

ROBERTS, GOMER MORGAN (1904-1993), minister (CM), historian, author and hymnwriter

Name: Gomer Morgan Roberts
Date of birth: 1904
Date of death: 1993
Gender: Male
Occupation: minister (CM), historian, author and hymnwriter
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion
Author: J. E. Wynne Davies

Born 3 January 1904, one of the eleven children of Morgan and Rachel Roberts. His father was a native of the parish of Llanfihangel Aberbythych, Towy Valley, the son of Sarah and Daniel Roberts, whilst his mother's roots were in the Llandyfân, Trap and Carreg Cennen area of Carmarthenshire, although she was brought up at Wernos, near Ammanford, the daughter of Ann and William Vaughan, the butcher. The family settled at Cwm-bach, a stone's throw from Bethel, Blaenau, Schoolroom, a branch of Gosen (CM), Llandybie. He acknowledges in his writings the chapel's influence upon him and his indebtedness to its ministers, the Reverends **W. Nantlais Williams**, Philip Evans and Lemuel Lewis. His father died when he was only nine and in 1917, aged thirteen, he started work at Pencae'reithin colliery. The fellowship at the mine was almost entirely Welsh and religion, literature and the issues of the day the subjects of conversation and discussion. He joined an Aberystwyth University College Extra-Mural Welsh Class at Ammanford, led by the Reverend John Griffiths, later Principal of the Baptist College, Cardiff. There he was introduced to the mysteries of strict metre poetry and came into contact with other local poets. He also joined an Economics class at Capel Hendre and his teacher, Tom Hughes Griffiths, encouraged him to apply for a W.E.A. Entrance Scholarship, worth £60, to Fircroft College, Bournville, Birmingham, an application which was successful. About the same time, Gosen was urging him to offer himself as a candidate for the ministry. Among the poets attending the Welsh class was **David Rees Griffiths**, 'Amanwy', who edited *O Lwch y Lofa* (1924), a volume of collected poems by local miners, including Gomer Roberts. Every copy was sold and the profit of £30, as stated by John Griffiths in his introduction, presented to 'the talented poet Gomer Roberts - a young man of whom Wales will hear much more in the future.' Following his year at Birmingham, he entered Trevecka College, proceeding to the Theological College of his denomination in Aberystwyth, 1926-9, where he pursued the Ordinary Course. His literary work continued and he won the Chair at the Inter-College Eisteddfod held in Cardiff, 1928, for his ode 'Ogof Arthur'. His mother died, February 1929, and was buried at Caersalem, Ty-croes. In the Autumn he began the Pastoralia course at Bala College and in 1930 accepted a call to be minister of Salem, Faerdre, Clydach, in the Swansea Valley. He was ordained at the Winter Association in Llanelli, 11-13 November 1930. He served the churches at Clydach, 1930-9, Pontrhydyfen and Ton-mawr, 1939-58, moving to St Dogmaels and Glan-rhyd, North Pems, in 1958, with Cilgerran later added to the pastorate. In 1968 he retired to Llandybie.

In a series of thoroughly researched studies, Gomer M. Roberts became the chief historian of Welsh Methodism and the leading authority on Welsh hymnology, especially the life and work of **William Williams**, Pantycelyn. The sheer volume of his literary output is remarkable, especially when one considers that it was all accomplished during an extremely busy and demanding ministry. He contributed regularly to local papers, denominational and national publications, prepared radio scripts and talks, histories of chapels and hymnwriters, as well as numerous popular articles and essays. In 1938 he published *Methodistiaeth Fy Mro* and a constant stream flowed from his pen until 1980 when his final volume *Mynwenta: Detholiad o Englynion y Beddau* appeared. A full and detailed bibliography prepared by Huw M. Walters and K. Monica Davies was published in *Gwanwyn Duw: diwygwyr a diwygiadau*, a festschrift presented to him in 1982. Among his main works are *Hanes Plwyf Llandybie* (1939); *Bywyd a Gwaith Peter Williams* (1943); *Y Per Ganiedydd*, Vol. I (1949) and Vol. II (1958); *Gwaith Pantycelyn* (1960); *Gweithiau William Williams*, Vol. I (1964). Within the denomination he contributed regularly to the *Historical Journal*, serving as its editor, 1948-78, and President of the History Society, 1973-83. He delivered the Historical Lecture in 1942 and 1964 and the Revival Memorial Lecture in 1966. As part of his work with the History Society he edited *Selected Trevecka Letters (1743-47)* in 1956 and *Selected Trevecka Letters (1747-94)* in 1962. In 1973 he edited the first two volumes of *Hanes Methodistiaeth Galfinaidd Cymru*. In the same year he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly having already served as Moderator of the Association in the South. His bilingual history of the General Assembly, *Y Can Mlynedd Hyn: These Hundred Years* appeared in 1964 and in 1968 he delivered the Davies Lecture on the work and significance of **Howell Harris**, published under the title *Portread o Ddiwygiwr* (1969). He edited the *Bulletin* of 'Cymdeithas Emynau Cymru' from 1967 until 1977. Two of his hymns have been included in *Caneuon Ffydd* (2001). He was also a member of the Court and Council of the National Library of Wales. He was awarded an honorary M.A., 1949, and D.Litt., 1985, by the University of Wales.

Of medium height and sturdy build, he enjoyed good health until the last few years of his life, when he received every care from his wife and daughter, Mair. An entertaining companion with a keen sense of humour (sometime witty, sometimes sharp) and a great fund of stories and anecdotes, he was generous with his time and knowledge to young researchers. He took a great interest in people and supported the various institutions of Wales - the Welsh League of Youth, the Eisteddfod and the Welsh Nationalist Party. He was a close friend of **Gwynfor Evans**, MP, who spoke at his funeral.

He married at Bethany, Ammanford, 23 September 1930, Gwladys Jones, second daughter of Mr and Mrs Joseph Jones, Pantyffynnon. Gomer Roberts died 16 March 1993, aged 89, and was buried at Llandybie.

Author

J. E. Wynne Davies

Sources

G. M. Roberts's papers are in the National Library of Wales

J. E. Wynne Davies, 'Trem ar ei fywyd', in *Gwanwyn Duw - diwygwyr a diwygiadau: cyfrol deyrnged i Gomer Morgan Roberts* (Caernarfon 1982) (1982) with photographs, 11-59

A number of obituaries and tributes appeared in the press, including:

Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Galfinaidd, 16-17 (1992-93), 3-8

Y Traethodydd, 148 (1993), 130-4

Barn, 364 (May 1993), 16-17

Bwletin Cymdeithas Emynau Cymru, 3, nos 4/5 (1995-96), 186-7

Y Goleuad, 9 April, 1993; 7 May 2004

Clydach Historical Society Newsletter, no. 41 (Autumn 1993), 12

Further reading

Huw Walters and K. Monica Davies, 'Llyfryddiaeth Gomer Morgan Roberts', in J. E. Wynne Davies (ed.), *Gwanwyn Duw - diwygwyr a diwygiadau: cyfrol deyrnged i Gomer Morgan Roberts* (Caernarfon 1982), pp.185-206

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Papurau Gomer M. Roberts

NLW Archives: Gomer M. Roberts Manuscripts

NLW Archives: Atgofion Gomer Roberts: Papurau D. Tecwyn Lloyd: PH/9

NLW Archives: NLW MS 6733C - Gomer Roberts: Atgofion amaethyddol

NLW Archives: Calvinistic Methodist Archive: Rev. Dr Gomer Morgan Roberts Papers

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