

JONES, THOMAS ROBERT ('Gwerfulyn ', 1802 - 1856), founder of the charitable movement, the True Ivorites

Name: Thomas Robert Jones

Pseudonym: Gwerfulyn

Date of birth: 1802

Date of death: 1856

Spouse: Elizabeth Jones (née Price)

Gender: Male

Occupation: founder of the charitable movement, the True Ivorites

Area of activity: Economics and Money; Education; Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Philanthropy; Scholarship and Languages

Author: Huw Walters

Born in Maes Gwerful, Llanefydd, Denbigh, in 1802. He followed his trade as a shoe-maker in Ruabon, Cefn-mawr and Llansanffraid Glyndyfrdwy, where he married Elizabeth, daughter of Evan Price, Baptist minister of Llanfyllin, in 1834. He established Welsh societies (Cymreigyddion) in all these areas and he was a regular contributor to the Welsh Baptist journals. He conceived the idea of setting up a society which would assist its members financially as well as safeguarding and nurturing the Welsh language. **Robert Davies**, 'Bardd Nantglyn' and **William Owen Pughe** expressed their willingness to be sponsors but both died before having an opportunity to help. Jones ventured and established a 'United and Gomerian Society under the sign of the Cross Guns' in Wrexham on 6 June 1836. There is little information about the society in its early period but by 1838 the membership of the first lodge was 252, 12 lodges had been opened in north Wales and the first lodge in south Wales (St. David's) was opened in Carmarthen on 24 April that year. By June 1840 a misunderstanding had arisen between Jones and the movement and he left the Cross Guns lodge to set up a rival lodge. Consequently the St. David's lodge and the Union which had developed around it declared itself the chief lodge of the whole of Wales and a fierce contention arose between it and T.R. Jones and his followers. St. David's lodge won the day and in 1845 the movement's central office moved from Carmarthen to Swansea. 'Ivorism' (named after **Ifor ap Llywelyn**, or Ifor Hael, of Bassaleg) was on the increase throughout Wales and the years between 1840 and 1850 were the golden period of the society. The Order had firm rules for its members regarding morals and behaviour, it nurtured the Welsh language and between 1850 and 1870 there was hardly a year without an Ivorite eisteddfod. This cultural activity puts the movement in a special category and assisting the poor and needy was not its only purpose. Though T.R. Jones established another lodge and claimed to have offices throughout Wales his influence waned after 1845. He spent the last two years of his life in Birkenhead where he died in May 1856 leaving a widow and 4 children.

Author

Dr Huw Walters

Sources

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