

MEMORIALS IN HOLY CROSS CHURCH

The Walters memorial

There are only two large wall-memorials in the church which are written in Latin, and incidentally, there are none written in Welsh. One of the two Latin memorials is to two Walters brothers (though as Latin has no letter W, the name is written Gualter). These were two of the five sons of Revd John Walters, the rector of Llandough, and a man of great interest in his own right. It is because of John Walters that Cowbridge has the honour of being the home of the first Welsh dictionary, because he was the man who wrote it, had it printed in parts, and who had the first few parts printed by Rhys Thomas, the Cowbridge printer, in 1770. Revd John Walters was also a close friend of Iolo Morganwg.

Two of his sons, John and Daniel, became headmasters of Cowbridge School; another, Henry, became a printer but developed into a recluse and was known as the Cowbridge hermit. The two who are commemorated in Cowbridge church are Daniel and William. The latter died in his twentieth year, and of him we know little; but of Daniel we have a great deal of information.

He was born in 1762 and - like his brothers - was brought up in Llandough, in the house which is now called The Cottage, that elegant Georgian house in the hollow, the first house in the village when arriving from St Mary Church. He went to school in Cowbridge as a day-boy and was assiduous in keeping a diary, some of which has been preserved. This diary for 1777 - 1778 gives us a picture of some of the schoolwork that had to be completed, the pastimes of youth, and events in the town.

Latin reading and composition - both during school time and in the holidays - were important elements of Daniel's education. School was held in the morning and the evening, but there were frequent holidays, both for saints' days and also if someone had requested a 'play-day'. Daniel enjoyed playing hand-ball, probably against the wall of the school, and seemed to do this for money; having lost the not inconsiderable sum of nine pence in August 1777, he resolved not to play again for the month. He also played bando, a form of hockey, went swimming, fishing and shooting, and was, at least during the period recorded in his diary, very keen on gardening. He also built himself a boat to sail on the Thaw at Llandough; it sank. Daniel also records fairs, the assizes, balls and the arrival of traders in the town.

Around this time, his growing interest in poetry was encouraged by his brother John at Oxford, and was stimulated by his friendship with Iolo Morganwg. Iolo gave him verses which he himself had written - on 'Ffynnon y Crable in Beauper Wood' - and they then walked together to look at the ffynnon or spring. Daniel then wrote to his brother ". . . the bard and me talking of a grotto or something of that nature, which we intended making somewhere in the woods, for the purpose of drinking a dish of tea, or a bowl of punch now and then". Later he dedicated a poem to Iolo, in which he expressed his gratitude for the latter's friendship, wisdom and philosophy. A fair amount of Daniel Walters's poetry has survived; it is considered that he was great poet in the making.

Daniel left school in 1780 and became a teacher at Norwich School; his older brother John had earlier gone up to Jesus College, Oxford, and became headmaster of Cowbridge School in 1783. At that time, Daniel was made perpetual curate of Talygarn (a post to be held later by the Revd Francis

Taynton) and under-master at Cowbridge School. When John Walters left Cowbridge in 1784, after only one year as headmaster, to become head of Ruthin School in north Wales, it was Daniel who succeeded him. He was a successful head, enhanced the reputation of the school and increased pupil numbers, and also saw to repairs and extensions to the building (which was of course the cottage-like precursor to the present building in Church Street). Sadly, he died of TB in 1787, after less than three years as headmaster.

It was his grieving and loving father, Revd John Walters senior, who had the plaque to the two brothers erected in Cowbridge church. The father unsuccessfully applied to become the next headmaster, but as we have seen the post went to Thomas Williams, and Revd John Walters continued as rector of Llandough until his death there in 1797.

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