

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM RETLAW JEFFERSON (c.1863 - 1944), solicitor, genealogist, and historian

Name: William Retlaw Jefferson Williams
Date of birth: c.1863
Date of death: 1944
Parent: Jane Williams (née Robertson)
Parent: John James Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: solicitor, genealogist, and historian
Area of activity: History and Culture; Law
Author: Evan David Jones

He was one of the remarkable children of Aberclydach, Llanfigan, Brecknockshire (see [WILLIAMS, Alice Matilda](#)). The father, John James Williams (died 31 March 1906), was a surgeon and a captain of the First Brecknockshire Rifle Volunteers, and a member of the Gorsedd of Bards as 'Brychan'. The mother's maiden name was Jane Robertson.

The main feat of the eldest son, Howell Price, was to traverse the African continent from the Cape to Cairo in 1909-10. He died in 1920. The second son, William Retlaw (which is Walter in reverse) became a solicitor in 1884, and had offices at Brecon and Tal-y-bont on Usk. There was a tradition of practising law in the family. The grandfather, Howell Williams, had married a sister of Walter Powell, the senior partner in the firm of Powell, Jones and Powell. Though his name appears in the *Law List* under Brecon until 1929, and for another year under Tal-y-bont, it does not appear that William Retlaw practised much.

Historical research was much more to his liking from an early age. At one time he ran a genealogical business and a trade in books on Wales at Tal-y-bont in close association with major booksellers such as [Henry Blackwells](#) of New York. He published privately a number of volumes on the history of the parliamentary representation of several counties and boroughs, beginning with *The Parliamentary History of the Principality of Wales, 1541-1895* (Brecon, 1895). A copy of this work with corrections and additions in his own hand intended for a second edition which was never published is preserved at the National Library of Wales (MS. 16363). This was followed by *The Parliamentary History of Hereford, 1213-1897* (Brecon, 1896); *The Parliamentary History of Worcester, 1213-1897* (Hereford, 1897); *The Parliamentary History of Gloucester, 1213-1898* (Hereford, 1898); and *The Parliamentary History of Oxford, 1213-1899* (Brecon, 1899). He left rough notes for a history of the parliamentary representation of Ireland. He published a history of the Courts of Great Sessions and their officers, *The History of the Great Sessions in Wales, 1542-1830*, together with the *Lives of the Welsh Judges* (Brecon, 1899), which is perhaps better known, from the lettering on its spine, as *The Welsh Judges*. He also published *Official Lists of the Duchy of Lancaster* (1901). These pioneer works are very useful, though not entirely reliable. It is possible that the author's untidy handwriting is partly responsible for some of the misprints in these books. [NLW MS 11029C](#) contains a typewritten copy of lists which he compiled of officers of Welsh regiments, 1715-92.

He edited and published a periodical entitled *Old Wales*, 1905-07, and contributed notes to *Old Welsh Chips*.

He was married but had no children. He died at his home, Brynoyre, Tal-y-bont, 20 March 1944, and was buried in Llansanffraid churchyard, Brecknockshire

Author

Evan David Jones, (1903 - 1987)

Sources

Law Lists

Poole, *The Illustrated History and Biography of Brecknockshire*(1886), 113

Brecon & Radnor County Times, 30 March 1944

Additional Links

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