

LEWIS, GRUFFYDD THOMAS (1873 - 1964), schoolmaster and a leading layman in the Presbyterian Church of Wales

Name: Gruffydd Thomas Lewis

Date of birth: 1873

Date of death: 1964

Spouse: Annie Lewis (née Thomas)

Child: Arianwen Elizabeth Ann Jenkins (née Lewis)

Parent: Elizabeth Lewis (née Harries)

Parent: David Watts Lewis

Gender: Male

Occupation: schoolmaster and a leading layman in the Presbyterian Church of Wales

Area of activity: Education; Religion

Author: Evan David Jones

Born 3 February 1873 at Pil-rhoth, Llan-gain, Carmarthenshire, the only son of David Watts Lewis, Presbyterian minister known generally as David Lewis, Llanstephan, and Elizabeth (née Harries) his wife. David Lewis was a native of Aberystwyth, son of Thomas Lewis who hailed from Llanrhystud. His mother's maiden surname was Watts, believed to be from the same stock as Isaac Watts (1674 - 1784), the English hymn-writer, but David Lewis did not use his second baptismal name. David Lewis began his career as a cabinet maker, but abandoned his craft to become a preacher. He was ordained at Llangetho in 1875. He attained considerable popularity as a preacher, and **James Morris** devotes three chapters in his *Efengylwyr Seion* to his biography. His wife, Elizabeth, was the sister of T.J. Harries, founder of the drapery firm of Harries of Oxford Street, London. She managed the small farm of Pil-rhoth, thus allowing her husband to continue his itinerant preaching. He died in 1896, aged 66, and she, who was of the same family as **William Williams**, M.P., died at an advanced age in 1933.

The son was named Gruffydd Thomas after an elder of that name, his father's bosom friend of Aberystwyth days. G. Tom., as he adopted for his usual signature, was educated at Llan-y-bri elementary school and at the Old College School at Carmarthen, from where he went with a scholarship to Llandovery College in 1889. He matriculated in the University of London in 1893, and won a scholarship to Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he graduated *senior optime* in mathematics in 1896, taking his M.A. in 1900. He rowed in the first boat for his college. At the end of his course he was appointed second master at the Pembroke Dock secondary school, and was appointed headmaster of the Tregaron intermediate school which opened in the town hall in September 1887. He was responsible for planning the permanent buildings which were modelled on those of Narberth School, and he placed the school on a sound footing and guided its development with great skill and enthusiasm until his retirement in 1937. He was a successful teacher and throughout his 'tenure of office' was responsible for the teaching of mathematics and scripture. Scripture was not given a prominent place in the curriculum but he made some use of it as a means of improving the English of some junior classes. He was a strong disciplinarian without being too severe. His puritanical attitudes were tempered by his sense of humour. Like the majority of teachers and parents in his time, material advancement was an aim to be encouraged in his pupils. He considered that the wholly Welsh catchment area of the school made it unnecessary to place much emphasis on Welsh education, and that the children needed a thorough instruction in English as that language was less familiar to them. He was a strong supporter of the annual Welsh eisteddfod at the school and he regarded the *eisteddfod* as a valuable element in the life and character of the school.

For the greater part of his period at the school most of the pupils from the neighbouring districts lodged in the town during the week, and at the week-night services at Bwlch-gwynt Presbyterian chapel where he was a thorough Welshman and an elder of the church since 1912 they saw a different side of their headmaster. He would impress upon the children who attended these meetings that they would be likely to do better in the school examinations, and he was proud of the number of ministers who entered the Christian ministry from the school.

He served on many key committees of the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion, and his services were acknowledged when he was elected to the chair of the South Wales Association in 1936-37, the centenary year of the death of **Ebenezer Richard** (1781 - 1837) who made Tregaron a household name in Wales. He married Annie, only child of **John Thomas** (1839 - 1921) and his wife Ann (née Williams) of Llanwrtyd in the Water Street chapel at Carmarthen on 27 December 1901. They had 5 daughters. She died 10 June 1939, and he died 20 July 1964. Both were buried in Bwlch-gwynt cemetery.

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

Information supplied by his grand-daughter, Bethan Bennett

West Wales Guardian, 27 September and 4 October 1935

Treasury, February 1936

personal knowledge

Additional Links

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