

MORRIS, WILLIAM (1705 - 1763), botanist, antiquary, letter-writer

Name: William Morris
Date of birth: 1705
Date of death: 1763
Spouse: Jane Morris (née Hughes)
Child: Jane Jones
Child: Robert Morris
Parent: Margaret Morris (née Owen)
Parent: Morris Morris
Gender: Male
Occupation: botanist, antiquary, letter-writer
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Nature and Agriculture
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born 6 May 1705 at Y Fferem, Llanfihangel Tre'r Beirdd, Anglesey, third son of **Morris ap Rhisiart Morris** and brother of **Lewis, Richard**, and **John Morris**. His own words suggest that he was tall and lanky; possibly he had a pronounced stoop, for his nephew **John Owen** (died 1759) nicknames him 'Gwilym Gam' (the crooked), but it may be that the nephew refers rather to his 'stinginess' - he had neither the generosity of his brother **Richard** nor the prickly genius of his brother **Lewis**; indeed, he had more hard common-sense than either. It is known that as a youth he spent some time at Liverpool (he was there to our knowledge in 1726), but in February 1737 he was appointed collector of customs at Holyhead (later on, he added other duties to this), and in 1758 became comptroller of customs there - in the meantime (1742) he had declined the chief clerkship to the comptroller at Chester. Thus from 1737 till his death he was settled at Holyhead, where he was also an unofficial physician and in great demand as a consultant in legal and other business. His chief friend at Holyhead was the curate **Thomas Ellis** (1711/2 - 1792), up to **Ellis**'s removal to Nutfield (1759); Morris was **Ellis**'s choirmaster and was greatly interested in church music - to him alone of the brothers has anyone dreamt of attributing a hymn, though it is very far from certain that a well-known Welsh hymn is actually his. Morris, too, fully shared his parson's opposition to Methodism. Though he was a good general naturalist, his chief pursuit was botany, of which he had an unusually good knowledge - the *Welsh Botany* of **Hugh Davies** (1739 - 1821) is based chiefly on William Morris's notes. Like his brothers, he was a collector and copyist of manuscripts - he took special pride in the volume called 'the Leathern Harp,' which feckless **Goronwy Owen** nearly lost for him. His knowledge and judgement in matters Welsh was highly respected by his brothers, and he in turn was greatly interested in the Cymmrodorion Society, whose first 'corresponding members' were in effect chosen by him. His 'discovery' of **Goronwy Owen** and of **Robin Ddu yr Ail o Fôn** is familiar. But his real importance is as a letter-writer; two-thirds of **J. H. Davies**'s collection of *Morris Letters* are by William. The whole life of Anglesey in the mid 18th century is mirrored in his letters, and he is our chief source for the social history of the island during his lifetime.

He married (1745) Jane, daughter and heiress of Robert Hughes of Llanfugail (**J. E. Griffith**, *Pedigrees*, 41); she died 1 May 1750, and Morris remained a widower. A son and a daughter survived him. The (elder) son, ROBERT MORRIS, born 9 March 1746, married Jane Parry, a widow, of the **Bulkeley** of Bryn-ddu family (**J. E. Griffith**, op. cit., 33), sold his share of the Llanfugail estate, and went to live at Holyhead. The daughter, JANE (1749 - 1833), born 12 February 1749, married twice: (1) John Jones, exciseman at Caernarvon, (2) Thomas Jones, customs officer at Beaumaris (**J. E. Griffith**, op. cit., 41). She died, a widow, 21 February 1833 (*Camb. Quart. Mag.*, v, 311). To her we owe the preservation of the letters written to her father by **Goronwy Owen** (see **J. H. Davies**'s preface to his edition of **Goronwy**'s letters). William Morris's letters make abundant mention of the children.

William Morris died 29 December 1763 - he was practically on his deathbed when his father died, and was unable to be at his father's funeral - his letter to his brother **Lewis** giving him the news (12 November 1763) is the last we have of his letters.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

J. H. Davies (ed.), *The Letters of Lewis, Richard, William, and John Morris, of Anglesey, (Morrisiad MĀ´n) 1728-1765* (1907â€9), vol. I, vol. II - indexes by Hugh Owen separately published)

Hugh Owen (ed.), *Additional Letters of the Morrises of Anglesey (1735-86)*(London 1947-9)

'Lewis Morris in Cardiganshire,' by D. Lleufer Thomas, in *Y Cymmrodor*, xv

O. Beynon, 'Lead Mining at Esgair y Mwyn in the time of Lewis Morris', *Transactions and archaeological record of the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society*, xi, 30-50

Saunders Lewis, *A School of Welsh Augustans being a study in English influences on Welsh literature during part of the 18th century* (Wrexham 1924)

T. Parry, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900* (1944) (consult index)

G. J. Williams, 'Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw, in *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 1943

Helen M. Ramage in *Llenyddiaeth Cymru o 1450 hyd 1600* (Lerpwl 1922), i

Y Cymmrodor, 1951, chapter ii and passim

miscellaneous information in Hugh Owen, *The life and works of Lewis Morris (Llewelyn Ddu o FĀ´n), 1707-1765* (1951), 1951

additional references given above

Further reading

NLW: [Lewis Morris and William Morris' Sea Charts](#)

T. R. Roberts, *Y Monwyson: Lewis Morys, Richard Morys, William Morys a Goronwy Owen*(Caernarfon 1902)

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