

THOMAS, JOHN (1821 - 1892), Independent minister, politician, and historian

Name: John Thomas
Date of birth: 1821
Date of death: 1892
Child: Josiah Thomas
Parent: Mary Thomas
Parent: Owen Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: Independent minister, politician, and historian
Area of activity: History and Culture; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Religion
Author: Richard Griffith Owen

Born 3 February 1821 at Holyhead; **Dr. Owen Thomas** was his elder brother. His father originally came from Llanddeiniolen, Caernarfonshire, and his mother from Anglesey. In 1827, owing to the shortage of work his father, who was a stone-mason by trade, moved with his family to Bangor, where the boy, after spending some time under different teachers, finally went to a school kept by one Hugh Williams. In 1831 he lost his father and, as he had to earn a living, became an assistant in a grocer's shop. This attempt lasted nine months and he was then apprenticed to a cobbler, one Dafydd Llwyd. He then left home and tramped over parts of Merionethshire looking unsuccessfully for work. Later, he went to Liverpool where he was employed for a few months and where he was admitted to full membership of Bedford Street (Calvinistic Methodist) church. When he returned to Bangor the temperance movement was causing a ferment in the country; he immediately plunged into the fray and it was on this subject that he made his first public speech at Caerhun. In 1838 he spent some months at Prestatyn, where he kept a school, but his main interest lay in lecturing up and down the country on temperance. His ability, and especially his eloquence, led many people to suggest to him that he should start preaching. In the meantime, however, he had passed through a crisis which caused him to re-orientate his life, to leave the Methodists and join the Independents. This was largely due to his friendship with **Dr. Arthur Jones** who had a singular attraction for young men of the John Thomas type. In September 1838 he took the decisive step of crossing over to the Independents. He spent some time as assistant master at the **Dr. Daniel Williams** school, kept at Bangor by **Dr. Arthur Jones**. In 1839 he began to preach and went as a schoolmaster to Tabor, Penmorfa, Caernarfonshire, preaching at every opportunity. He attracted considerable notice as a preacher and, in the summer of 1840, went to Marton, where there was a school kept by the local minister for the training of preachers. The following year he went to Ffrwd-y-fâl school where, however, he only stayed a few months. He received a call to Bwlchnewydd church, Carmarthenshire, where he was ordained, 15 June 1842. In February 1850 he moved to Glyn Neath church, and in 1854 to Tabernacle, Great Crosshall Street, Liverpool, where he spent the rest of his life. He died at Old Colwyn, 14 July 1892, and was buried in Anfield cemetery, Liverpool.

As a young man he became one of the foremost preachers in Wales and one of the chief leaders of his denomination - an eminence which he retained for half a century. He had a towering intellect and boundless energy. He took a prominent part in the movement to celebrate the bi-centenary of the 1662 'ejected ministers' and in the plan to build a Memorial College at Brecon. He agitated vigorously for a single college for the whole denomination, a policy which upset the supporters of the other colleges, particularly of Bala Independent College, and brought about the 'Battle of the Constitutions' (1877-85) which split the denomination in two, one party following him, and the other **M. D. Jones**.

He did not confine his interests and his efforts to denominational affairs; he was also a leader in national and political movements. He was an incomparably good debater on the topics of the day and, in addition, an able writer and journalist. His work as historian of his denomination has been mentioned in the article on **Thomas Rees** (1815 - 1885). He twice visited the U.S.A., in 1865 and 1876, preaching and lecturing in many places with a view to giving moral support to the Welsh way of life in that country. He was elected to the chair of the Union of Welsh Independents in 1878 and to the chair of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1885.

He edited *Y Gwerinwr* (a monthly), 1855-6; *Yr Annibynwr*, 1857-61; *Y Tyst*, jointly with **Gwilym Hiraethog** until 1872 and then single-handed until his death. He also published *Traethodau a Phregethau*, 1864; *Cofiant y Tri Brawd* (John, David, and Noah Stephens); *Hanes Eglwysi Annibynol Cymru* (jointly with **T. Rees**); *Pregethau*, 1882; *Cofiant J. Davies, Caerdydd*, 1883; *Y Diwygiad Dirwestol*, 1885; *Cofiant Thomas Rees*, 1888; *Hanes Eglwysi Annibynol Cymru*, vol. v, 1891; and a novel, *Arthur Llwyd y Felin*.

Author

Reverend Richard Griffith Owen, (1890 - 1973)

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