

WATKINS, JOSHUA (1769 or 1770 - 1841), Baptist minister

Name: Joshua Watkins
Date of birth: 1769 or 1770
Date of death: 1841
Parent: Howell Watkins
Gender: Male
Occupation: Baptist minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

believed to have been born in Llangynidr, Brecknock - he was one of the trustees of the first Baptist meeting-house at that place in 1794 (D. Jones, *Bed. Deheubarth*, 655), and he may have been the son of the Howell Watkins, at whose house the Baptists used previously to meet (op. cit., 811). But the Llangynidr Baptists were formally members at Llanwenarth, and it was there that Joshua Watkins was baptised in 1789 (op. cit., 658) and began to preach (1790). He conducted missions in Llangynidr, Tredegar, and as far as the outskirts of Rhymney. In 1793 he went to live at Carmarthen in order to help his friend M. J. Rhys with the *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg*, and there is a somewhat doubtful story (see J. J. Evans, *Morgan John Rhys*, 33-4) that the two were compelled to flee the town; however, he returned home when the *Cylchgrawn* expired. On the 28 March 1796 he was ordained minister of Penuel, Carmarthen. He was obviously a zealous missionary, for he not only greatly increased the size of his congregation but started churches at Ferryside, Kidwelly, Porth-y-rhyd, and elsewhere. But his theological views were no more in accord with the higher Calvinism of the west than were those of M. J. Rhys; he was drawn into the controversy which, in 1799, led to the schism in the Baptist denomination, and that year he and his church seceded from the Particular Baptists; in 1801 we find him (his name being wrongly given as 'Joshua Mathias') appealing to the Assembly of the General Baptists in London on behalf of the small denomination in Wales (Whitley, *Minutes of the General Baptist Association*). But Watkins belonged to that section of the General Baptists whose unorthodoxy would not go beyond Arminianism, and he was appalled at the Unitarian leanings of some of his Welsh fellow-ministers; accordingly, in 1805, he and his congregation rejoined the Particular Baptists. He was warmly welcomed; his name appears immediately in the lists of festival preachers (*Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru*, 1942, 16), and he is found working with his former opponent, Titus Lewis, to re-establish causes like Tŷ Coch (Llangynog), 1806, which had lost their congregations. He was exceedingly popular for the rest of his life. *Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol o Enwogion Cymru* (ii, 609) says that he had a shop in the town - possibly a bookseller's; in 1809 he was a printer and publisher, at first in partnership with others, but from 1810 on his own account. He died 22 June 1841, 'at the age of 71' says *Seren Gomer* (1841; 223), while J. T. Jones in *yn y Geiriadur Bywgraffyddol o Enwogion Cymru* says that he was born in 1769. He had a son who was a doctor; the latter's widow was the second wife of H. W. Jones, minister of the Tabernacl, Carmarthen.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

David Jones, *Hanes y Bedyddwyr yn Neheubarth Cymru* (1839), 444-5

Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Bedyddwyr Cymru, 1930

Ifano Jones, *A history of printing and printers in Wales to 1810, and of successive and related printers to 1923* (Cardiff 1925), 209

and other references given above

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