

OWEN, JOHN (1836 - 1915), Calvinistic Methodist minister and author of the popular ballad 'Cân y Mochyn Du' ('the Ballad of the Black Pig')

Name: John Owen
Date of birth: 1836
Date of death: 1915
Spouse: Elizabeth Owen (née Rees)
Parent: Rachel Owen
Parent: Simon Owen
Gender: Male
Occupation: Calvinistic Methodist minister and author of the popular ballad 'Cân y Mochyn Du' ('the Ballad of the Black Pig')
Area of activity: Poetry; Religion
Author: Dillwyn Miles

Born 1 April 1836, the son of Simon and Rachel Owen, Blaenpencelli, Eglwysrw, Pembrokeshire. He received his early education at the Sunday school held at Ebenezer Baptist chapel. Before he was 12 years of age, he was engaged as a shepherd boy at Henllys, the former home of the 16th century historian, [George Owen](#), and after serving thus for a period of two years, he took leave for eight weeks in order to attend the day school held at Eglwysrw. His knowledge of English and his proficiency in music and Welsh shorthand he obtained by self-tuition.

He wrote his famous ballad 'Y Mochyn Du' about 1854. He was then in the service of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas James, of Felin Wrddan (Jordan's Mill), Eglwysrw, and it is believed that the ballad was published by Mrs. James at a later date, without the author's knowledge. The characters referred to in the ballad were all drawn from life, and the tragedy recorded befell one David Thomas, of Parc-y-maes, Brynberian. The ballad was sung at local fairs by the well-known ballad-monger [Levi Gibbon](#), who also added some of the verses. Soon it became one of the most popular of Welsh ballads, sung not only throughout Wales, but in all quarters of the globe where Welshmen gathered. Its author, however, remained deeply ashamed of his composition to the end of his days. He forbade its further publication and could not tolerate its strains. There is but one brief mention of the work in his manuscript autobiography: 'During this period (i.e. 1850-57) I wrote "Y Mochyn Du", now so well known throughout the land; a song that will continue to corrupt the tastes of our young people when the tongue that first sang it will have long been silent in the grave. Forgive, O Lord, the sins of my youth!'

In 1857, while employed as a servant at Blaenmeini, Newport, Pembrokeshire, John Owen attended Gethsemane C.M. chapel, and it was here, after hearing the Rev. John Jones of New Quay preaching, that he was converted to Methodism and decided to enter the ministry. Two years later he married Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Rees, Chapel House, Glan-rhyd. At Glan-rhyd he came into contact with the leaders of the religious revival of 1859-60, but he did not begin preaching until 1863. In the following year he accepted a call to the newly-founded chapel at Whitland, and during his ministry there he established the cause at Red Roses, near Narberth. In 1876 he moved to Burry Port to undertake the pastorate of Bethany C.M. chapel, where he remained until his death. His wife, Elizabeth, died in 1878, but he was married again in the following year. For many years he was a correspondent of *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* and *Y Goleuad*; later he became editor of *Y Cylchgrawn*. He died at Burry Port in October 1915.

Author

Captain Dillwyn Miles

Sources

MS. Autobiography of John Owen in the possession of the writer

Further Reading

The Story Behind the Ballad of 'Y Mochyn Du'(accessed May 2021)

Additional Links

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