

THOMAS, WILLIAM (Gwilym Marles; 1834 - 1879), Unitarian minister, social reformer, writer, and schoolmaster

Name: William Thomas
Pseudonym: Gwilym Marles
Date of birth: 1834
Date of death: 1879
Parent: Ann Thomas (née Jones)
Parent: William Thomas
Gender: Male
Occupation: Unitarian minister, social reformer, writer, and schoolmaster
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Religion
Author: David Jacob Davies

Born at Glan Rhyd y Gwiall, near Brechfa, Carmarthenshire, son of William and Ann Thomas (née Jones), but adopted by his father's sister. He was educated at Ffrwd-y-fâl school, 1851, Carmarthen College, 1852-6, and Glasgow University, 1856-60, where he graduated M.A. He was an Independent when he went to Carmarthen College, but a Unitarian when he left it, and when he had completed his course at Glasgow he settled down as Unitarian minister of Bwlch-y-fadfa and Llwynrhydowen, where he remained from 1860 until his death.

From November 1857 to February 1858 he was private tutor to **Islwyn**; in 1855 he had written a novel for *Seren Gomer*. In 1859 he published his little book, *Prydyddiaeth*, and he edited and wrote a great deal for his periodical, *Yr Athraw*, during the short period of its existence from September 1865 to August 1867. His chief contributions to the *Ymofynydd* were 'Cofion a Chyffesiadau,' 1861, 'Hanner awr gyda'r Bardd o Bantycelyn,' 1863, and 'Theodore Parker,' 1863-4.

He was completely converted to Parker's theological and social views and, for that reason, may be regarded as the founder of modern Unitarianism in Wales. He joined wholeheartedly in the Liberal movement in Cardiganshire, and his contributions to the Press, his speeches, and his sermons aroused the antagonism of the landlords with the result that he and his congregation were turned out of the old Llwynrhydowen chapel, 29 October 1876. He took a leading part in the 1868 election and was a strong advocate of the secret ballot. He kept a school at Llandysul, 1860-79, and was the means of starting a new Unitarian church in the town.

He died 11 December 1879, and was buried in the burial ground of the new chapel at Llwynrhydowen.

Author

Reverend David Jacob Davies, (1916 - 1974)

Sources

William Thomas, *Gwilym Marles* (Llanuwchllyn 1905)

diaries and manuscripts in Llwynrhydowen library

T. R. Roberts, *Eminent Welshmen: a short biographical dictionary of Welshmen... from the earliest times to the present* (1908)

Yr Ymofynydd (memorial issue), October 1934

R. J. Jones, *The Unitarian Students at the Presbyterian College, Carmarthen 1796-1901* (1901)

Further Reading

Aubrey J. Martin, *Hanes Llwynrhydowen* (Llandysul 1977)

RCAHMW: Welsh Religious Buildings Trust: [Yr Hen Gapel, Llwynrhydowen](#)

Coflein: [Hen Gapel, Cardigan Road, Rhydowen](#)

Coflein: [Capel Llwynrhydowen Welsh Unitarian Chapel; Llwynrhydowen \(New\), Pontsian Road, Rhydowen](#)

Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography [William Thomas \(Gwilym Marles\)](#), viewed December 2019

Images

NLW: William Thomas M.A. "Gwilym Marles" poet, preacher, patriot - Headmaster of Llandyssul Grammar School, 1860-1879

John Thomas, Gravestone of Williams Thomas (Gwilym Marles) (d.1879)

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