ' The Harpist's Grave ' for which **Brinley Richards** composed the music.

In March 1872 Llewelyn Thomas was elected, despite keen competition, a fellow of his old college. He remained in post for a quarter of a century, teaching and instructing generation after generation of students as, senior tutor, vice-principal (1882-97) and Welsh reader (1873-80). He was regarded as an exceptionally popular tutor. He acted as university examiner and adjudicator of the Newdigate prize. On the strength of his distinction as a classicist he was invited to deliver the Latin sermon. He could compose verses in the classical languages, Welsh and English with ease. He ensured that Jesus College's closed scholarships were earmarked for boys from Wales who could not afford to pay for their education. He held that from the start the college was intended for students from Wales; he gave special support to the Meyrick Trust. Thomas laboured to promote the church's mission on Welsh soil. It was thought that he had qualities which could have led to his becoming a bishop. He strongly supported the establishment of a chair of Celtic. He could be harsh in his criticism as well as a hard but kind disciplinarian. He was an interesting conversationalist in the common room, and there was no curbing his Welsh rhymes in the college's annual concerts. He was especially fond of the works of Virgil, Dante, Goethe and Tennyson. He contributed a chapter on the history of his college to *Colleges of Oxford* (1891). During Dr. Hugo Harper's illness he acted as principal between 1887 and 1895, but it was **John Rhys** who succeeded Harper. In 1897 he accepted the canonry of St. Asaph from the Crown, but died before his installation. Llewelyn Thomas contributed scholarly articles on the Basque language to *The Academy*, 21 January 1893, 23 June 1894, 1 February 1896, and 8 February 1896. His treatise on the Basque manuscripts shows that he had a mastery of that language. It was he who edited Pierre D'Urte's version of his translation into Basque, based on the Geneva French *Bible*, of the Old Testament. It was he also who compared it to Licarrague's translation of the New Testament. Thomas called for a popular version of the Old Testament in Basque which ordinary folk could read. His efforts did not pass without criticism but it is agreed that his contribution was very considerable. In March 1893 he published in the series *Anecdota Oxoniensis*, *The Earliest Translation of the Old Testament into the Basque Language*.

In May 1897 he was struck by pneumonia and died on the 12th of the month aged fifty-seven. He was buried next to his father's grave in Llanbeblig cemetery, Caernarfon. There is a pulpit erected in that church in memory of his father. The choral funeral service was conducted in Welsh.

### Author

**Gwilym Arthur Jones**, (1925 - 1998)

### Sources

Harriet Thomas (ed.), *Father and Son* (London 1898)

Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: the members of the University of Oxford*

*Carnarvon and Denbigh herald, and North and South Wales independent* 14 May 1897

### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Thomas Llewellyn Thomas](#)

### Additional Links

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APA Citation



Jones, G. A., (2001). THOMAS, THOMAS LLEWELYN (1840 - 1897), scholar, teacher and linguist. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s3-THOM-LLE-1840>

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