

## PRYSE, ROBERT JOHN Gweirydd ap Rhys (1807-1889), man of letters

**Name:** Robert John Pryse  
**Pseudonym:** Gweirydd ap Rhys  
**Date of birth:** 1807  
**Date of death:** 1889  
**Spouse:** Grace Prys (née Williams)  
**Child:** Elen Prys  
**Child:** William Pryse  
**Child:** Jane Pryse  
**Child:** Margaret Pryse  
**Child:** John Pryse  
**Child:** Robert Pryse  
**Child:** John Robert Pryse  
**Child:** Catherine Jane Prichard (née Pryse)  
**Child:** Grace Jones Thomas (née Pryse)  
**Parent:** John Robert Pryse  
**Parent:** Marged Pryse (née Williams)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** man of letters  
**Area of activity:** History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Enid Pierce Roberts

Born 4 July 1807 in a cottage called Beudy Clegryrog, Llan-badrig, Anglesey. He only had four days' schooling, two when he was 5 years of age and two more fifteen years later. His mother died when he was 4 years of age, and in the spring of 1818 his father died also. As the children were in dire poverty the Llandrygarn vestry (for by now they were in that parish) found employment for the three eldest and put the two youngest, Robert and William, on the parish. After a month at Tryfil Bach, Robert was sent to Pentre'r Bwâu. There he and Marged, the farmer's daughter, fell in love and there followed the happiest period of his life. But Marged died about 1823 and Robert left the place. He continued to work as a farm labourer for a time, then gave it up and became a weaver, working at Bontnewydd, Llan-rhyddlad, Gerlan, Llanfairpwll, and Tan-y-fron, Llansannan. He became such a master of the art of weaving the herring-bone pattern that he was asked to supply the mantle material presented to princess Victoria at the Beaumaris eisteddfod, 1832. He married Grace Williams of Ynys-y-gwyddyll, Llanfflewin, 21 November 1828, and from that time on until 1857 lived at Llanrhyddlad, where he kept a shop and made a good income by the sale of his exquisitely worked material. While he was thus engaged and while, at the same time, he was trying to bring up seven children, he set to work to educate himself. After his family had retired for the night he would retire to his study to read and work until the small hours of the morning. Music and poetry first attracted his attention, then he learned English, Greek, and Latin, but his main interest lay in the history and literature of Wales. The upshot was that, in 1857, the implements of his craft were laid aside and he went to Denbigh to work in **Gee's** office, mostly on the *Gwyddoniadur* and the dictionaries. Shortly after the death of his son, Golyddan (below), November 1862, he went to Bangor to try and earn a living by his pen. Sometimes he was in great poverty, sometimes his circumstances improved. He was paid £360 by Messrs. Mackenzie for his *Hanes y Brytaniaid a'r Cymry*, won a number of prizes at the national eisteddfod - among others one of £100 at Cardiff in 1883 for the work published later as his *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymreig, 1300-1650* - and in 1883 was given a Civil List Pension of £150. In 1884, being by this time old and ill, he went to live with his daughter Catherine (below) at Holy-head. In 1887 his wife died, and he went to live with his eldest daughter, Elin, at Bethesda, where he died 3 October 1889. Both were buried at Holyhead.

When he was 16 years of age he was admitted to membership by the Methodists. Later, he was given the opportunity of going to S. Bees College and being ordained as a clergyman, but after a careful study of the Book of Common Prayer and the *New Testament* he came to the conclusion that he could never accept holy orders which, in his view, smacked too much of popery. He concluded, moreover, that according to the *New Testament* 'every Christian Church should be independent.' Accordingly, he became an Independent; but he very soon realised that the churches of this denomination were not altogether independent - a state of affairs which he endeavoured to rectify. He was accused of adopting the code of the Plymouth Brethren, and **Gwilym Hiraethog** thundered against him and his opinions in sermons delivered at the Caernarvon and Llangefni Assemblies of July 1844. At the Aberffraw eisteddfod, 1849, he was made a bard and given the name Gweirydd ap Rhys. Quite certainly, there was no more industrious Welsh writer than Pryse in the whole of the 19th century; he contributed more than any one else to the *Gwyddoniadur* - sufficient, indeed, almost to fill a whole volume of that work; he produced five dictionaries; he edited a number of books, including a reprint of the *The Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales, 1870*, and of the *Bible, 1876*; and he also edited the greater part of *Enwogion y Ffydd*. His weekly paper, *Papur y Cymry, 1863-4*, was short-lived. His most important works are *Hanes y Brytaniaid a'r Cymry (1872-4)* and *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymreig, 1300-1650 (1885)*. An outstanding characteristic of all his work is his independent judgement; he sought at all times to go to the fountain head and find out the truth for himself.

### JOHN ROBERT PRYSE (Golyddan; 1840 - 1862), poet

Son of Gweirydd ap Rhys. Born at Cae-crin, Llanrhyddlad, Anglesey, 10 June 1840. He was educated at the British School, Llanrhyddlad, after which he was sent to R. E. Williams ('Apeles'), Independent minister of Llanddeusant, to learn Greek and Latin. When he was 13 or 14 years of age he was apprenticed to Dr. Jones of Llanfachraeth and Holyhead, but continued with his other studies. In 1855 he was sent to the Andersonian College, Glasgow, where he won two first prizes, then he returned to Holyhead to assist Dr. Jones. During this period he was reading extensively in French, English, Greek, and Latin. At the end of September 1860 he went to Edinburgh University where he gained two prizes and the top place in the first M.D. examination. In the course of the summer holidays he returned to Holyhead as usual, where he worked very hard; he caught a heavy cold which settled on the lungs and brought on tuberculosis. He died at his parents' house, Vale View, Denbigh, 13 November 1862, and was buried in S. Davids churchyard there. He left 40,000 lines of poetry, mostly unsuccessful eisteddfod entries. His ambition, like that of most of the eisteddfod bards of those days, was to write a great Christian epic in the Miltonic style. None of them succeeded in doing so, but his efforts are probably the most worthy.

### CATHERINE PRICHARD (Buddug; 1842 - 1909), poet

Daughter of Gweirydd ap Rhys. Born at Cae-crin, Llanrhyddlad, Anglesey, 4 July 1842. She was admitted to the bardic order by **Clwydfardd** at the Denbigh eisteddfod, 1860, and was given the name Buddug, a name which she had made use of in *Udgoron Cymru* when defending her sex against the attacks made on it in the series '*Ffoledd Ffasiwn*.' She married Owen Prichard (Cybi Velyn) of Holyhead, 2 January 1863. She wrote a number of lyrics, the best known being 'O na byddai'n haf o hyd' and 'Neges y Blodeuyn.' She died 29 March 1909. A collection of her poems was published in '*Cyfres y Fil*' (O.M.E.).

## Author

Dr Enid Pierce Roberts

## Sources

T. R. Roberts, *Eminent Welshmen: a short biographical dictionary of Welshmen... from the earliest times to the present* (1908)

*Bye-Gones, relating to Wales and the Border Counties*, 1889, 236

*Cymru (O.M.E.)*, xii, 16, xxxix, 221

*Y Geninen*, 1890 (119, 200), Gŵyl Dewi, 25

*Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol*, 1936, 97

Y Traethodydd, 1903 (437), 1947 (61)

T. Parry, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900* (1944), 261-2, 264

E. P. Roberts, *Detholion o Hunangofiant Gweirydd ap Rhys* (Aberystwyth 1949)

## Further reading

Owen Prichard (gol.), *Caniadau Buddug* (Caernarfon 1911)

Huldah Charles Basset, *Golyddan: ei fywyd a'i weithiau: gyda chyfeiriad arbennig at yr arwrgerdd Gymraeg* (Prifysgol Cymru 1935)

John Robert Pryse, Robert John Pryse (gol.), *Nabl Golyddan: buchedd a gwaith Golyddan* (Bangor 1863) [Rhif I](#), [Rhif II](#)

Richard Mon Williams, *Buddug, Cymru (O.M.E.)*, Cyfrol 39, 1910, pp.221-224

Wikipedia Article: [Catherine Prichard](#)

## Works

Robert John Pryse, *An English and Welsh pronouncing dictionary: in which the pronunciation is given in Welsh letters*(Dinbych 1899)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 8337C: Caneuon 'Buddug'](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 21949E: Cerddi](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 10304C: A scrap-book](#)

Wikidata: [Q13129344](#)

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