

ROWLAND(S), WILLIAM (1887-1979), schoolmaster and author

Name: William Rowland (S)
Date of birth: 1887
Date of death: 1979
Gender: Male
Occupation: schoolmaster and author
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing
Author: Arwyn Lloyd Hughes

Born 16 July 1887 at Rhiwlas, in the village of Rhiw (parish of Llanfaelrhys), near Aberdaron, Caernarfonshire, the sixth of the seven children - five sons and two daughters - born to Thomas Rowlands, tailor and draper, and his wife Ann (née Williams). His parents hailed from Rhiw, his father being the son of Congl Cae Hen and his mother the daughter of Bwlch Garreg - two smallholdings in the district. He lost his mother in May 1889 before attaining his second birthday.

He was educated initially at Rhiw board school (1891-1901) and at the old school Botwnnog (1901-05) founded according to the will of **Bishop Henry Rowland** in 1616. He spent the two years (1905-07) as an uncertificated teacher at nearby Llaniestyn before entering the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in October 1907. He graduated BA in 1910 with first-class honours in Welsh. (He was the third person to achieve this at Bangor and joint fourth within the University of Wales since the degree was first awarded in 1899.) He held the Meyrick Scholarship for the session 1910-11 and was awarded his MA degree in 1912 for a thesis on the subject 'Barddoniaeth Tomos Prys o Blas Iolyn'.

As an undergraduate he came under the spell of **Professor John Morris-Jones**, and became a close friend of **Ifor Williams**, who was an assistant lecturer in the department of Welsh at the time. (It is more than likely that it was his affection for and admiration of his friend that caused him to name his son Ifor.) He was a schoolteacher in Monmouthshire - at New Tredegar (1911-14) and Abersychan (1915-20 (he spent circa 1917-18 in the army); and then at Swansea grammar school (1920-24), founded by **Bishop Hugh Gore** in 1682. In 1924 he was appointed successor to Rhys Evans as headmaster of Porthmadog county school; he remained in post until his retirement in December 1949.

William Rowland was a dedicated and diligent educationalist. Besides teaching children daily and holding evening classes for adults in Welsh language and literature whilst in the south, he was also a prolific author. In 1923 he was a member of an advisory committee which met at Hughes & Son, the Wrexham publishers, with the purpose of identifying the literary needs of children in the Welsh language, and to meet those needs where possible. Following this he published a number of books for children mainly during the 1920s and 1930s. In the words (in translation) of Elis Gwyn Jones, a former pupil of his at Porthmadog: 'His writings were meant mainly for schools. He felt that his true vocation was to produce good reading material for pupils so that they would learn how to write Welsh correctly ... The purity of the Welsh and the natural Welshness of the tales which he published were an invaluable contribution. In all that he did one can detect clearly the historian, the searcher and the scholar at work'. (The collection of his papers at the National Library of Wales confirms the last statement.) Here are details of his publications: *Cawr yr Ogo a Straeon Eraill i Blant* (1921, a prize-winner at the National Eisteddfod in Caernarfon that year); *Chwedlau Gwerin Cymru* (1923); *Y Llong Lo* (1924, a prize-winning story for children at the National Eisteddfod Ammanford, 1922); *Llawlyfr dysgu Cymraeg* (1924 and 1927, two volumes); *Bywyd ac Anturiaethau Robinson Crusoe* (Rhan 1) (1928, a translation of 'the most well-known and popular of Defoe's work, i.e. chapters i-xxvii in Bohn's edition (1893), he [W.R.] summarized these and followed the example set by most of the English editors of the history, omitting many of the more tedious moral passages...'); *Llyfr V, VI a VII* (1928-30, in the *Prifffordd Llên* series); *Ymarferion Cymraeg* (1934); *Straeon y Cymry: Chwedlau Gwerin* (1935); *Gwyr Eifionydd* (1953) and *Tomos Prys of Plas Iolyn (1564?-1634)* (1964, a bilingual booklet to celebrate St David's Day in the schools). (As stated in his preface to *Straeon y Cymry*, he received generous bibliographical assistance from his friend **Robert (Bob) Owen**, Croesor when he was researching the sources of the folk-tales which he included in the volume. He dedicated it in memory of his father, who had died two years previously, for 'his enduring effort and untiring care'. Again, he thanks **Bob Owen** in his preface to *Gwyr Eifionydd* 'for many facts about several of the characters'.) He contributed to the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* and published occasional articles on educational, historical and literary subjects in *Cymru*, *Lleufer*, *Y Beirniad*, *Y Drysorfa*, *Y Genhinen*, *Y Goleuad*, *Yr Athro* (y Gyfres Gyntaf) and *Yr Haul*. It is of interest to note that the form 'Rowland' rather than 'Rowlands' appears on the majority of his publications. Omitting the 's', no doubt, was his attempt at making his surname sound more Welsh. However, the more Anglicised form 'Rowlands' appears on his birth certificate and gravestone.

Wales- its history, language and literature - was all important to him. His aim was to safeguard the best educational standards and to impart his learning to others, children and adults alike, in the most effective and in as interesting a way as possible. According to Marged Pritchard (née Thomas), another former pupil of his at Porthmadog, he was 'a gifted and learned teacher, human and pleasant at the same time'. He possessed a sweet tenor voice and on occasions would sing the old Welsh tunes, old sea songs and old ballads in his lessons, and especially in Porthmadog county school's annual socials, much to the enjoyment of his pupils. He was recorded by the Welsh Folk Museum three times, and some of the songs (a number were stable-loft songs) sung by him were later released, first on cassette and then on C.D. As a native of Pen Llŷn William Rowland took pride in the culture and in the rural and maritime heritage of that region. His broadcasts on Welsh folk-tales during the 1930s were well-received and later, during his long retirement, he had much pleasure in sharing his reminiscences of Llŷn and his knowledge of folk-songs, old ballads etc. in occasional entertaining radio talks. He also became an authority on the literary tradition of Eifionydd, especially from about the end of the 18c. to the days of **Eliseus Williams** ('Eifion Wyn'). Welsh drama was also a special interest of his; he was the first producer of Cwmni Drama Dyffryn Madog which won the first prize in a competition in the National Eisteddfod in Liverpool in 1929.

As expected, he was amongst the earliest members of the Caernarfonshire Historical Society when it was founded in 1938. Likewise, he was among the founders in 1943 of Clwb Dafydd y Garreg Wen, a Welsh cultural, non-denominational and non-political club in Porthmadog; he served as its permanent president from the beginning until his death. He was chairman of the executive committee of the National Eisteddfod Pwllheli, 1955. He was also one of the founders of the Caernarfonshire Rural Community Council in the late 1930s, and after many years of service (he was hon. general secretary for a while with **Bob Owen**, Croesor, as organiser), he was made one of the hon. presidents of the new Gwynedd Rural Community Council in 1974. He served as a member of the Caernarfonshire education committee during 1946-74 and gave his ardent support to the county's Record Office from its establishment in 1947. He was for a time president of the Llŷn and Eifionydd Presbytery, and president of the Porthmadog Rotary Club. He served Tabernacl (C.M.) chapel, Porthmadog, faithfully for years as elder (from 1934 until his death), treasurer and Sunday school teacher. Besides his scholarly, literary and musical interests, it should be noted also that he was a keen gardener and angler; he was hon. president of both the Porthmadog Gardening Club and the Glaslyn Angling Society.

He married on 7 April 1923 Grace Williams (she died 16 May 1990) of Tonpentre, Glamorganshire, who had been a domestic science teacher at Abersychan. A son and daughter were born to them, Ifor and Menna. William Rowland was highly respected locally and beyond; he was a genial and popular person. He died on 29 December 1979 at 92 years of age at Bron y Garth Hospital, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd, and his remains were cremated at Bangor on 2 January 1980, following a public service held at Tabernacl chapel, Porthmadog. His ashes were interred at Minffordd cemetery, near Penrhyndeudraeth.

Author

Arwyn Lloyd Hughes

Sources

William Rowland Papers in The National Library of Wales

tapes 1550, 2220-21 and 4635 in National History Museum, St Fagan's, recorded in 1967, 1969 and 1975

family information given by his grand-daughter, Ms Lynn Schindler, Welwyn Garden City, Herts., and his great-niece, Mrs Beti Williams, Bala (formerly of Rhiw, near Aberdaron)

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Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol, viii (1929), 124-25

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A photograph of him appears in *Rhaglen y Dydd*, Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Pwllheli, 1955

Additional Links

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