

OWEN, GORONWY (1723 - 1769), cleric and poet

Name: Goronwy Owen
Date of birth: 1723
Date of death: 1769
Spouse: Joan Owen (née Simmonds)
Spouse: Owen (née Clayton)
Spouse: Elin Owen (née Hughes)
Parent: Siân Parri
Parent: Owen Gronw
Gender: Male
Occupation: cleric and poet
Area of activity: Poetry; Religion
Author: David Gwenallt Jones

Born on New Year's day 1723 in a cottage in Rhos-fawr, in the parish of Llanfair-mathafarn-eithaf, Anglesey. His grand-father, Goronwy Owen the tinker, and his father, Owen Gronw, were rhymers and genealogists, while his mother, Jane Parry, was a cultured woman. When he was 10 years of age he went to a school at Llanallgo; then, in 1734 or 1735 to the free school at Pwllheli; and, after that, in 1737, to Friars school, Bangor. There, under the tuition of the headmaster, Edward Bennet, and his assistant, Humphrey Jones, he became a classical scholar. On 20 September 1741 he appealed to **Owen Meyrick** of Bodorgan, one of the trustees of the Lewis Charity, for a scholarship to Jesus College, Oxford, and on 3 June 1742 was accepted by that college as a servitor, being enrolled as a member of the university on the same day. His name remained on the books (with some interruptions) until March 1748, but he was not resident there apart from a few days in the first fortnight of June, 1744. Between 1742 and 1744 he was an usher at the free school at Pwllheli and between 25 January 1744/5 and 25 November 1745 occupied the same position at a school at Denbigh. It seems probable that in both places he came into contact with the local poets. In January or February 1746 he was ordained deacon and appointed curate of Llanfair-mathafarn-eithaf, which gave him an opportunity of associating with the poets and antiquaries of Anglesey. When he was compelled to leave he became a curate and schoolmaster at Oswestry for three years; there, he married Elin, daughter of Owen and Margaret Hughes, who were tradespeople of some consequence. He then became curate of Uppington, Salop, and also master of Donnington school. It was at Donnington that he wrote some of his most important *cywyddau*, including 'Cywydd y Farn Fawr.' **William Morris** (1705 - 1763) helped him to get a curacy at Walton, near Liverpool, where he began to work in April 1753, receiving an additional salary of £13 for acting as schoolmaster. He was happy at Walton but produced comparatively little poetry there. In 1755 he gave up this appointment and went to London, thinking that the Cymmrodorion would engage him as their paid secretary and translator and would also pay him 'for ministering in Welsh' in 'some church or Chapel once a Sunday.' Although his wishes were not realised, the Cymmrodorion were very kind to him and he obtained the curacy of Northolt, Middlesex, where he wrote more *cywyddau*, including the best of all - 'Cywydd yn ateb Huw'r Bardd Coch o Fôn, yr hwn a roddasai glod i Oronwy.' Dr. Samuel Nicholls, his vicar at Northolt, obtained for him (with the consent of the bishop of London) an appointment as headmaster of the grammar school attached to the William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia, where he began work about 9 April 1758; he was also, in all probability, professor of Humanity (i.e. Latin) at the same college. Before the end of the first summer he had married Mrs. Clayton, sister of the college president, but she died within the year. He resigned from the college and on 25 August 1760 applied for the living of S. Andrews, Brunswick County, Virginia, which he obtained a year later and where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1761 he bought a tobacco and cotton plantation, and in 1763 married Joan Simmonds, his third wife. He died early in July 1769, and was buried on his plantation. Four enslaved people were listed as part of his estate.

Copies of *cywyddau* and letters written by Goronwy Owen are to be found among the manuscripts in the British Museum and the National Library of Wales; it is also said that there is a manuscript, written by him, kept somewhere in Anglesey. Three of his poems appeared in *Dewisol Ganiadau yr Oes Hon*, 1759; almost all his poems are to be found in *Didanwch teuluaidd*, 1763; five which did not appear in the latter publication were published in *Corph y Gainc*, 1810, and were added to the other poems in the second edition of *Didanwch Teuluaidd*, 1817. John Jones of Llanrwst published an edition of Goronwy Owen's works in 1860 with the title *Gronoviana*; the **Rev. Robert Jones** of Rotherhithe (1810 - 1879), another edition in 1876; and **Isaac Foulkes**, his *Holl Waith Barddonol Goronwy Owen* in 1878. Among later editions of Goronwy Owen's works are 'Cyfres y Fil,' 1902; *Cywyddau Goronwy Owen*, **W. J. Gruffydd**, 1907; *Y Farn Fawr ... a Dinistr Jerusalem*; *Clasuron Llenyddiaeth Cymru*; 'Cyfres yr Ysgol Haf Gymreig,' 1907. The 'Marwnad Lewis Morris' first appeared in **Gwilym Howel's Almanac**, 1770, and Goronwy Owen's letters in the *Greal* (London), the *Cambrian Register*, the *Cambro-Briton*, and *Y Gwyliedydd*.

Authors

David Gwenallt Jones, (1899 - 1968)

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Sources

Y Beiriniad: cyhoeddiad trimisol, er egluro gwyddoriaeth, gwlyddyddiaeth, llenyddiaeth a chrefydd, iv, v, vi

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Further Reading

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

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