

THOMAS, WILLIAM (Islwyn; 1832 - 1878), Calvinistic Methodist minister, and poet

Name: William Thomas
Pseudonym: Islwyn
Date of birth: 1832
Date of death: 1878
Spouse: Martha Thomas (née Davies)
Partner: Ann Bowen
Gender: Male
Occupation: Calvinistic Methodist minister, and poet
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Poetry; Religion
Author: David Gwenallt Jones

Born 3 April 1832 at Tŷ'r Agent near Ynys-ddu, a village in the Sirhowy valley, Monmouthshire. His two brothers, David Thomas and John Thomas, were surveyors and engineers and Islwyn began to learn the rudiments of their profession, but his brother-in-law, the Rev. D. Jenkins ('Jenkyns y Babell') saw that he had the making of a preacher and he was sent to schools at Tredegar, Newport, and Cowbridge, and to **Dr. Evan Davies's** (1826 - 1872) academy at Swansea. At Swansea he fell in love with a young girl, Ann Bowen, but before they could be married she died, and this profoundly affected both his life and his poetry. At the Twyncarno (Rhydney) monthly meeting, 3 and 4 January 1854, a request was received from Babell chapel that William Thomas be allowed to preach and at the monthly meeting held at Gelli Groes, 16 August 1854, after the usual probation, permission was given 'to begin preaching according to the normal dispensation.' He was ordained in 1859, but never had charge of a church. In 1864 he married Martha, daughter of William Davies, who had married the widowed mother of Ann Bowen; they lived at 'Green Meadow' near Babell chapel until, in 1871, he built 'Y Glyn' for himself and his wife. According to **Daniel Davies** (1840 - 1916), Islwyn 'edited the *Cylchgrawn*, the *Ymgeisydd*, the *Glorian*, the *Gwladgarwr*, and the poetry columns of the *Baner* and *Cardiff Times*,' but it is difficult to know how much truth there is in this. At any rate, he edited the Welsh column in the *Cardiff Times*, and *Glasynys* (Owen Wynne Jones) and he was leader writers for the *Glorian*, but it was **Llew Llwyfo** (Lewis William Lewis who was appointed its editor. Islwyn died 20 November 1878, and was buried in Babell chapel burial-ground.

Islwyn was taught poetry by Gwilym Ildid and **Aneurin Fardd**, and there were at that time several literary circles in Monmouthshire, particularly at Abergavenny. He constantly competed in the eisteddfodau - for the most part unsuccessfully. In 1853 he won the prize at Cefn-coed-y-cymer eisteddfod for a poem, 'Abraham yn aberthu Isaac,' and another at the last eisteddfod of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society for an elegy on **Carnhuanawc**; he won the chair at Rhyl eisteddfod, 1870, for his *awdl*, 'Y Nos'; at Holyhead, 1872, for an *awdl*, 'Moses'; at Caerphilly, 1874, for an *awdl*, 'Cartref'; and at Treherbert, 1877, for an *awdl*, 'Y Nefoedd.' He never succeeded in winning the chair at the national eisteddfod, although he competed for it on many occasions. Towards the end of his life he formed the opinion that his urge for competing had caused him to neglect the preaching of the gospel.

His books and collected works were: *Barddoniaeth, gan Islwyn*, 1854; *Ymweliad y Doethion a Bethlehem. Y bryddest fuddugol yn Eisteddfod Ivoraidd Llanelli*, 1867 (Aberdare, 1871); *Caniadau gan Islwyn* (Wrexham, undated); *Pregethau y Parch. William Thomas (Islwyn). Gan y Parch. Edward Matthews*, 1896; *Awdl ar y Nefoedd*, 1878?; *Cymru, gan Islwyn* (Cyfres Blodau'r Grug, undated); *Islwyn, pigion o'i waith*, 1897; *Islwyn* (Llyfrau Urdd y Delyn, 1897); *Gwaith Barddonol Islwyn (Owen M. Edwards)*, 1897; *Gwaith Islwyn* (Cyfres y Fil, 1903); *Perlau Awen Islwyn, gan J. M. Edwards*, 1909; *Islwyn's English Poems*, 1913.

Author

David Gwenallt Jones, (1899 - 1968)

Sources

Evan Rees (Dyfed), *Oriau gydag Islwyn*, 1901

W. J. Gruffydd, *Islwyn Darlith Goffa Islwyn*, 1942 (Cardiff 1942), 1942

D. Gwenallt Jones, *Bywyd a Gwaith Islwyn* (Liverpool 1948) ('Cyfres Pobun,'no. xvii)

T. H. Parry-Williams, *Islwyn, Detholion o'i Farddoniaeth* (Caerdydd 1948)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 1064B: Llythr gan Islwyn](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 2340C: Letters](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MSS 3191-3197C: Letters to Daniel Davies](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 3292E: Llythyrau](#)

NLW Archives: NLW MS 4500B: William Thomas (Islwyn): Letters
NLW Archives: NLW MS 5876D: Barddoniaeth, beirniadaethau, &c.
NLW Archives: NLW MS 5878B: Llythrau

Further Reading

Glyn Tegai Hughes, *Islwyn* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru 2003)
The OGRE blog: [Babel chapel, Cwmfelinfach, burial place of Islwyn the Poet](#)
Wikipedia Article: [William Thomas](#)

Images

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NLW: ["Cadair Islwyn yn eisteddfod Caerffili 1874"](#)

Additional Links

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