

THOMAS, JOHN (Ifor Cwmgwys; 1813 - 1866), poet

Name: John Thomas
Pseudonym: Ifor Cwmgwys
Date of birth: 1813
Date of death: 1866
Spouse: Rachel Thomas (née Davies)
Parent: Mary Davies
Parent: Evan Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: poet
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Poetry
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born at Ael-yr-ychen, Pentre-gwenlais, Llandybie (Llandebïe), Carmarthenshire, son of Evan and Mary Davies, and 'totally uneducated' - he was 30 before he learned to write. At 10, he began to work in the woollen factory, afterwards owned by Job Davies (Rhydderch Farfgoch, 1821 - 1887, eisteddfodwr and poet); when about 16 he became a collier at Tredegar, afterwards working at Dowlais, at the Werfa colliery at Aberdare, and at Cwm-twrch, Ystalyfera. His lack of formal education did not prevent the continuous practice of verse composition throughout these wanderings: he competed diligently at eisteddfodau, and won prizes - but had to carry his compositions in his memory and hie to and fro to Pentregwenlais for Job Davies to reduce them to writing. At Cwm-twrch, he married Rachel, Job Davies's daughter, and it was she who taught him to write; they lived at Gilfach on the banks of the Gwys brook (hence his pseudonym). They moved to Troed-y-rhiw (Merthyr Tydfil), and thence (1863) to the Rhondda Valley. Shortness of breath had for some time prevented him from working in the mine, but eisteddfodic prizes provided him with a livelihood of sorts. He died 26 December 1866, and was buried in the graveyard of Capel Rhondda, Pontypridd. In his youth, he had been a copious producer of tribannau; later on, he excelled at the *englyn* - *englynion* of his, e.g. won the prize at the national eisteddfod at Aberdare in 1861. But he also produced work of larger compass, printed in the periodicals, e.g. *Yr Ymfynydd* in 1849 and 1853 (like his father-in-law, he was a Unitarian), *Y Gwladgarwr* (when *Caledfryn* was its editor), and *Y Diwygiwr*, 1863; see also *Gardd Aberdâr*, 223, 237. One of his ballads is item vii in **B. B. Thomas**, *Baledi Morgannwg*. Two books of his verse were published: *Ceinion Glan Gwenlais*, 1862, and *Diferion Meddyliol*, 1865.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

Ifor Davies (his brother-in-law) in *Yr Ymfynydd*, 1893, 84

E. B. Morris in *Cymru (O.M.E.)*, xxxvi, 221

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