

## WILLIAMS, OWEN (Owain Gwyrfai; 1790 - 1874), antiquary

**Name:** Owen Williams  
**Pseudonym:** Owain Gwyrfai  
**Date of birth:** 1790  
**Date of death:** 1874  
**Spouse:** Margaret Williams (née Lloyd)  
**Child:** Thomas Williams  
**Parent:** Siân Pritchard (née Marc)  
**Parent:** William Pritchard  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** antiquary  
**Area of activity:** History and Culture  
**Author:** Griffith Thomas Roberts

Born in a cottage called Bryn-beddau on the Plas Glan'rafon estate, Waun-fawr, and christened at Betws Garmon, 10 January 1790. His parents were William Pritchard of Pant Ifan Mawr, Llan-rug, and Siân Marc of Plas Mawr, Llandwrog. When he was still very young, Owen Williams married Margaret Lloyd of Pen-y-bryn, Llanwnda, and they set up house together at Tu-ucha'r-ffordd, Waun-fawr. He was a short, spare man with a round face and fair hair. He used to walk with short, quick steps, stooping a little, and he was never seen without a stick. A cooper by trade, he used to make wheel-barrows for sale to the Dinorwig quarries before the latter began to use waggons. When **Dafydd Ddu Eryri** kept a school at Waun-fawr and Betws Garmon, Owen Williams was one of his pupils and it was **Dafydd Ddu** who taught him the rules of prosody. Owen Gwyrfai's *awdl* on 'Baron Richards' was judged to be the best at the Cymreigyddion eisteddfod held at Caernarvon in 1824. He edited a life of **Peter Williams** (1723 - 1796), which was published in 1817, and in 1820 published a metrical version of the *Song of Solomon*. After 1830 his labours were directed to producing a Welsh dictionary, *Geirlyfr Cymraeg*, which he published in forty-five parts sold at a shilling each. He then began to publish *Y Drysorfa Hynafiaethol*, four parts only of which were issued. In 1847 he published a half-crown book called *Hanes y deg erledigaeth o dan Rufain Babaidd*. Many of his works are still unpublished and the manuscripts are in the National Library of Wales, e.g. **Cwrtmawr MS 188B**, a collection of Welsh poetry in Owen Williams's hand-writing; **Cwrtmawr MS 90C**, *cywyddau* by **Cadwaladr Cesail** and **Morys Dwyfech** transcribed by Owen Williams; **Cwrtmawr MS 149E**, Owen Gwyrfai's 'Piser Hir,' containing a collection of poetry transcribed mostly from **Peniarth MS 98**. In **Cwrtmawr MS 407E** there is a collection of pedigrees prepared by him and **Eben Fardd**, while in **Cwrtmawr MS 456D** there is another collection of pedigrees prepared by Owen Williams alone. He died at Fron Heulog, Waun-fawr, 3 October 1874, and was buried in Betws Garmon churchyard. **Ioan Arfon** and other friends of his collected fifty pounds to provide a suitable tomb-stone and this was unveiled, 7 March 1879. In 1904 his son, Thomas Williams, published some of his works, together with the story of his life, in *Gemau Gwyrfai*; and in 1911, he published another book, *Gemau Môn ac Arfon*, which contains a number of his father's antiquarian writings, together with some of the poetry transcribed by Owen Williams from the ancient manuscripts. Owen Williams was exceedingly industrious during his long life of 84 years, but had not been adequately trained for much of the work which he sought to do. His notes on the day-to-day happenings of his own time are valuable and many of the letters he collected and the comments he made are interesting today. In 1829 Owen Williams was a Wesleyan, but shortly afterwards he joined the 'Little Wesleyans' (see **Owens, Owen**).

### Author

Griffith Thomas Roberts

### Sources

Thomas Williams, *Gemau Gwyrfai sef, gweithiau barddonol a rhyddiaethol y diweddar Owen Williams o'r Waenfawr (Owain Gwyrfai) yn cynwys, bywgraffiad, dadleniad cofgolofn, Eisteddfod Caernarfon, 1824, beddargraffadau, cywyddau, awdlau, emynau, carolau, englynion, ffraethebion, hynodion ac hanesion* (Bala 1904)

*Gemau MĀ´n ac Arfon sef nodiadau hynafiaethol, hanesiol ac eglurhaol, yn nghylch Ynys MĀ´n a'i henwogion, a hynafiaethau eraill*  
*Y Tyddynwr*, 1922, 313

*Enwogion Sir Gaernarfon* (1922), 357-60

J. Jones ('Myrddin Fardd'), *'Adgof uwch Anghof.'* *Llythyrau lluaws o Brif Enwogion Cymru* (1883), 108, 168, 224-6

A. H. Williams, *Welsh Wesleyan Methodism, 1800-1858 its origins, growth and secessions* (1935) (index)

Gomer M. Roberts, *Bywyd a Gwaith Peter Williams* (Cardiff 1943) (index)

### Images

Hugh J. Hughes, Owen Williams, Waenfawr, 'Owen Gwyrfai'  
Humphreys's Photographic Studio, Owen Gwyrfai (Waenfawr)

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Owen Williams](#)

## Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q13130556](#)

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