

HUGHES, JOHN (1776 - 1843), Wesleyan minister, and antiquary

Name: John Hughes
Date of birth: 1776
Date of death: 1843
Parent: Elizabeth Hughes (née Thomas)
Parent: William Hughes
Gender: Male
Occupation: Wesleyan minister, and antiquary
Area of activity: History and Culture; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born at Brecon 18 May 1776, the son of William Hughes, hatter, by his second wife Elizabeth Thomas, of Dan-y-cefn near Brecon; her father, John Thomas, is described on his tombstone at Llanspyddid (*Jones, History of the County of Brecknock*, 3rd ed., iv, 159) as 'gent.'; he died 1757 aged fifty-five; her brother John Thomas (1752 - 1829), was an Oxford graduate (*Foster, Alumni*), and became vicar of Caerleon (1784?-1829).

John Hughes went (1778) to the school attached to Christ College, then under *David Griffith* (1726 - 1816). In 1790, he heard John Wesley (*Eurgrawn*, 1809, 445) at Brecon - the boy and his father were society-members; it should be noted that the (English) Wesleyans of the town were of good social and economic standing - see the articles on *Bold*, *Churche*, and *Coke*. The father, however, was not pleased when the boy turned his back upon Anglican orders (for which his connections and education seemed to destine him) and insisted, in spite of his uncle's persuasions, on becoming a Wesleyan preacher (1796). In 1800, Hughes was sent out to the new Welsh Wesleyan mission in North Wales, under *Owen Davies* (1752 - 1830). His success there was surprising, in a bookish man who was never an eloquent preacher, and in particular not fluent in Welsh; but his pertinacity, already shown in 1792-6, overcame all these obstacles, and he was to become a respectable though never a racy writer in Welsh. His disposition made him at times squirm under the 'revivalistic' methods of his North-Welsh associates; and he seems also to have resented the absolute powers given to *Owen Davies*. When (1805) the Welsh mission was extended to South Wales, *Davies* retained these powers. Hughes got himself transferred to the Carmarthen (English) circuit as acting-superintendent, with a view to working a Welsh mission from that centre; but this stratagem incurred the displeasure of *Coke*, who got him transferred to England, where (except for a brief interval at Ruthin in 1809) he resided for the rest of his life. He retired in 1832, and died at Knutsford, 15 May 1843.

Hughes was a diligent provider of reading-matter, original and translated, for the newly-formed Welsh Wesleyan connexion. Besides pamphlets, sermons, and commentaries (lists in *Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol o Enwogion Cymru*, i, 557-8, and *Cardiff Catalogue*), he compiled a Welsh hymn-book, *Diferion y Cysegr* (Chester, 1802); his own hymns are pedestrian. Though not the editor of *Yr Eurgrawn*, which began to appear in 1809, he wrote a preface for it, and contributed to its pages as late as 1842. But his exile enhanced his affection for the language and history of Wales; he became an enthusiastic supporter of the eisteddfodau of the period, and a friend and correspondent of *Thomas Price* (1787 - 1848), *Rice Rees*, and *W. J. Rees*. In 1818 and 1819 he published a substantial work in two volumes, *Horae Britannicae*, which won him high praise from *Sharon Turner* and others; and in 1822 *An Essay on the Ancient and Present State of the Welsh Language*; other books were in project in his latter years. Naturally these books are now antiquated, but their reclusive author deserves recognition for the industry, scholarship, and tolerance which distinguished him.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

Archifau LIGC: NLW MS 3501B - John Hughes: Journal - MS. autobiography, to 1810

R. Jackson, *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (1822-1913), 1847 (memoir)

W. Rowlands, *Yr Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd*, 1848 and 1849 (based on the autobiography)

The literary remains of the Rev. Thomas Price, Carnhuanawc, 1854-5, ii - consult index

A. H. Williams, *Welsh Wesleyan Methodism, 1800-1858 its origins, growth and secessions* (1935), 1935 - consult index

R. T. Jenkins, *John Hughes o Aberhonddu (1776-1843), Bathafarn: cylchgrawn hanes yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd yng Nghymru*, 1950, pp. 6-22

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