

THOMAS, JOHN (1730 - 1804?), Congregational minister, and hymnist

Name: John Thomas
Date of birth: 1730
Date of death: 1804?
Spouse: Elizabeth Thomas (née Jones)
Gender: Male
Occupation: Congregational minister, and hymnist
Area of activity: Poetry; Religion
Author: John Dyfnallt Owen

Born in 1730 in the parish of Myddfai, Carmarthenshire (christened 25 March). He came from a thriftless family but was nurtured by relatives. He received short periods of schooling in the neighbourhood of his home and learnt to read Welsh. He worked on farms, reading the *Bible*, *Cannwyll y Cymry*, and *Taith y Pererin* in his leisure hours. He heard **Howel Harris** preach in the house of Sieffre Dafydd, Llanddeusant (1745), an experience which shook him to the core. He went to Llanddowror as man-servant to the **Rev. Griffith Jones** and stayed there two years. At the invitation of **Howel Harris** he went to Trevecka; by this time his greatest delight was in attending religious meetings and societies, in preaching, and exhorting. For some years he taught in some of **Griffith Jones**'s circulating schools in South Wales.

Liking the Congregational church system, he joined that body and on the recommendation of some Congregational ministers, he was received into the Academy at Abergavenny in 1761. Here he devoted more time to preaching and exhorting than to his studies.

He was ordained, 23 April 1767, as minister of Rhayader, Cae Bach, Llandrindod, and Garn by **Edmund Jones**, **Isaac Price** and **Richard Tibbott**. According to his 'Confession of Faith,' 6 April 1788, he was then minister of Rhayader and Llandrindod. His ministerial life was tempestuous. He left Radnorshire in 1794 and made his way to Liangathen, Abergwill, and Carmarthen, where he died. It is not known when exactly he died - according to *Rhad Ras* he was alive in the winter of 1803-4, other sources maintain that he lived until 1810 or 1811. His personality was highly complex - he was warm spirited and exceedingly aware of sin. He married Miss Elizabeth Jones of Dyffryn Cothi, parish of Llanfynydd.

His *Rhad Ras* (published in 1810), which may be called the first Welsh autobiography, and the hymns of **William Williams** (Pantycelyn) are perhaps the most eloquent expressions of the spirit of the Welsh religious revival of the 18th century. He published *Caniadau Sion* [*sic*] in six parts between 1758 and 1788 (this work [the separate parts of which were collected into a volume in 1788] includes some of our best-known hymns), and translated many of Bunyan's tracts. There are elegies by him to **Howel Harris**, **David Jones** of Caeo, and **Peter Williams**.

Author

Reverend **John Dyfnallt Owen**, (1873 - 1956)

Sources

Rhad Ras (1810, 1949), 1949 ed.

Hanes Eglwysi Annibynnol Cymru, ii, 535

Josiah Thomas Jones, *Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol o Enwogion Cymru (Aberdŵr 1867-70)*, ii, 594

Minutes of Cong. Fund Board, 2 November 1772; 5 April 1779; 6 October 1800

Hanes llenyddiaeth Gymreig o 1651 O.C. hyd 1850 (1893) 356-64

A History of Carmarthenshire, ii, 201, 261, 421

J. Thickens, *Emynau a'u Hawduriad* (1945)

Catalogue of Printed Literature in the Welsh Department, Cardiff Free Libraries (1898)

Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd, March 1967

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