

LHUYD, EDWARD (1660 - 1709), botanist, geologist, antiquary, and philologist

Name: Edward Lhuyd
Date of birth: 1660
Date of death: 1709
Parent: Bridget Pryse
Parent: Edward Lloyd
Gender: Male
Occupation: botanist, geologist, antiquary, and philologist
Area of activity: History and Culture; Nature and Agriculture; Scholarship and Languages; Science and Mathematics
Author: Thomas Jones

The illegitimate son of Edward Lloyd of Llanforda, near Oswestry, and Bridget Pryse of Glan-ffraid, near Tal-y-bont, Cardiganshire, he was born in Loppington parish and nursed there at Krew Green for nine years by a Catherine Bowen. He entered the grammar school at Oswestry and it is probable that he later taught there. There is definite evidence that he had developed an interest in antiquities, more particularly genealogy and heraldry, by the year 1681; in that year his father states in a letter that his son is well-versed in genealogies; his MSS. prove that Lhuyd's interest in this subject did not cease in later life although his subjects of study became ever wider and more complex. On 31 October 1682 he became a student at Jesus College, Oxford, and soon after his matriculation he was appointed assistant to Dr. Plot, Professor of Chemistry and first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, which was opened on 21 May 1683. Lhuyd continued to be associated with this Museum until his death. The opening of the Ashmolean Museum led to the founding of the Oxford Philosophical Society, in the minutes of which there is information about Lhuyd's earliest experiments and discoveries in the natural and experimental sciences: making inflammable paper from mineral asbestos (December 1684), description of plants from North Wales which John Ray had omitted from his catalogue (January 1685-6), etc. In January 1685-6, too, he presented the Society with a new catalogue of shells in the Museum, entitled *Cochlearum omnium tam terrestrium quam marinarum quae in hoc Musæo continentur, Distributio classica juxta figurarum vicinitatem concinnata*. Lhuyd's natural ability and devotion to his work won him many friends, such as Jacob Bobart, Professor of Botany. During the summer of 1688 he collected plants in the Snowdon district, and through Dr. Plot and others he came to know John Ray of Cambridge.

In his book *Synopsis Methodica Stirpium Britannicorum* (1689-90) Ray incorporated a list of plants from Snowdon which had been drawn up by Lhuyd, and this began a long friendship between them. When a second edition of Ray's *Collection of English Words not generally used* appeared in 1691, it included two lists of words which Ray had received from Lhuyd, the one prepared by Lhuyd himself and the other by Tomlinson. Later, Lhuyd became more and more interested in words, but in this period his chief subject of study was botany. It is probable that in 1689 he accompanied Dr. Plot and helped him with his investigations for a survey of the coastline of Kent.

In 1690-1 he was appointed keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in succession to Dr. Plot. Although he continued to search for plant specimens, there was a change in his interests: hitherto he had concentrated on botany, but now he began to devote himself more and more to stones and fossils. In the spring of 1691 he accompanied two Danish geologists, Seerup and Hemmer, on a nine-day excursion to Salisbury, Bath, and Bristol. He sought to establish a 'Geological Club,' and carried on a steady correspondence with John Woodward, William Nicholson, and Richard Richardson. He thought of travelling abroad in order to extend his researches, and at one time he planned to go to the West Indies; but by May 1693 he had given up that plan. Nor did he succeed in his plan to go to Cornwall.

In 1693 too we see another change in the nature of his researches. Henceforth his main interest was to be in antiquities and philology, although he never forsook his studies in botany and geology. He helped his friend Edmund Gibson to edit a new edition (1695) of Camden's *Britannia* by writing valuable notes on the Welsh counties. He was already busy with plans and preparations for a comprehensive work on the antiquities of Wales, somewhat on the same lines as Dr. Plot's *Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686), but before fully embarking upon it he revised his catalogue of British fossils. This catalogue was ready for the press by the middle of March 1697, but the university refused to publish it. It was at last published in February 1699 under the title *Lithophylacii Britannici Ichnographia* (120 copies only) through the good services of ten subscribers. It contained many printer's errors, and Lhuyd prepared a second revised edition, which was published in 1760 by W. Huddesford.

Long before this book appeared in 1699, Lhuyd was busy with preparations for his work on Wales. To win support and to obtain subscribers, he published, in 1695, 'A Design of a British Dictionary, Historical and Geographical; With an Essay entitled "Archaeologia Britannica"; And a Natural History of Wales.' This was followed in 1696 by 'Parochial Queries in Order to a Geographical Dictionary, a Natural History, etc., of Wales.' Four thousand of the 'Parochial Queries' were printed and they were distributed three to each parish. The number of subscribers was encouraging, and in 1696 he was able to visit eight or nine counties between the end of April and the beginning of October.

In 1697 he set out on his great tour, accompanied by his trained helpers William Jones, Robert Wynne, and David Parry. Leaving Oxford in May and travelling through Gloucestershire and the Forest of Dean, in five months he reached Cowbridge and stayed there for two months. Thence he worked through South Wales as far as Cardigan, and then back to Hereford by August 1698. Making his way through central Wales he spent the winter at Dolgellau and reached the coast of North Wales in the summer of 1699. He crossed over to Northern Ireland and thence to Scotland where he stayed for the winter. Next came Southern Ireland, then four months in Wales, and another four in Cornwall before he sailed to Brittany. He and his companions had met with many difficulties even in Wales and Cornwall, but in Brittany they became suspect as spies; they were arrested at S. Pol de Leon and imprisoned at Brest for eighteen days. He returned to Oxford in April 1701, after visiting every county in Wales, with transcripts of MSS., copies of inscriptions, and a vast collection of curiosities from Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall, and Brittany.

On 21 July 1701 the University conferred upon him the degree of M.A. Excepting short visits to Cambridge, Marcham, and Appleton, he spent the rest of his life at Oxford, arranging the vast material he had collected on his journeys and in the replies to his 'Parochial Queries.' He also delivered lectures on natural history. In October 1703 he sent his first volume of the *Archaeologia Britannica*, entitled *Glossography*, to the press and it was published in June 1707 with a dedication to Sir Thomas Mansel of

Margam.

The titles of its various sections show what its contents are: (1) ' *Comparative Etymology* '; (2) ' *Comparative Vocabulary* '; (3) and (4) ' *An Armoric Grammar and Vocabulary* ' - a translation by **Moses Williams** from the French of Julian Manoir; (5) ' *Some Welsh Words Omitted in Dr. Davies's Dictionary* '; (6) ' *A Cornish Grammar* '; (7) ' *MSS. Britannicorum Catalogus* '; (8) ' *A British Etymologicon* ' - by **David Parry**; (9) ' *A Brief Introduction to the Irish or Ancient Scottish Language* ' - an extract from a grammar published by F. O. Molloy in Rome in 1677; (10) ' *An Irish-English Dictionary* .' Section (10) is followed by a short catalogue of Irish MSS. Many of the subscribers were disappointed in the *Glossography* because of the philological nature of its contents, but it was warmly received by English and Celtic scholars. Lhuyd did not live to complete the great work he had planned, of which the *Glossography* was but the first volume. In 1708 he was elected F.R.S., and in 1709 he was appointed superior Bedel of divinity in the University of Oxford. Throughout his life he had enjoyed excellent health, but on his travels through North Wales in 1698 he began to be affected by asthma. Towards the end of June 1709 he contracted a cold, which turned to pleurisy on 26 June, and on 30 June he died. He was buried the following day in the ' Welsh Aisle ' of S. Michael's church, Oxford. In 1905 a mural tablet of brass was placed in the chapel of Jesus College to the memory of this remarkable Welshman, whose grave was marked by no stone or inscription.

Lhuyd ranked with the greatest antiquaries, naturalists, and scholars of his time. He did pioneering work of very great importance in the study of botany and geology, and he, more than anyone else, was the founder of Celtic and comparative Philology. In addition to his two principal books he made many other contributions, though it was after his death that some of them were published. He helped Dr. M. Lister with his *Historia sive Synopsis Methodica Conchyliorum*, 1685, 1687, 1691; dean Hickes with his *Thesaurus Linguarum Septentrionalium*; Nicholson with his *Historical Library*; and Collier with his *Historical Dictionary*; and **William Baxter's** *Glossarium Antiquitatum Britannicarum*, 1719, contains a treatise by Lhuyd on the meaning of Welsh place-names. A number of notes and articles by him appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions*; Nos. 166, 200, 208, 213, 229, 243, 252, 269, 292, 295, 314, 316, 334, 335, 336 - the last seven after his death.

Both Jesus College and the University of Oxford refused to buy his MSS., and they were sold to Sir Thomas Sebright. Later the Sebright MSS. were sold and scattered. Amongst the buyers were **Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn**, Wynnstay, and **Thomas Johnes**, Hafod Uchdryd, but both of them lost most of the MSS. which they had bought, in fires, the former in a London book-binder's shop and the latter at Hafod Uchdryd itself.

Author

Professor Thomas Jones

Sources

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'Several letters written by Edward Lhuyd ... to Thomas Tomkin'

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Further Reading

Brynley F. Roberts, *Edward Lhwyd c.1660-1709, Naturalist, Antiquary, Philologist* (University of Wales Press 2022)

Wikipedia Article: [Edward Lhuyd](#)

Additional Links

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