

The Rev. John Walters of Llandough - *two articles under 'Welsh Tit Bits' by Cadrawd, 1893*

There is no-one to whom Wales is more indebted than to the late Mr Walters, M.A., rector of Llandough. He was a sound & able divine, an excellent classical scholar, a poet of much genius & a lexicographer of the first rank. Of course, it is upon his Welsh-English Dictionary that his fame rests. That great undertaking took him all the best years of his life to produce, and indeed was not completed until he was ready to sink to his rest. The dictionary, independent of its intrinsic value, is more valued in Glamorgan because it is the first book ever printed in the said county. The printer, Mr Rees Thomas, was a Carmarthenshire man, who before the time he removed to Cowbridge had tried his success as a printer at Llandovery, & had failed. He came to Cowbridge....burdened with debt & a law suit of some sort hanging over him, sufficient to bring him down to the ground. His first & great job at Cowbridge was the printing of Mr Walters's dictionary, which was commenced in the year 1770. In the year 1777, the bailiffs seized his press, & Mr Walters had to buy the press & stock-in-trade in the hope of completing the printing of the dictionary. In the latter hope he was sadly disappointed, for when the work had reached the 12th part, which ended with the word 'Rampired' in 1780, there was a complete collapse, & Mr Thomas died. He is buried in a nameless grave at Llandough, record being made of the burial in the parish register by Mr Walters himself. Under the influence of Iolo Morganwg, Owen Myfyr now stepped forward & put his shoulder to the wheel. The printing of the remaining portion of the dictionary was done in London, & it was 14 years before the end was reached, which accounts for the date 1794 being on the title page of the first edition. A second edition was issued in 1815, & a third in 1828.

The catalogue of the British Museum Library shows that the following printed works of his are in the National Collection :-

Dwy Bregeth ar Ezeq, XXXIII, 2; An Ode to Humanity; An English & Welsh Dictionary; A Dissertation on the Welsh Language.

The late Mr David Jones of Wallington has written a short biography of Mr Walters, a summary of which we shall give here.

'John Walters was born in a small farmhouse called "Y Fforest", in the parish of Llanedi, Carmarthenshire, in August 1721. The parish register records the baptism of John, the son of John Walters, on the 22nd of August in that year. He was educated at Oxford, and shortly after taking his B.A. degree took orders. In 1753 he was located at Margam, but whether as curate of the parish or as a tutor or chaplain in the Talbot family, the writer has no evidence to determine. Whatever position he occupied there it was one which secured him the friendship of the Talbots, and that friendship seemed to have been preserved through life. He was a fine Welsh scholar, & his diction is considered to be remarkably pure & chaste. Mr Walters was presented to the rectory of Llandough in 1759, & it would seem that immediately upon his obtaining this preferment he married'. D.J.'s MSS.

How Mr Walters came to devote himself to the task of writing the dictionary may be best learnt from what he tells us of the matter in the preface. He had acquired either by gift or purchase the MSS. Of the Rev. John Gambold, who had for many years been working upon a dictionary. Mr Gambold's labours had been talked of & much had been hoped from this very renowned Welsh scholar. It seemed almost like a national loss that all this labour upon a work so much desired should be thrown away, & Mr Walters hoped that if the MSS. Came into his hands, a little editing & possibly

a few editions would be all they would require to make them ready for publication. This proved to be a vain dream. Mr Gambold had not worked systematically; his MSS. had serious blanks in them, & worse than all his scholarship was so defective that much of his prepared work was valueless. In the end Mr Walters found that the work, or his task, would have been lightened had he never been burdened with the Gambold MSS. The only good effect that they had was to turn Mr Walters's attention to that particular study, & to arouse his interest in it.

There is a very interesting series of letters in the British Museum Library which passed between Mr Walters & that patriotic Welshman (to whom we owe the collection & publication of the 'Myfyrian Archaeology') Mr Owen Jones, 'Myfyr', a most liberal-handed London merchant, to whose energy it is that the Welsh & English Dictionary was at last brought to completion.

The Rev. John Walters the Younger.

He received his early education at Cowbridge, passing on to Oxford where he was a scholar at Jesus College, sub-librarian at the Bodleian, & having taken his B.A. degree was elected fellow of his college. Having entered into Holy Orders, he was speedily appointed to the mastership of Cowbridge School. This position he held but a short time; the better appointment of Ruthyn presented itself & he accepted it. Preferment came quickly, & he was soon after made rector of Evenechydd, near Ruthin, but his enjoyment of it all was short. He died 28th June 1789 & was buried at Evenechydd.

Daniel Walters, second son of Mr Walters of Llandough, was, it is said, even more talented than his elder brother, & his educational course followed that of his brother; but it does not appear that he gained a fellowship at his college. However, in 1785 he was appointed (at three-and-twenty) to the mastership of Cowbridge School as successor to his brother. He died 24th August 1787 at the early age of 25, & is buried at Cowbridge. the 'Bristol Gazette' of September 13th 1787 has the following obituary notice :- 'On the 24th ult., died at Cowbridge in the 25th year of his age, the Rev. Daniel Walters, master of the Free Grammar School there. Learning and abilities so extensive are seldom connected with years so few.'

Cardiff Times, 15th April 1893

William Walter's, the rector of Llandough's fourth son, appears to have been a youth of great promise. He died at Cowbridge in the 20th year of his age. His name the reader will find mentioned in the following entries from a diary which his brother, Daniel Walters, kept when a Cowbridge school boy, 1777-1778. This book was carefully bound up in a small volume, but it appears to have been now lost. However, we are indebted to the late Mr Jones of Wallington for the preservation of some of the interesting entries in it; and brief as these fragments are, the story they tell is almost as interesting as if they had been from the daily journal of one of the family of 'The Vicar of Wakefield'. They present a charming simple picture of the domestic life of a Welsh country clergyman in the last century. On the first page of the book, which has been carefully ruled into separate spaces for each day, the following title was written : '*A Daily Journal made by Daniel Walters in the year of our Lord 1778*'.

May 1777 Thursday, 1st May – A Holyday. Mrs Jones of Boverton dined with us & drank tea, together with Mr Rees of Llysworney.

Friday – At school. Came home in the evening and heard the newspaper. Mr Edwards of the Golden Mile drank tea with us.

Saturday – At school in the morning. Played ball and got 4 pence. My father bought a horse of Edward of How Mill.

Sunday – Was at church in the morning and evening. Heard the newspaper.

Monday, 5th. – At school in the morning. Were dismissed at eleven o'clock, it being Cowbridge Fair. Sold our horse for 6 guineas.

Tuesday – At school. *Que virtus quantuning boni sit vivere.*

Wednesday – At School.

Thursday – a holyday. Went to Cowbridge with the horse to be shod. Play'd ball; fell down and hurt my knee.

Friday – At school; were removed to the second class and H.L to the first. Were tasked, and broke up at 3 in the afternoon. Miss Nancy Morgan drank tea with us.

Saturday – Went to Cowbridge in the morning. Played ball; came home *sera nocti*.

Sunday – Was at church in the morning. Heard the newspaper read.

Wednesday, 14th. – To the printers (*Mr Rees Thomas at Cowbridge*) to seize their goods (*with H. the bailiff*). Mrs Thomas, after sending C. backwards and forwards many times, came, with tears in her eyes, to entreat my father to come to Cowbridge. He went, and all the goods being appraised bought them.

Thursday – My father went to St Mary Church to marry a couple. The stupid bridegroom, in pulling of his glove, tore it to pieces. It thundered terribly, which was accompanied with much rain.

Friday – John Evans bought two cows. Jack Davies came to look at the globes, and drank tea with us. Edward Williams called to see us.

Saturday – Went with Edward to Cowbridge to assist in driving one of the cows to J.E. Came home through the rain.

Friday, 23rd. My brother H. took a nest with three young ones. My father made me go with him to carry it back.

ANNO DOMINI 1778 Thursday, January 1st – At Llanvihangel. Go a-shooting with Mr Franklin and Tommy. Tommy kills one bird and I kill three. The harper plays during dinner and all the evening; Tommy jigs. Mr F- gives me half a crown. Come home *sero vespere*. My father and mother drink tea at Mrs Morgan's.

Tuesday, 27th. – At school in the morning, have a play-day in the evening, given us by Mr Thomas of Pwll-y-wrach, on account of the Mountebanks exhibiting here. Catch cold by standing to see the Mountebanks. Came home with Mr Hopkins, who drank tea and sups with us.

Saturday, April 11th. – At School. Go to the river for the first time this year. The judges come to town. The assizes for the county of Glamorgan were held in Cardiff twice in the year from 1730 to 1759. From 1760 on to about 1789 they were held chiefly at Cowbridge. The house between the 'Cross' and the 'Greyhound' used to be known as the judge's lodgings. It was a tradition in Cowbridge that

the immediate cause of the assizes being removed was the impertinence of Mrs Bates, the landlady of the 'Bear', who had a most unbridled tongue, and took upon herself to deliver a charge to the judge, which he did not stand. He fled, and took the assizes with him

In an old guide of the last century there are some adverse comments upon the reception accorded to travellers at the principal inns at Cowbridge. It winds up with :- 'If signs are emblems of what landlords are, How like is B—ley to his Bear!'

D.J.'s MSS.

Cardiff Times, 22nd April 1893

1909, 17th July *In writing about Cowbridge characters, 'Cadrawd' reports - 'we are going to introduce to the reader Lewis Walters, a tall, gaunt figure with an amazing appetite, his hermit brother Henry in his lonely learned squalor in Cattles-court, or Anna Ovens with her fantastic finery, her love of showing of her "graceful" dancing and her elevated pity for poor Lewis Walters. "Yes, the poor fellow is mad, you know"... The Rev Mr Walters's family consisted of five sons, to whom he gave good education. All the sons reached manhood, but two only survived their father - Lewis, the youngest, who was half-witted, and Henry, the elder, who became a hermit. Both of them were said to have shown in youth great mental promise, and to have been brought to the state in which they were for some many years known to the inhabitants of Cowbridge by the severe studies imposed upon them by their father. Mr Walters left behind him little or no property, and at his death his sons removed to the town from the rectory of Llandough, to subsist upon the scanty income afforded them by some clerical charity & the slight benevolence of the neighbourhood. Henry lived alone in the small house down Cattle's-court (Ballard's Court); 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. What Henry's appearance was like during the early part of his twenty years' abode in Cowbridge I have not been able to ascertain, but during the latter part of it I have been told that he never went to bed, never washed himself, had no clothes on save a large flannel wrapper bought him by his friends, and wore till it hung in tatters. He allowed his beard to grow and his hair to remain uncut, and the dust & dirt of years covered everything in the house. The furniture of his rooms was scanty, the large arm chair which he occupied day & night, a table & stool was nearly all he could boast of beyond a curtain which he could draw round one portion of the room, and screen himself from the gaze of a visitor or the unpleasantness of the draught. In the back part of the room were heaps of books & papers, carelessly thrown about the floor. After his death, "Felix Farley's Bristol Journal" for several years was found, every copy unopened! The proprietor kept sending it, though he never got paid for it. Upstairs, there were more books, old china & lumber, all thickly coated with the pervading dust. Yet this man, dirt & dust encased as we see him, was most marvellously particular as to the cleanliness of all he ate. To begin with, his table, though wood of the greater part of it could not be seen for dirt, was, at the spot where his plate was laid, as brightly polished as possible. In the Memoir of the celebrated Vicar Pritchard of Llandoverly, published in 1867,... we are informed that Mr Rees Thomas the printer, who brought out the first edition of the above popular work at Llandoverly, took with him, when he removed his printing press to Cowbridge, the whole of the papers left by the old vicar of Llandoverly, and that Mr Rees, of Ton, was only 3 months too late to save them from the cartloads of papers which were taken out of the house in which Henry Walters had lived. These loads are said to have been taken to a place called "Waen y Gaer" and burnt as rubbish.*

The only thing saved from this fire... was a portrait of the Rev. Mr Walters in oil, which was for years afterwards seen hung in the parlour of a public-house at Cowbridge, but now cannot be traced. It is

said that this picture in the time of his son Lewis was living was so little valued or admired by its owners that it had been stuck into the frame head downwards, and that by some chance he went into this tavern parlour, recognised his father's portrait on the wall, and had sense enough to be indignant at the small respect paid to it. They pacified him....by restoring the portrait to its proper position.

Cardiff Times

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