

## THOMAS, WILLIAM (died 1554), Italian scholar and clerk of the Privy Council to king Edward VI

**Name:** William Thomas  
**Date of death:** 1554  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Italian scholar and clerk of the Privy Council to king Edward VI  
**Area of activity:** Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** William Llewelyn Davies

His career, which was described fairly fully in the *D.N.B.* (in 1898) by (Sir) Daniel Lleufer Thomas, can be briefly outlined as follows: He was a Welshman from Radnorshire (Brecknock?), who was presumably educated at Oxford (a William Thomas was admitted bachelor of the canon law on 2 December 1529) and who lived for some five years in Italy (Bologna, Padua, etc.), where he wrote a defence of King Henry VIII - *Il Pellegrino Inglese ne' quale si defende l'innocente & la sincera vita de' pio & religioso re d' Inghilterra Henrico ottauo* (1552, probably printed in Venice; see English translation, published in 1861, edited by J. A. Froude). He returned to England in 1549, in which year his *Historie of Italie* (another ed. in 1561) and *Of the Vanities of this World* were published. His *Principal Rvles of the Italian Grammer, with a Dictionarie for the better vnderstandynge of Boccace, Petrarcha, and Dante* was published in 1550, with other eds. in 1560?, 1562, 1567. He was made Clerk of the Privy Council to Edward VI in 1550, given a prebend in S. Paul's, London, and, among other grants and rewards, the toll of Presteign, Builth, and 'Elvael,' together with the parsonage of Presteign and the patronage of the vicariate (26 October 1552). He became political instructor to Edward VI and drew up instructions for his use; details in *D.N.B.* In April 1551 he was appointed a member of the embassy which, with the marquis of Northampton at its head, proceeded in June to France to negotiate for the marriage of princess Elizabeth of France to Edward. He had previously dedicated to king Edward his translation into English from Italian of Josaphat Barbaro's account of his voyages to the east; this was published by the Hakluyt Society in 1873, with an introduction by lord Stanley of Alderley. On the accession of Mary, Thomas lost all his preferments, including his clerkship. He took an active part in Wyatt's conspiracy, 1553-4, was arrested, accused of conspiring the death of Mary, and executed (18 May 1554).

Additional information concerning Thomas came to light after the *D.N.B.* account was written. Much of this was utilised by E. R. Adair in his study - 'William Thomas: A Forgotten Clerk of the Privy Council,' which is included in *Tudor Studies presented to Alfred Frederick Pollard* (London, 1924). Adair suggests that Thomas, whom tradition had long associated with Llanthomas in the parish of Llanigon, Brecknock, may have been the eldest son of Thomas ap Philip ap Bledodyn or that he may have been the William, only son of Thomas Cromwell's faithful servant, Walter Thomas of Crickhowell, Brecknock, and Writtle in Essex, who was described as living in the Temple in August 1536. Lleufer Thomas had already suggested that he was the William Thomas who, along with two other commissioners, had inquired into and reported to Cromwell from Ludlow, 27 January 1533-4, on certain extortions in Radnorshire and the Welsh Marches. As Adair points out, William Thomas was the first 'Englishman' to show in his writings some knowledge and appreciation of Machiavelli and his political philosophy; it is also significant as the same writer emphasises, that it was Thomas's profound appreciation of Italian that led him to extol the importance of English as a written language and to advocate the necessity for teaching it for itself alone, not merely as a medium for instruction in Latin or Greek. Hitherto the honour of being the first man to advocate this has been assigned to Richard Mulcaster; William Thomas was advocating the thorough teaching of English in schools thirty years before that.

### Author

Sir William Llewelyn Davies, (1887 - 1952)

### Sources

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the sources therein noted, including

William Thomas, *The Works of William Thomas, Clerk of the Privy Council in the year 1549. Consisting of a very curious and circumstantial account of the reign of King Henry the Eight, in which the causes of the Reformation are most particularly and candidly exhibited. To which are added six essays on questions of great moment to the state, written by the same author at the command and for the private information of King Edward the Sixth. The whole literally transcribed from the manuscript in the Cotton Library* (London 1774)

NLW Archives: [NLW MSS 12855A](#)

*The National Library of Wales Journal*, i, 153-4

### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Thomas](#)

### Additional Links

VIAF: [49103420](#)

Wikidata: [Q1344706](#)

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