

GWENOGVRYN EVANS and the identity of 'THEODORE DODD'¹

Early on in my researches into the life of J. Gwenogvryn Evans I found, whilst at the National Library of Wales, a file of press cuttings, in which was an article about him that was written by one 'Theodore Dodd'.² It became fairly clear, as I read through the article, and began looking into its background, that the name 'Theodore Dodd' was a pseudonym. The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibilities as to who this writer, or team of writers, might be, at least in the case of the article on Evans. I say 'team' since a pseudonym does have the capacity to hide the identity of a team, just as easily as a single person.

First, let us look at the evidence of the article itself. There is no evidence on the surviving cutting of what periodical it was taken from, nor any evidence of a date save that it has the words 'Spring 1892' hand-written on it in ink. The article is headed 'Open Letters to Welsh Leaders of Opinion: XXV, Mr. J. Gwenogfryn Evans, M.A.' and consists, in letter form, of an amusing biographical essay on Evans from his birth, covering his publications up to *The Book of Llan Dav*, and describing the beginnings of his interest in the cataloguing of Welsh Manuscripts. A considerable part of it covers Gwenogvryn's association with the University of Oxford. It is clear from the way that this part of the article is written that the writer was a member of the University at the period that Gwenogvryn was living and working in the city. Not only that, but he was also a member of Cymdeithas Dafydd ap Gwilym, the Oxford University Welsh Society, at the same time as Gwenogvryn. This is the first important point to note. Despite his apparent sojourn in Oxford, 'Dodd' had no high opinion of the place. He says of Evans:

. . . Your health, always ailing, broke down entirely during the first few years of your residence at that fog-bound and malaria-infested city on the Isis. Many is the healthy and vigorous man whom that relaxing climate has rendered inactive; and many is the promising Welshman, who would have done well in the bracing air of his native hills, whose growth has been stunted through the enervating influence of that marshy town. . . .

The original source of the article was found easily through the National Library's online database 'Welsh Newspapers Online'. A search for 'Open Letters to Welsh Leaders of Opinion' soon indicated that the source of the article was *The South Wales Star* of Friday, 1 April 1892.³ The fact that the name 'Theodore Dodd' was a pseudonym was confirmed by an editorial tailpiece to a previous 'Open Letter':

WHO IS "THEODORE DODD?"

We wish to announce to our readers that "Theodore Dodd" is only a *nom de plume*, and has no connection whatever with Mr. J. Theodore Dodd, barrister-at-law, of Lincoln's Inn, London. The name was assumed in ignorance, and we are sorry to hear that Mr. Dodd has been subjected to

¹ This paper arose from a mild disagreement over the identity of 'Dodd' at the John Rhys Conference in the Drwm at Aberystwyth, since which time I believe we have both moved our positions, thankfully towards each other's.

² NLW John Gwenogvryn Evans papers, Group II, 150, 17.

³ *The South Wales Star* 2/14, 3.

some annoyance through being taken for our lively and sarcastic contributor.⁴

The tailpiece may have been useful in telling everyone of a person who was not 'Theodore Dodd', but it gets us no further forward in deciding who he was. The coincidence of name is curious, however, as the 'real' Dodd was a prolific writer of pamphlets and short books on legal and church matters, as can be seen from the Bodleian online catalogue. Another point to be kept in mind.

The author of the Oxford part of the 'Dodd' article states in it: 'Indeed, if I could give up my Calvinism and a pernicious habit I have of smoking I don't think we should ever have a difference of opinion.' Note that the writer describes himself as a Calvinist. As to smoking, 'Dodd' expands further:

. . . I shall never forget one meeting of the Dafydd ap Gwilym Society in your rooms. A certain undergraduate, known then mainly for his love of William Wynne's verses, but who is now one of the "risingest" of Welsh professors, and I were the only smokers among the lot, and Owen Edwards had written a little note to both of us to warn us that smoking was not allowed. Owen, however, had only just returned from six months' stay at Geneva, where he had been weaned from a too-absorbing love of tobacco by the mysterious warning, "*defense de fumer*." So he tried the experiment on us; but to us it was as unintelligible as the frogs' chorus of Aristophanes. I shall never forget the horrified look on your face when William Wynne's disciple began to puff away at an old clay, as only he could; and how, on being remonstrated with, he said that he thought Owen Edwards had wanted him to prepare a defence of smoking. . . .

It so happens that this particular incident is recorded elsewhere, in an article in Owen Edwards's *Wales*, with less reticence to naming names. This article is entitled 'Jottings I: Professor John Morris Jones, M.A.'. The author here, one John Jones-Jones, Esq., J.P., of Jones Hall, who describes himself as 'not related within the Ninth Degree', is clearly also writing under a pseudonym, but we have good grounds to believe it was J. Gwenogvryn Evans himself:

. . . I can recall vividly Mr. Morris Jones and Mr. Llewelyn Williams sitting on a low sofa in Lincoln College, two massive pipes in their mouths, and a kind of halo about their heads, with Mr. Gwenogfryn Evans and Mr. Owen Edwards fiercely denouncing the oldness of the pipes and the bad quality of the tobacco. The meeting began with a double duel between these smokers and non-smokers. . . .⁵

I believe it is fair to ignore the difference in location, since Evans did not have College rooms, but a house in North Oxford, so 'Dodd' must be misremembering that. It was Owen Edwards who had rooms in Lincoln College. John Morris Jones is

⁴ *The South Wales Star* 1/27 (Friday, 18 September 1891), 2.

⁵ John Jones-Jones, Esq., J.P., of Jones Hall [J. Gwenogvryn Evans], 'Jottings I: Professor John Morris Jones, M.A. (not related within the Ninth Degree)', *Wales* 3/27 (July 1896), 322-325, 323.

undoubtedly the 'one of the "risingest" of Welsh professors' referred to by 'Dodd', which means that 'Dodd', being the only other smoker, must be Llewelyn Williams. Williams was an Independent, so could indeed be referred to as a Calvinist. An obituary of Llewelyn Williams by J. Arthur Price was kindly sent to me by Robin Chapman. It is clear from the obituary that Llewelyn Williams had taken over the editorship of *The South Wales Star* then under the ownership of Mr. Arthur Williams, M.P. So did that automatically mean that he was 'Theodore Dodd'? The article is also informative on that point:

. . . Was "Theodore Dodd" in truth Llewelyn Williams? Not altogether, though some of the letters were written and all were edited by him. The "Junius" of the *South Wales Star* was, I believe, a composite personality, but some of the best of the letters were by Mr. Williams himself. . . .⁶

It seems reasonable to assume that Williams wrote, as 'Dodd', about those people he knew intimately, and passed the job on to others where they knew the subject better. If we assume for the moment that Williams wrote on Evans at Oxford, then who was it who supplied the earlier information that not only spoke of Gwenogvryn's early history, but also on Welsh Unitarianism in general? Of course, Williams may have simply quizzed Evans himself, but another suggestion has been made. Hywel Roberts wrote a paper on Gwenogvryn in which he quoted a passage from the 'Dodd' article prefacing it with the following words:

. . . Fel y mae portread ohono gan Theodore Dodd (ffugenw Rees Jenkyn Jones, cyfaill i Gwenogfryn, efallai) yn *The Saturday Review* ym 1892 yn nodi . . .⁷

. . . As the portrait of him by Theodore Dodd (pseudonym of Rees Jenkyn Jones, a friend of Gwenogfryn, perhaps) in *The Saturday Review* in 1892 notes . . .

We already know the reference to *The Saturday Review* is incorrect, but 'Welsh Newspapers Online' was not available at the time, so that should not be held against Roberts, although he does not indicate a source for his information. The reference to *The Saturday Review* did, however, cause me to discount this attribution altogether at first, but further thought led me to consider that Hywel Roberts might have hit the nail on the head with respect to Rees Jenkin Jones. Jones clearly did not write the article as he was no Calvinist, but he might well have supplied much of the early and Unitarian material to enable Williams to write it. Jones was a Unitarian minister, and he knew Evans, but he knew him at Carmarthen, not at Oxford. Jones took over temporarily as Principal of Presbyterian College after the death of Stephenson Hunter on 6 November 1875, until George Vance Smith was given the permanent appointment in September 1876.⁸ Gwenogvryn was a signatory of a testimonial from

⁶ J. Arthur Price, 'Llewelyn Williams', *The Welsh Outlook* 9/6 (June 1922), 134-135, 135.

⁷ D. H. E. Roberts, 'John Gwenogfryn Evans: Ei Gymhellion a'r Dylanwadau fu arno', *Y Llyfr yng Nghymru* 2 (1999), 53-80, 58. My translation.

⁸ For Hunter see HMCS National Probate Calendar 1875, for Jones see comment in his page in Welsh Biography Online, and for Smith see Oxford DNB online.

students of Presbyterian College to Jones for his time as Classical Tutor there, a job Jones undertook at the same time as being temporary Principal.⁹ Evans also submitted articles to Jones as Editor of *Yr Ymofynydd*, the Unitarian newspaper. Jones wrote a book on the histories of students at Presbyterian College and must have known much about the lives of Gwenogvryn and his contemporaries.¹⁰ Jones was not at Oxford, neither was he a member of the Dafydd, so he could not have written the whole article.

There is one item in the 'Dodd' article that has not been recorded elsewhere, and Rees Jenkin Jones might have been one of the few people who could have known about it. It is this:

. . . While you were still at Lampeter, you showed the stuff you were made of, and brought out an edition of "Telyn Dewis," [sic] the poetical works of the great Unitarian bard and preacher. . . .¹¹

I tracked down a digital copy of this book.¹² The book is silent as to the editor's name. 'Dodd' has again made a slight slip. The book was published in Lampeter, and in 1876, so not whilst Gwenogvryn was working for his uncle in Lampeter, at which time he would have been ill-equipped for the task. In 1876 Gwenogvryn was in his last year at Presbyterian College, Carmarthen, and certainly capable of doing the editing. Evans seems to have been very reticent about putting his name to his religious writings, whereas he was very much the self-publicist when it came to his palaeographic tasks. I know he wrote at least two articles for *Yr Ymofynydd*, the Unitarian journal, but I have been unable to trace them, presumably because he either wrote anonymously or under a pseudonym. Rees Jenkin Jones, as acting Principal of Presbyterian College at the time, would most certainly have known, and may well have been the person who involved Gwenogvryn in the matter, or, at least, have supported him in the task. Thus Jones would have been uniquely placed to pass the information to Llewelyn Williams for the 'Dodd' article.

Why Williams chose the pseudonym 'Theodore Dodd' is perplexing. Williams had trained as a lawyer, and one has to wonder if he knew J. Theodore Dodd, and mischievously chose the name to annoy him. A certain John Theodore Dodd, who must surely be the same person, occupied 55 St Giles' (now part of Regent's Park College) Oxford from 1894-1927, and, as the previous occupier from 1866 was also a Dodd, possibly a family member, John Theodore may well have been around Oxford when Llewelyn Williams was.¹³ J. Arthur Price, the author of Williams's obituary, tells an interesting story:

⁹ NLW Rees Jenkin Jones papers, FR7/3.

¹⁰ 'R. J. J.' [Rees Jenkin Jones], *The Unitarian Students at the Presbyterian College, Carmarthen, in the Nineteenth Century (1796-1901)* (Aberdare, 1901).

¹¹ *The South Wales Star* 2/14, 3.

¹² D. Davis, *Telyn Dewi; sef Gwaith Prydyddawl y diweddar Barch. David Davis, gynt o Gastell-Hywel, Ceredigion, Ail Argraffiad, gydag Ychwanegiad.* (Llanbedr, J. Davis, 1876). The first edition was printed in London in 1824.

¹³ http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/stgiles/tour/west/55_regents.html (downloaded 8 May 2017).

. . . Let me explain what, if not now a mystery, was at least a joke. Mr. J. Theodore Dodd was then a Chancery barrister and a parliamentary draughtsman. . . . At that time the future Lord Pontypridd, then simple Mr. Alfred Thomas, was thinking about Welsh Home Rule. . . . Mr. Thomas consulted Mr. J. Theodore Dodd, and Mr. Dodd duly drafted what was called a Welsh Home Rule Bill. . . . It aimed at setting up in Wales a National Council with somewhat limited powers, and its only interesting feature was the proposal that the Welsh National Council should secure for Wales Welsh books from the British Museum Library.

However, a meeting was convened somewhere in Glamorganshire, and was addressed by the future peer and Mr. Dodd. And this, so far as Welsh politics were concerned, was the end of Mr. J. Theodore Dodd. Suddenly a series of letters to Welsh public men began to appear in the *South Wales Star*. The public rushed to the conclusion that "Theodore Dodd" was J. Theodore Dodd, and was bewildered. How was it, they asked, that this English Chancery barrister had learnt Welsh and acquired the intimate knowledge that these letters shewed of Welsh Nonconformity and Welsh literature? Mr. J. Theodore Dodd would, one might have expected, have been pleased at his supposed authorship. As a matter of fact he was, I have been told, particularly annoyed. . . .¹⁴

The result was the not particularly apologetic tail-piece you have already seen. Having done what the editor felt to be his duty by publishing the disclaimer, the series of articles continued unabated under the same by-line. Whatever Mr. J. Theodore Dodd, barrister-at-law, of Lincoln's Inn, London, felt about that is not recorded.

So there we have it. The evidence we have supports the idea that the author of the article on J. Gwenogvryn Evans signed by 'Theodore Dodd', was Llewelyn Williams, but Rees Jenkin Jones may well have supplied the information on Evans's early life, and on Unitarianism in general. Absolute proof, unless further information emerges, is unlikely to be possible, but the balance of probabilities is certainly in favour of that conclusion.

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¹⁴ J. Arthur Price, 'Llewelyn Williams', *Welsh Outlook* 9/6 (June 1922), 134-135.