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Jeff Alden,
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Our Ref.: RM/EN1

Your Ref.:

Date: 15 October 2001

Dear Mr Alden,

I have received a personal enquiry from a friend in Montgomeryshire Dr Glyn Tegai Hughes, [REDACTED], which *inter alia* requests help with a research matter. Dr Hughes is attempting to discover more about the school career of Islwyn (William Thomas) (1832-78), educated (in part) in Cowbridge, and is due to publish a book (in Welsh) on him very shortly. I enclose a copy of the entry from *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* relating to Islwyn. Is it possible that you or someone in the Cowbridge & District Local History Society knows a little more about Islwyn and the history of education in Cowbridge? Dr Hughes suspects that Islwyn attended the Eagle Academy in Cowbridge; I quote him in translation:

"A teacher was paid to teach Latin and Greek to him. Afterwards, according to the testimony of his sister, he went to the 'old grammar school', Cowbridge, as a boarding scholar, it seems, either in the school itself or, when the number of pupils increased, in an outside lodging house. It is very difficult to guess when he was there, though one can be fairly certain that he had left before the 1851 census' (and:)

"In an article in *Ceninen Gŵyl Dewi 1902*, Cynwyd Thomas suggests that Islwyn went from the school in Newport 'to a school in Cowbridge, which was kept by Mr Lewis'. One cannot be certain who followed the first masters Thomas Williams, who died in 1839 aged 81, and Thomas Rhys, who died in 1851; but it is quite likely that it was William Lewis because he is listed as a schoolmaster in the Eagle Academy at least between 1861 and 1879. We see further on, when discussing complimentary copies of the booklet *Barddoniaeth*, a little evidence to strengthen the argument in favour of the Eagle."

[Llawdden, ie. David Howell, 1831-1903, Dean Howell in later years. According to Gwenallt in *Y Bywgraffiadur*, he went to 'Eagle School', Cowbridge. If this is true, the following note with it in 1899 tends to strengthen the supposition that Islwyn was also there. The heading of the note is 'Peredur' but he does not give his proper name and I have not succeeded in come across it:

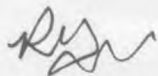
Four of us started about the same time, and we were warm friends, namely Islwyn, Cuhelyn [Thomas Gwallter Price 1829-69] an, Peredur, and the secretary. Dear Islwyn went up to the heights, like an eagle defying the sun, leaving the rest of us creeping fearfully in the shadow of the great birds, namely Nefydd, Ioan Emlyn, Cynddelw, and all others who were dwelling on the mountains of Gwent.]"

Dr Hughes is aware that the Glamorgan Record Office holds a number of school exercise books of William Mathew of Ystradowen 1816, 1817, and 1819, and his sons John Mathew 1850, James

Mathew 1855 and 1858 and Charles Mathew 1857, who attended the Eagle Academy, Cowbridge, and evidently hoped that the later books may contain a mention of Islwyn. I have looked at these but they have nothing to add and I have written to him to inform him of this. I have looked at *Cowbridge Buildings & People. Sources and References* (Cowbridge Record Society 2000) but, as you know, the history of the Academy is a little obscure. I have also checked a list of the Grammar School pupils which you have compiled, and Islwyn is not there. I am aware that the Eagle Academy was once of considerable importance since I have seen a mention recently of a prominent Nonconformist minister who attended the school.

I am sure Dr Hughes would be grateful of any help you can give.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Morgan', written in a cursive style.

Richard Morgan,
Archivist

THOMAS

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19th October 2001

Dear Richard,

Islwyn (William Thomas)

Thank you for your letter RM/EN1 of 15th October.

I had always 'understood' that Islwyn had attended the *Eagle Academy* in Cowbridge, but have been unable to find any confirmation of that. One exercise book of the *Eagle*, the property of Charles Sandland, is now with his family in Australia, and I will write to see if there are any mentions of fellow-pupils in that book. You can inform Dr Glyn Tegai Hughes, however, that William Lewis was certainly the teacher at the *Eagle Academy* in 1851 ("teacher of reading, arithmetic, &c" in the Census, #1).

The mention of a teacher for Latin and Greek, and then that his sister had said that he had attended 'the old grammar school' at Cowbridge as a boarder would suggest a link with CGS. At the time of the 1851 census, the boarders were living in the town, as the school was still being rebuilt. The list of scholars in 54 High Street does include an 18-year-old William Thomas, but he was apparently born in Beaumaris in Anglesey. As Dr Hughes suggests, we could be pretty sure that Islwyn would have left before the Census date. A fairly rapid skim through all the census details of Cowbridge and Llanblethian in 1851 did not throw up any 19-year-old William Thomases from Ynysddu.

Not a great deal of help, I'm afraid - but should I have any success with the Australian enquiry, or should I find out any more, I will contact you.

On a linked matter, perhaps you would like to add these census details to the D/D Cow/ 67 list I had compiled earlier?

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Jeff Alden

THOMAS, WILLIAM (Islwyn; 1832-78), Calvinistic Methodist minister, and poet; b. 3 April 1832 at Tŷ'r Agent near Ynys-ddu, a village in the Sirhowy valley, Mon. His two brothers, David Thomas and John Thomas, were surveyors and engineers and Islwyn began to learn the rudiments of their profession, but his brother-in-law, the Rev. D. Jenkyns ('Jenkyns y Babell') saw that he had the making of a preacher and he was sent to schools at Tredegar, Newport, and Cowbridge, and to Dr. Evan Davies's (1826-72) (q.v.) academy at Swansea. At Swansea he fell in love with a young girl, Ann Bowen, but before they could be married she died, and this profoundly affected both his life and his poetry. At the Twyncarno (Rhymney) monthly meeting, 3 and 4 Jan. 1854, a request was received from Babell chapel that William Thomas be allowed to preach and at the monthly meeting held at Gelli Groes, 16 Aug. 1854, after the usual probation, permission was given 'to begin preaching according to the normal dispensation.' He was ordained in 1859, but never had charge of a church. In 1864 he m. Martha, daughter of William Davies, who had m. the widowed mother of Ann Bowen; they lived at 'Green Meadow' near Babell chapel until, in 1871, he built 'Y Glyn' for himself and his wife. According to Daniel Davies (1840-1916) (q.v.), Islwyn 'edited the *Cylchgrawn*, the *Ymgeisydd*, the *Glorian*, the *Gwladgarwr*, and the poetry columns of the *Baner* and *Cardiff Times*,' but it is difficult to know how much truth there is in this. At any rate, he edited the Welsh column in the *Cardiff Times*, and Glasynys (Owen Wynne Jones, q.v.) and he were leader writers for the *Glorian*, but it was Llew Llwyfo (Lewis William Lewis (q.v.) who was appointed its editor. Islwyn d. 20 Nov. 1878, and was buried in Babell chapel burial-ground.

Islwyn was taught poetry by Gwilym Ildid and Ancurin Fardd (q.v.), and there were at that time several literary circles in Monmouthshire, particularly at Abergavenny. He constantly competed in the eisteddfodau—for the most part unsuccessfully. In 1853 he won the prize at Cefn-coed-y-cymer eisteddfod for a poem, 'Abraham yn aberthu Isaac,' and another at the last eisteddfod of the Abergavenny Cymreigyddion Society for an elegy on Carnhuanawc; he won the chair at Rhyl eisteddfod, 1870, for his *awdl*, 'Y Nos'; at Holyhead, 1872, for an *awdl*, 'Moses'; at Caerphilly, 1874, for an *awdl*, 'Cartref'; and at Treherbert, 1877, for an *awdl*, 'Y Nefoedd.' He never succeeded in winning the chair at the national eisteddfod, although he competed for it on many occasions. Towards the end of his life he formed the opinion that his urge for competing had caused him to neglect the preaching of the gospel.

His books and collected works were: *Barddoniaeth, gan Islwyn*, 1854; *Ymweliad y Doethion a Bethlehem. Y bryddest fuddugol yn Eisteddfod Ivorraidd Llanelli*, 1867 (Aberdare, 1871); *Caniadau gan Islwyn* (Wrexham, undated); *Pregethau y Parch. William Thomas (Islwyn). Gan y Parch. Edward Matthews*, 1896; *Awdl ar y Nefoedd*, 1878?; *Cymru, gan Islwyn* (Cyfres Blodau'r Grug, undated); *Islwyn, pigion o'i waith*, 1897; *Islwyn* (Llyfrau Urdd y Delyn, 1897); *Gwaith Barddonol Islwyn* (Owen M. Edwards), 1897; *Gwaith Islwyn* (Cyfres y Fil, 1903); *Perlau Awen Islwyn, gan J. M. Edwards*, 1909; *Islwyn's English Poems*, 1913.

Dyfed, *Oriau gydag Islwyn*, 1901; W. J. Gruffydd, *Islwyn, Darlith Goffa Islwyn*, 1942; D. Gwenallt Jones, *Bywyd a Gwaith Islwyn* ('Cyfres Pobun,' no. xvii); T. H. Parry-Williams, *Islwyn, Detholion o'i Farddoniaeth* (Univ. of Wales), 1948; N.L.W. MSS. 1064, 2340, 3191-7, 3292, 4500, 5876, 5878.

D.G.I.