

LEWIS, HENRY (1889 - 1968), Welsh and Celtic scholar, university professor

Name: Henry Lewis
Date of birth: 1889
Date of death: 1968
Spouse: Gwladys Lewis (née Thomas)
Parent: William Lewis
Gender: Male
Occupation: Welsh and Celtic scholar, university professor
Area of activity: Education; Scholarship and Languages
Author: David Myrddin Lloyd

Born 21 August 1889, youngest son of William Lewis and his wife, in Ynystawe, Glamorganshire. He proceeded from Ystalyfera county school to university college Cardiff where he graduated in Welsh, and then to Jesus College, Oxford to study under Sir John Rhys. He gained the degrees of M.A. and D.Litt. (Wales). He began his career as a teacher at his old school in Ystalyfera and then at Llanelli county school. During World War I he served as a sergeant in the Welsh Guards and 2nd Lieut. in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. From 1918 to 1921 he was an assistant lecturer in the Welsh dept., university college Cardiff, and he held the chair of Welsh at university college Swansea from 1921 until his retirement in 1954. In 1921, too, he married Gwladys, youngest daughter of William Thomas and his wife of Treorchy. There were 2 daughters of the marriage.

It is difficult today to appreciate the difficulties facing the study of Welsh language and literature when Welsh degree courses were first established. Henry Lewis stands in the front rank of that handful of scholars who transformed the situation by editing essential texts, interpreting them and commentating on lexical, grammatical and syntactical features - work carried out in parallel with running a university dept. with the help of one or two lecturers. As early as 1921 he began to publish medieval Welsh translations of Latin texts: *Darnau o'r Efengylau* (*Cymmrodor*, 31), *Chwedlau seith doethion Rufein* (1925), *Delw y byd* (1928, with Pol Diverres) and especially *Brut Dingestow* (1942) with a valuable introduction for students of Welsh-Latin translations. He also edited and commentated upon the works of medieval Welsh poets, most importantly on Iolo Goch in *Cywyddau Iolo Goch ac Eraill* (1925, 1937) and *Hen gerddi crefyddol* (1931), a pioneering study of an important aspect of the poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd*. He edited some renaissance prose, e.g. *Hen gyflwyniadau* (1948) as well as some later texts, e.g. *Glanffrw, Llanwynno* (1949), *Hugh Jones, Maesglasau, Cydymaith yr hwsmon* (1949), *Morgannwg Matthews Ewenni* (1953).

But to return to his main interests, he prepared, with Elizabeth J. Louis Jones an index to manuscript poetry (1928) and also edited (1927) the poetry in *Peniarth MS 53*. The *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, (the language and literature section of which he edited from 1950 to 1964), and to a lesser extent other scholarly journals contain, over a long period, numerous articles and notes by him. These are of fundamental importance and deal with Welsh from its earliest period in the work of the *cynfeirdd* and Old Welsh glosses and with the syntax and morphology of the language, topics he discussed in *Datblygiad yr iaith Gymraeg* (1931), *The Sentence in Welsh* (Sir John Rhys British Academy Lecture 1942) and *Yr elfen Ladin yn yr iaith Gymraeg* (1943). The comparative aspects of Welsh interested him as is seen in his grammars of Middle Cornish (1928, 1946) and Middle Breton (1922, 1935, and, in conjunction with J.R.F. Piette, 1966), and most particularly in his collaboration with Holger Pedersen in the translation and revision of the latter's masterpiece *Vergleichende Grammatik der Keltischen Sprachen* which appeared as *A concise comparative Celtic grammar* (1937, revised 1961).

Early in his career Henry Lewis was one of the editors of the *Cyfres y Werin a'r Brifysgol* series of translations and he had a hand in translating *Brenin yr ellyllon* (Gogol). He was a member of the editorial committee of the University of Wales *Welsh Dictionary* and he prepared the *Collins-Spurrell Welsh Dictionary* (1960). Other tasks which he undertook include membership of the editorial committee of *Y Caniedydd*, the hymnal of the Welsh Independents, orthographical revision of *Beibl y plant* (1929), *Y Testament Newydd* (1936), *Y Beibl* (1955), *Yr Apocrypha* (1959). He translated a number of government reports, thereby raising the standards of such translation. He was a member of several public bodies, committees and voluntary societies, e.g. Welsh Joint Education Committee, council (and Chairman) of Coleg Harlech, Clerk and Warden of the Guild of Graduates of the University of Wales, vice-president of the National Library of Wales, hon. Member of the Royal Irish Academy, a vice-president of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. He was made C.B.E. in 1954 and awarded an hon. LL.D. by the University of Wales, and an hon. D.Litt.Celt. by the National University of Ireland. He died 14 January 1968.

Author

David Myrddin Lloyd, (1909 - 1981)

Sources

Who was who?

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B. B. Thomas in *The National Library of Wales Journal*, 27 (1971), 121-35

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Further Reading

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