

## ROBERTS, JOHN (Ieuan Gwyllt; 1822 - 1877), Calvinistic Methodist minister, and musician

**Name:** John Roberts  
**Pseudonym:** Ieuan Gwyllt  
**Date of birth:** 1822  
**Date of death:** 1877  
**Spouse:** Jane Roberts (née Richards)  
**Parent:** Elizabeth Roberts  
**Parent:** Evan Roberts  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Calvinistic Methodist minister, and musician  
**Area of activity:** Music; Religion  
**Author:** Robert David Griffith

Born 27 December 1822 at Tanrhiwfelen, a house just outside Aberystwyth, the son of Evan and Elizabeth Roberts, who moved in 1823 to Ty'n-y-ffordd, Pen-llwyn, and, in 1829, to Pistyll-gwyn, Melindwr. The father was a precentor, the mother was also a good vocalist. He attended **Lewis Edwards**'s school at Pen-llwyn for some years. When quite young he composed a poem to which he signed his name 'Ieuan Gwyllt Gellydd Melindwr'; henceforward he became known as 'Ieuan Gwyllt.' He became a clerk to Messrs. Griffith and Roberts, druggists, Aberystwyth, but after two years started to teach in Skinner Street school. This latter post he relinquished after a few months in order to go to the Borough Road Training College, London, where he stayed nine months. On his return to Aberystwyth (1845) he opened a British school which, however, he left after nine months to become clerk to Messrs. Hughes and Roberts, solicitors; he stayed in that post for nearly seven years. In 1852 he became assistant editor of *Yr Amserau*, a Liverpool Welsh newspaper of which **William Rees** (Gwilym Hiraethog) was editor; this connection was maintained until 1858. On 15 June 1856 he preached his first sermon - at Runcorn. In 1858 he went to Aberdare to edit *Y Gwladgarwr*, and, the next year, he married Jane Richards, Aberystwyth.

Ieuan Gwyllt began to compose music when he was quite young; a hymn-tune by him, 'Hafilah,' was published in November 1839 in *Yr Athraw*. In 1852 he published *Blodau Cerdd* which contained lessons in music together with hymn-tunes which, like 'Hafilah,' were imitations of the poorer kind of English hymn-tunes. It was after he went to Liverpool (1852) that he came to recognize what was characteristic of true ecclesiastical hymn-tunes, and it was then that he began to start on his real life-work - the collection and selection of the best tunes for use by his countrymen. After labouring for six years he was able to produce (April 1859) *Llyfr Tonau Cynulleidfaol*, with the publication of which there began a new era of Welsh congregational singing. To the original work he added an *atodiad* (supplement), and, in 1870, an *ychwanegiad* (appendix). He arranged and harmonized a large number of hymn-tunes and psalms and himself composed some two dozen including the very famous tune 'Moab.' At this time he was travelling much throughout Wales to lecture on congregational music. In 1859 he and **Thomas Levi**, Aberystwyth, issued the first number of **Telyn y Plant**, the name of which was changed in 1861 to *Trysorfa y Plant*; Ieuan Gwyllt was responsible for the hymn-tunes. In 1859 he was asked to become minister of Pant-tywyll Calvinistic Methodist church, Merthyr Tydfil; he was ordained on 7 August 1861 at the Newcastle Emlyn Association. In March 1861 he issued the first number of *Y Cerddor Cymreig*, a periodical which he continued to edit and publish on his own responsibility for four years, i.e. until Hughes and Son, Wrexham, took it over (1865); Ieuan Gwyllt continued as editor until 1873. He founded the Gwent and Morgannwg musical festival in 1854, Gŵyl Eryri in 1866, and Gŵyl Arduwgy in 1868. He began to study the Tonic Sol-fa system in 1863, producing a sol-fa edition of his *Llyfr Tonau Cynulleidfaol* the next year. He founded **Cerddor y Tonic Solffa** in 1869 and edited it until 1874. In 1865 he became minister of Capel Coch Calvinistic Methodist church, Llanberis, Caernarfonshire, where he remained until he retired to Y Fron, Llanfaglan, near Caernarvon, in 1869. He was secretary of the committee which prepared *Llyfr Emyrnau y Methodistiaid Calfaidd*, 1869. He edited *Y Goleuad*, from July 1871 until October 1872. In 1874 he issued *Sŵn y Jiwbill*, an arrangement in Welsh of Sankey and Moody hymns and tunes. Throughout the years he was well known as music adjudicator and as conductor of singing-festivals; he was also a frequent contributor to *Y Traethodydd* and *Yr Oenig*. He died 14 May 1877 and was buried in Caeathro cemetery, near Caernarvon.

### Author

**Robert David Griffith**, (1877 - 1958)

### Sources

J. E. Jones, *Ieuan Gwyllt ei fywyd, ei lafur, ei athrylith, ei nodweddion, a'i ddylanwad ar Gymru* (Holywell 1881)

J. Owen, *Traethawd ar fywyd ac athrylith y Parchedig John Roberts (Ieuan Gwyllt)* (Pwllheli 1879)

*Y Cerddor*, October 1892 and January-May 1909

### Further Reading

Rhidian Griffiths, 'Ieuan Gwyllt (John Roberts; 1822-77)', *Cydymaith i Gerddoriaeth Cymru* (Talybont 2018), p.249

## Images

NLW: [John Roberts, 'Ieuan Gwyllt'](#)

[Humphreys's Photographic Studio, John Roberts, 'Ieuan Gwyllt'](#)

## Works

Ieuan Gwyllt, *Llyfr tonau cynulleidfaol* (Llundain 1859)

Thomas Levi, John Roberts (eds.), *Telyn y plant* (Merthyr Tydfil 1859-1861)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 9915D: Llyfr Tonau Cynulleidfaol](#)

VIAF: [29320511](#)

Wikidata: [Q3400203](#)

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