

JOHN WALTERS - LEXICOGRAPHER.

Kneeling down in a dusty corner of one of Richard Booth's book havens at Hay-on-Wye, my eyes fell upon an old dictionary in two volumes. How long had these been hidden and unnoticed in this corner, I wondered, as I rescued them from being a feast to moths and bookworms. They were on the shelves forgotten, just as John Walters who compiled the dictionary lies forgotten in Llandough Church, near Cowbridge. No headstone marks the spot where he was buried in the Church yard and I searched in vain for any memorial in the Church itself.

Yet, it was whilst he was Rector of Llandough that John Walters compiled his magnum opus - The English Welsh dictionary.

Indeed he was one of the great men of Glamorgan in the 18th Century. He compiled the dictionary in order to give Welsh writers an adequate vocabulary to treat all subjects in the brave new World of the 18th century. It was a great achievement and scores of words formed in his house - The Cottage at Llandough - are today an essential part of the Welsh language.

The dictionary was one of the major scholarly productions of the period in Wales and one of the largest books published in Wales in the 18th Century. It is interesting to note the full title of the Dictionary:-

"An English and Welsh Dictionary wherein not only the words, but also the idioms and phraseology of the English language, are carefully translated into Welsh, by proper and equivalent words and phrases with a regular interspersion of the English proverbs and proverbial expressions, ranged in their alphabetical order and rendered by corresponding ones in the Welsh tongue".

This monumental English - Welsh dictionary was published in parts at Cowbridge and finally at London between 1770 and 1794. In order to get it published, John Walters was instrumental in establishing at Cowbridge the first printing press in Glamorgan in order that he could over-see the production.

Parts I - XIV were published between 1770 and 1783 bringing the work down to the word "Stain" on page 1344. Nothing was then published for 10 years owing to the numerous difficulties which affected the printing press.

The letters between John Walters and his friend, Owain Myfyr - a London Welshman - are very interesting in tracing the difficulties of the output of the printing press at Cowbridge. These letters are preserved in the British Museum and the National Museum of Wales.

Part VIII appeared in March 1774 and part IX should have appeared at the end of the year but Rhys Thomas, the printer, was involved in a law-suit in London. In 1777 the bailiffs were in the printing office. It is assumed that the Rector bought the press but things did not improve although John Walters' son, Henry, was now in charge of the printing. Part XIV was the last part to be printed at Cowbridge because towards the end of 1783 Rhys Thomas' affairs reached their ultimate crises and he was imprisoned at Bristol for debt. He died in 1790 and was buried at Llandough Church. In 1791 the press was sold to John Bird of Cardiff for 77 guineas.

In 1774, Owain Myfyr began distributing parts of the dictionary in and around London and in 1794, Owain had the rest of the dictionary printed at his own expense in London for £36.16.6d. So after a quarter of a century the work was complete.

John Walters was now an old man and in bad health. His spirit was saddened by the loss of his three most able sons. It is said that they were among the most brilliant pupils who had ever been at the Cowbridge Grammar School. He had five sons in all, John, Daniel, Henry, William and Lewis.

John, is known to literary historians because among the books he published when he was a student at Jesus College, Oxford, was an anthology of English verse in 1780 and translations of some of the odes of the Cogynefeirdd. He died a young man of 29.

Daniel kept a diary at the age of 15 which gives us a good insight into the life of a Clergyman and his family in the Vale in the 18th century. Copies of parts of this diary are in the National Museum of Wales. Daniel was also a Poet and having studied at Jesus College, Oxford, he was appointed headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School in 1785. He died in 1787 at the age of 25.

John, Daniel and William died young. Henry's business as a printer was a failure and as he grew older he became more and more a hermit. He spent his time sitting in filth and meditating among the books and papers of his father and brothers. Lewis, the youngest son was rather simple and spent his time roaming about the district like a tramp.

It is sad therefore that the three most brilliant of John Walters' sons died before the completion of the dictionary and nothing brings this home more poignantly than John Walters' own words in the preface to his dictionary:

"I hoped - but often - how vain are the hopes of man! - I hoped, that, when I should have finished my wearisome task, I should have the happiness to enjoy that high gratification, which none but a father can fully conceive, the approbation and applause of my dear sons; the prospect of which had cherished and supported me in the tedious prosecution; and which I would have deemed more than a sufficient reward for all the pains I have taken and fatigue I have undergone, had Heaven been pleased to have spared their lives to the period of the work - early, ardent and successful in the pursuit of knowledge, the universality of their acquaintance with literature was far beyond what most would have expected from years so few; and their judgement critical, exact and such as is not frequently found in maturer age and experience - as often as I consulted them upon any difficult point (and that was not seldom in the course of the Undertaking). I received their modest, yet decisive answers with heartfelt pleasure -

with parental exultation - with resistless conviction of their being well founded. As many as had an opportunity of knowing them, and were competent judges of their various literary abilities, will have no difficulty in admitting this voluntary attestation to their merits, and every parent in similar circumstances, if any such there be, will, I presume to hope, readily pardon the digression.

"Adieu, dear Shades! accept, fraternal Band,
This last, sad tribute from a Father's hand"

Thus the great lexicographer of The Vale dedicated his dictionary to his dead sons.

V.G.



THE COTTAGE - LLANDOUGH

The fortunes of the Walters family make a very sad story. The father, the Rev. John Walters, M.A., was at one time rector of Llandough and St. Marychurch, and Master of Cowbridge Free School, a man of extensive learning, an excellent Welsh scholar, and the author of several valuable works. His family consisted of five sons, all of whom reached manhood, and on whom he bestowed an excellent education. But two only survived him—Lewis, the youngest and half-witted, and Henry, the elder with his hermit eccentricities. Both were said to have shown in youth great mental promise, and to have been brought to the state in which they were for many years known to the inhabitants by the severe studies imposed upon them by their father. The other sons distinguished themselves at Oxford, and had been made headmasters of two of the best grammar schools in the Principality at that time; but they died very young, long before their father.

Mr Walters left behind him little or no property, and at his death his sons removed to Cowbridge, to subsist upon the slender income offered them by some clerical charity and the slight benevolence of the neighbouring gentry. Henry lived alone in his small house in a lane. Lewis lived in lodgings provided for him by those who saw to the laying out of his share of the pittance, but came daily to attend his strange tempered but perfectly sane brother, who kept him in great subjection. It is said that for many years before he died Henry never went to bed, never washed himself, had no clothes on save a large flannel wrapper bought him by his friends, and worn till it hung in tatters. He allowed his beard to grow and hair to remain uncut, and the dirt and dust of years covered everything in the house. The furniture in his room was scanty, consisting of an arm-chair which he occupied day and night, a table, and a stool were nearly all it could boast of, beyond a curtain which he could draw round a portion of his room and screen himself from the gaze of a visitor or the unpleasantness of a draught. In the back part of the room was a heap of books and papers carelessly thrown about the floor, and from which he sometimes selected one for reading. After his death, "Felix Farley's Bristol Journal," for several years, was found in the house, every copy unopened! Upstairs there were more books, old china, and lumber, all thickly coated with the pervading dust. Yet this man, dirt and dust encased as we see him, was most marvelously particular as to the cleanliness of all he ate. His table, though the wood of the greater part of it could not be seen for dirt, was at the spot where his plate was laid polished as brightly as possible. Lewis Walters, the last of the family, died at Cowbridge in 1844. His father brought the first printing press to Glamorganshire, in order to print his English-Welsh Dictionary and other works, in 1770.

Old Vicar Pritchard's MSS.

We are told in the Memoirs of Vicar Pritchard, published at Llandovery in 1867, that Mr Rees Thomas, the printer, took with him, when he removed his press from Llandovery and Caermarthen to Cowbridge, the whole of the papers left by the "Old Vicar," having published several of the first editions of that popular Welsh work, "Canwyll y Cymry." We are also told that Mr Rees, of Ton, was only three months too late to save these traditional cartloads of papers, including those of the Rev. Rbys Pritchard and those of the industrious Rector of Llandough from the flames. The unfortunate part of the business was that Mr Walters had not thought fit to name some one who knew the value of these papers as his literary executor, knowing as he did that those of his own family who survived him would not care to be burdened with so much lumber.

We have had two different stories from people who remembered seeing the bonfire which was made of the whole of the papers left by Mr Walters. One night soon after his death they were carted away to the top of the Stallingdown Hill and there burnt in a heap. The other story is much to the same purport, only differing as to the place where the papers and lumber were burnt. The other tale which I have heard was that they were carted to a place called Waen y Gaer, and burnt, and that only an oil portrait of the Rev. J. Walters was rescued from the flames. Many years after this portrait was hung up on the wall in a certain public-house called "Ship Aground." It was so little valued by its owner that it had been stuck into the frame head downwards. Poor demented Lewis Walters was then alive, and by chance went into this tavern. He recognised his father's portrait on the wall, and had sense enough to be indignant at the small respect paid to it. The people present pacified him by restoring the portrait to its proper position.

"How did Mrs Slugger succeed in solving her husband's brutal disposition?" "She soaked him."

Nangle: "I hear there was a disturbance at th' meeting last night." Plummery: "Ye heard wrong thin; for when M'Gowan hit th' chairman in the eye we threw him out o' th' windy, an' that stopped all trouble. Oh, no, everything was harmonys an' quiet."

WALTERS, Daniel

1777-8 - 1780

2nd son of Rev John Walters of Mansel.

Kept diary 1777-8

Went from CGS to Norwich School as under-master

(HM Jan 1785 - 1787

IDD 56-63

1783 Came back as undermaster at CGS to
brother; + benefice of Talysgraw.

d. 24 Aug 1787 JTB

120.

WALTERS Henry

1777 (apt 11).

Son of Rev John Walters of Mansel &
bro of Daniel & John.

IDD 61

WALTERS, JOHN (1721-97), cleric and lexicographer; b. 22 Aug. 1721, son of John Walters, timber merchant, Llanedi, Carmar. His parents died when he was a young lad. He went to Bassaleg, Mon., as schoolmaster, and afterwards was a pupil at Cowbridge grammar school. He then went to Margam to keep a school and, in 1750, was ordained. He was curate at Margam and afterwards received the perpetual curacy of Llanfihangel Ynys Afan. He remained there until 1759 when he became rector of Llandough, near Cowbridge, and vicar of S. Hilary. In 1795 he was given a prebend in Llandaff cathedral. He d. 1 June 1797, and was buried at Llandough. He had five sons, two of whom, John (q.v.) and Daniel, attained considerable eminence as poets and scholars.

It was probably John Walters who persuaded Rhys Thomas, printer (q.v.), to set up at Cowbridge the first printing press in Glamorgan. He published *A Dissertation on the Welsh Language*, 1771, and *Dwy Bregeth*, 1772, but his chief work

was the large English-Welsh dictionary. This was based on the unpublished dictionary of William Gambold (q.v.), but Walters was assiduous in collecting material of all kinds. The work was printed at the Cowbridge press, part one appearing on 5 April 1770. Fourteen parts were issued between 1770 and 1783, but the remainder could not be printed until 1794, when Owen Jones (Owain Myfyr, q.v.) arranged for the work to be completed in London. Walters coined a large number of words which have become established in the Welsh vocabulary, and he sought to show how to translate English idioms into Welsh. Two editions were published during the last century and this was the work which Daniel Silvan Evans (q.v.) had at his elbow when he was compiling his English-Welsh dictionary.

Em. W.; Emw. F.; D.N.B.; Ifano Jones, Hist. of Printing and Printers in Wales, 85-9.

WALTERS, John

1777

1st son of Rev^d John Walters of Madagh.
 Jesus Oxford 1 Dec 1777. 1780 scholar, & sub-librarian of Bodleian
 H72 1783-4. Curate of Cowbridge, ~~sub-librarian of~~
 Talysan (IDD 63.)
 1784 H72 of Ruthin School, Denbigh. d. 1789

WALTERS, JOHN (1760-89), cleric, poet, and scholar; b. 11 June 1760 at Llandough, eldest son of John Walters (q.v.), rector of Llandough. He was educated at Cowbridge grammar school. He matriculated as of Jesus College, Oxford, in 1777, and graduated B.A. in 1781, M.A. 1784. He was sub-librarian in the Bodleian Library. In 1783 he was appointed headmaster of Cowbridge grammar school, becoming also curate at Cowbridge. Towards the end of 1784 he was appointed headmaster of Ruthin grammar school; a little later he became rector of Efenechtyd, where he d. 28 June 1789. He won some prominence as a poet (in English), and when he was a student at Jesus College he published *Poems with Notes*, 1780. It is clear that his father had caused him to become interested in Welsh studies, and in 1782 he published metrical translations of some old Welsh poems — *Translated Specimens of Welsh Poetry*. He

attracted the attention of some London Welshmen, and, after the death of Richard Thomas (1753-80) (q.v.) he was persuaded to publish the poems of Llywarch Hen, with a translation into English. Part of this translation appeared in Warrington, *The History of Wales*, 1788. Walters gave Edward Jones (Bardd y Brenin, q.v.) some notes to be included in the introduction to his *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards*, 1784. Letters of the time show that London Welshmen looked upon Walters as a young scholar who might be able to further their plans. He published other works, among them being an edition of Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*.

Em. W.; Emw. F.; Not. W.