

## THOMAS, JOHN (1838-1905), photographer

**Name:** John Thomas  
**Date of birth:** 1838  
**Date of death:** 1905  
**Spouse:** Elizabeth Thomas (née Hughes)  
**Child:** Jane Claudia Lloyd (née Hughes)  
**Child:** Albert Ivor Thomas  
**Child:** Robert Arthur Thomas  
**Child:** William Thelwall Thomas  
**Parent:** Jane Thomas  
**Parent:** David Thomas  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** photographer  
**Area of activity:** Art and Architecture  
**Author:** Emyr Wyn Jones

Born at Glan-rhyd, Cellan, Cardiganshire, 14 April 1838, son of David and Jane Thomas, went to Cellan school (where he became a pupil-teacher), and was apprenticed to a draper at Lampeter. From 1853 till 1863 he worked in a drapery shop at Liverpool; then illhealth drove him to seek outdoor work as commission-salesman for a stationery and photograph firm.

Noting the scanty representation of Wales among the notabilities whose photographs he had to sell, he embarked upon a venture which became his life's work. He began, in 1863, by purchasing a camera and inviting a number of famous Welsh preachers to sit to him. He had at first to battle with a prejudice against 'street photographers,' but he persevered, and in 1867 opened his own photographic business at 53, S. Anne Street; this became known as 'The Cambrian Gallery,' a name which it retained (at various addresses) for thirty years, until it became 'Yr Oriel Gymreig,' when it was acquired by (Sir) Owen M. Edwards. In 1867, too, Thomas made his first professional visit to Wales - to photograph the Calvinistic Methodist General Assembly, then in session at Llanidloes. Thereafter he travelled the length and breadth of Wales, photographing notabilities and 'characters,' churches and chapels, homes of famous Welshmen, ancient buildings and places of scenic beauty - all this despite difficulties of open-air photography by the wet process,' and difficulties of transport. Realising the unique value of his collection, he selected over 3,000 of his plates and sold them ' for a very moderate sum ' to O. M. Edwards, who used them for illustrating *Cymru* and ' *Cyfres y Fil* '; they are today in the National Library of Wales.

Thomas had other interests. He wrote extensively in *Cymru (O.M.E.)* and other Welsh periodicals. He was a deeply religious man, a member of Rose Place C.M. church until its dissolution in 1865, and afterwards of Fitzclarence Street C.M. church.

He married (1861) Elizabeth Hughes, of Glandwr, Bryneglwys, Denbighshire (died 1895); they had four children: Jane Claudia, afterwards Mrs. Hugh Lloyd (1863 - 1934), William Thelwall , Robert Arthur (1866 - 1932), and Albert Ivor (1870 - 1911, a medical man). He died 14 October 1905, and was buried in Anfield cemetery, Liverpool.

### Author

Emyr Wyn Jones, (1907 - 1999)

### Sources

*Cymru (O.M.E.)*, xiv, 229, xvii, 133 (portrait), xxii, 221

*Y Cymro*, 19 and 26 October 1905

*Y Goleuad*, 27 October 1905

family papers, including autobiographical notes written in 1904, and further observations by Hugh Lloyd (son-in-law) in 1924

### Further Reading

Hilary Woollen, Alistair Crawford, *John Thomas, 1838-1905, photographer* (Llandysul 1977)

Iwan Meical Jones, *A Welsh way of life: John Thomas photographs* (Talybont 2008)

Wikipedia Article: [John Thomas](#)

## Works

NLW: The John Thomas photographic collection

## Additional Links

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Wikidata: [Q3403561](#)

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