

WILLIAMS, THOMAS ('Capelulo'; c.1782 - 1855), reformed drunkard, itinerant bookseller, 'character'

Name: Thomas Williams

Pseudonym: Capelulo

Date of birth: c.1782

Date of death: 1855

Gender: Male


Occupation: reformed drunkard, itinerant bookseller, 'character'

Area of activity: Business and Industry; Literature and Writing; Performing Arts

Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

born in Llanrwst, Denbighshire, about 1782 the son of a hatter and baking-woman. His father came from Capelulo, Dwygyfylchi, Conwy, which is how he gained his nickname. He was a hostler and carriage driver for a while before enlisting as a soldier, seeing service in the Napoleonic wars and then in South Africa, South America and India. His predilection for drink got him into trouble frequently both in the army and after returning home, and he lived by begging, entertaining, singing and recounting his escapades and adventures. Granted his lifestyle as a drunkard and adulterer, there can be no doubt about his skill as an oral storyteller and this is what characterized his life after his religious conversion about 1840. He became a zealous teetotaler and a dangerously witty speaker for the cause. He became a well-known character, famed for his memorable sayings, his simple-minded attitudes (probably more feigned than real as he revealed a sharp wit when provoked), his humour and his ability to entertain audiences with accounts both of his reformed and his dissipated life.

His chief patron was [John Jones](#), the Llanrwst printer (1786 - 1865 who helped him to make a living by selling songs and ballads, almanacks and books.

Most of what is known of 'Capelulo' is found in his autobiography ([Hanes bywyd Thomas Williams, yr hwn a adwaenid wrth yr enw Thomas Capelulo. A ysgrifenydd o'i enau ef ei hun](#) ) published by [John Jones](#) in 1854. This is a literary version of what the author said 'in his own words' and its honesty is a remarkable feature. [Robert Owen Hughes](#) 'Elfyn' based his memoir on the autobiography but also brought together many stories in oral circulation or found in magazines, succeeding in capturing the flavour of Capelulo's lively oral style. He died in Llanrwst and was buried there, aged 73, 14 February 1855.

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

The autobiography was reprinted with an introduction by Gerald Morgan, *Lle diogel i sobri, sef hunangofiant Thomas*

Williams (Capelulo) (Llanrwst 1982)

Robert Owen Hughes (Elfyn), *Capelulo* (Caernarfon 1907, 1927)

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