

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM NANTLAIS (1874 - 1959), minister (Presb.), editor, poet and hymn writer

Name: William Nantlais Williams
Date of birth: 1874
Date of death: 1959
Spouse: Annie Williams (née Price)
Spouse: Alice Maud Williams (née Jones)
Parent: Mari Williams
Parent: Daniel Williams
Gender: Male
Occupation: minister (Presb.), editor, poet and hymn writer
Area of activity: Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Religion
Author: Gomer Morgan Roberts

Born 30 December 1874 at Llaur-cwrt, Gwyddgrug, near Pencader, Carmarthenshire, the youngest of the ten children of Daniel and Mari Williams. He was educated at New Inn elementary school, and at the age of 12 he was apprenticed to his brothers as a weaver. He was brought up in New Inn church, where he began preaching in 1894. He was educated for the ministry at Newcastle Emlyn grammar school and Trefeca College. He took an interest in poetry at a young age and published a collection of his poems, *Murmuron y Nant* (1898), while he was a student. He won a bardic chair under the adjudication of **Walcyn Wyn** (Watkin Hezekiah Williams) at an *eisteddfod* in Ammanford in 1899, and he received a call soon afterwards to be pastor of the recently established church of Bethany in that town. He was ordained in 1901, and he laboured in Bethany from 1900 until his retirement in 1944 (having supervised also the small church of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in Llandybïe during the first years of the twentieth century). His ambition at that time was to preach at preaching festivals and succeed as a poet in *eisteddfod* competitions. He was joint-winner at Bangor national eisteddfod (1902) for composing six lyrics; he won the bardic chair at the Meirion eisteddfod in 1903, and the chair at the *eisteddfod* held in the Queen's Hall, London, in 1904. That year the religious Revival spread to Ammanford, and Nantlais was heavily affected by the stirring events. He determined to consecrate his life thenceforth to evangelising and fostering the spiritual life of the churches. He married twice; (1) in 1902, Alice Maud Jones (granddaughter of the eccentric Thomas Job, Cynwyl), and they had three sons and two daughters; she died in 1911; (2) in 1916, Annie Price (head-mistress of Mountain Ash school and daughter of T. Price, minister of Brechfa). He died 18 June 1959, and his remains were buried in front of the new chapel of Bethany.

After the Revival Nantlais became associated with the leading personalities who attended the annual evangelical conferences at Keswick and Llandrindod Wells, e.g. **E. Keri Evans** (above), R.B. Jones, W.W. Lewis, **Seth Joshua** (see **Supplement below**), W.S. Jones, W. Talbot Price, and in 1917 he established an annual conference of the same kind at Ammanford (see J.D. Williams, *Cynhadledd y Sulgwyn Rhydaman* (Ammanford, 1967). His labours at Bethany proved very successful; a schoolroom was built at Pantyffynnon in 1904, and another in Tir-y-dail in 1906 (a church was established there in 1911; see W.N. Williams, *Y Deugain Mlynedd Hyn* (Ammanford, 1921)). A beautiful new chapel was built at Bethany in 1930. Nantlais was elevated to the chair of the South Wales Association (1943), and he was Moderator of the General Assembly (1940). He corresponded for years with **Eluned Morgan** of Patagonia, and at her earnest request Nantlais went on a preaching tour for three weeks in the Welsh colony in Patagonia in 1938 (see the correspondence between them in Dafydd Ifans (ed.), *Tyred drosodd* (1977)).

Although Nantlais refrained from competing at *eisteddfodau* after the Revival, he continued to write, consecrating his talents and his poetry thereafter to spreading the Gospel. He was one of the editors of *Y Lladmerydd* (1922-26), and editor of *Yr Efenglydd* (1916-33), and *Trysorfa'r Plant* (1934-47). He composed many hymns for children, indeed there was scarcely anyone more successful than he as a hymn writer for children. These hymns were published in three collections, *Moliant Plentyn*, part I (1920) and part II (1927), and *Clychau'r Gorlan* (1942). Many of his fine, inspired hymns are to be found in the present-day hymnals of all denominations. There is a collection of his best hymns in *Emynau'r daith* (1949), and in *Clychau Seion* (which he edited c. 1952). He also published (in collaboration with **Daniel Protheroe**, **David Evans** (1874 - 1948) and **J.T. Rees** a number of children's songs, as well as other musical works. Even though he refrained from competing, he did not lose his gift as a lyrical poet, as was shown in his anthology of poems, *Murmuron Newydd* (1926), and his children's rhymes, *Darlun a chân* (1941). Before the end of his life, in recognition of his literary contribution, he was awarded an hon. M.A. degree by the University of Wales. There is an appreciation of him as a hymnist and poet, together with a list of all his publications in *Bwletin Cymdeithas Emynau Cymru*, I, no. 4 (1971), 77-99. He contributed extensively to the periodicals which he edited, and to *Y Goleuad*. There are chapters of reminiscences in the latter (1955), which were published in 1967 under the title *O Gopa Bryn Nebo*.

Author

Reverend Gomer Morgan Roberts, (1904 - 1993)

Sources

Add to the references noted above, *Who's who in the Free Churches?* (1951) (1951), 358

Y Drysorfa, 1944, 47-50

Blwyddiadur y Methodistiaid Calfaidd, 1960, 275-6

W. Morris (ed.), *Deg o Enwogion* (1965) (1965), 51-9

personal knowledge and acquaintance

[T. Gareth Jones in Hywel T. Edwards, ed., *Cwm Aman* (Llandysul 1996) (1996), 80-105]

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Nantlais Williams](#)

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