WILLIAMS-ELLIS, JOHN CLOUGH (1833 - 1913), scholar, clergyman, poet and possibly the first Welshman to climb one of the highest mountains in the Alps

Name: John Clough Williams-ellis
Date of birth: 1833
Date of death: 1913
Spouse: Ellen Mabel Williams-Ellis (née Greaves)
Child: Bertram Clough Williams-Ellis
Parent: Harriet Ellen Williams-Ellis (née Clough)
Parent: John Williams-Ellis
Gender: Male
Occupation: scholar, clergyman, poet and possibly the first Welshman to climb one of the highest mountains in the Alps
Area of activity: Poetry; Religion; Scholarship and Languages; Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Ioan Bowen Rees

Born 11 March 1833 in Bangor, Caernarfonshire, second son of John Williams-Ellis, clergyman, and his wife Harriet Ellen Clough of Denbigh. He was brought up in Brondanw, Llanfrothen, and later, when his father was inducted rector of Llanaelhaearn, in Glasfryn, Llangybi. He was educated in Rossall School and Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he graduated 3rd Wrangler and was elected a fellow of the college in 1856. Being a brilliant mathematician and a successful tutor he did as much as anyone to promote the good name of the college. When the Cambridge chair in mechanics became vacant all the eminent workers in the field supported him but another person was elected as a result of the influence of the larger colleges. He turned to the church, becoming vicar of Madingley, Cambs., in 1865 and rector of Gayton, Northamptonshire, in 1876. Meanwhile he had invested his earnings as a tutor in expanding his Glasfryn estate, where he retired in 1888. He was appointed J.P. in 1890.

He won prizes for poetry in Cambridge and later. Although he was proficient in Welsh and assumed the pen-name, ' Shon Pentyrch ', he seems to have written in English only. He was a good oarsman and swimmer and in 1855 won the Royal Humane Society medal for rescuing a friend from drowning in the River Cam. He was familiar with the mountains of Snowdonia as a follower of the Ynysfor hounds and in 1857 went on a tour in the Alps with J.F. Hardy. On 13 August, accompanied by William and St. John Mathews, E.S. Kennedy, Hardy and five guides, he climbed the Finsteraarhorn (4,274 m.), the highest peak in Bern Oberland. The mountain had been scaled earlier, possibly as early as 1812, but this first British climb motivated William Mathews and Kennedy to establish an Alpine Club. Williams-Ellis did not join the Club and there is no mention of him visiting the Alps again but the family still has his alpenstock.

On 2 January 1877 he married Ellen Mabel Greaves. They had 6 sons: Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, the architect (1883 - 1978), was the 4th. He died 27 May 1913 and was buried in a glade near Glasfryn.

Author

Dr Ioan Bowen Rees, (1929 - 1999)

Sources

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