

REES, JOSIAH (1744-1804), Unitarian minister

Name: Josiah Rees
Date of birth: 1744
Date of death: 1804
Child: Josiah Rees
Child: Richard Rees
Child: Thomas Rees
Child: Owen Rees
Parent: Mary Rees
Parent: Owen Rees
Gender: Male
Occupation: Unitarian minister
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Born 2 October 1744 in Llanfair-ar-y-bryn parish, Carmarthenshire - his father, **Owen Rees (1717 - 1768)**, was at the time pastor of Clun-pentan. Josiah was at Swansea grammar school and afterwards at Carmarthen Academy (1761-6, under **Jenkin Jenkins**), where he became very friendly with **David Davis** of Castellhywel. But as early as 1763 he had been ordained as pastor of Gelli-onnen church (Llangyfelach parish - today Pontardawe); he lived at Gelli-gron, and kept school there till c. 1785.

He was deeply interested in Welsh history and literature, and in March 1770 began publishing a fortnightly magazine, *Trysorfa Gwybodaeth*, better known under the title *Yr Eurgrawn*, which was suggested by **Richard Morris of Anglesey** (see *Add. M.L.*, p. 767). Only fifteen numbers appeared - still, this was the first Welsh magazine to find any sort of public. Whether **Peter Williams (1723 - 1796)** was also concerned in the venture is still not quite clear (see **Gomer M. Roberts**, *Bywyd a Gwaith Peter Williams*, 176-84), but modern opinion tends to the contrary.

In theology, there is no doubt that Rees was an Arian from his early days; by the end of the century he was a declared Unitarian - his name stands first on the list of the committee of the South Wales Unitarian Association, dated 8 October 1802, and he was the preacher at that Association's first public assembly, at Cefn-coed-cymer, 26 June 1803. It was under the Association's auspices that he published in 1804 the tract (of which no copy is now known to have survived) which provoked in the same year the reply by **Joseph Harris (Gomer)**, *Bwyall Crist*. Rees published a hymnary, 1796, and a metrical psalter 1797, which were long used by Unitarian congregations. He refused in 1785 to take charge of the Carmarthen Academy when it migrated to Swansea, but consented to deliver a series of lectures to its students. He died 20 September 1804.

Josiah Rees was twice married, and some of his sons call for notice:

OWEN REES (1770 - 1837)

The eldest son, who in 1794 became a partner in the famous publishing firm of Longman. He returned to Wales in 1837, and died at Gelli-gron on 5 September; he, too, was a Unitarian in 1803 (*D.N.B.*, in the article on his brother Thomas, below).

THOMAS REES (1777 - 1864), Unitarian minister, and historical writer

Born at Gelli-gron, 14 September 1777. He was apprenticed to a bookseller, but turned to the ministry, and was at Carmarthen Academy from 1799 till 1802. From 1802 till 1831 he was pastor of various churches in England (mostly in London), apart from a short term (1805-6) at Gelli-onnen. In February 1819 he became LL.D. of Glasgow (*D.N.B.* - but the printed *Roll of Graduates* omits his name).

He became a prominent figure in his connexion: he was one of the **Daniel Williams** trustees (1809-53), a member of the Presbyterian Fund Board from 1813 and secretary of the Board from 1825 till 1853. Unfortunately, he so mismanaged some of the funds committed to his charge that he had to escape to Spain to avoid prison; and though he eventually cleared his accounts and made good the losses, he never recovered esteem, and died in obscurity (at Brighton), 1 August 1864. One notes that after 1853 the Welsh Unitarians complain of less favourable treatment at the Presbyterian Board's hands than what they had enjoyed when he was secretary. Rees, in the opinion of Alexander Gordon (who knew) 'had no equal' as an authority on the history of anti-Trinitarianism.

His most important work is *The Racovian Catechism*, 1818, but he also contributed valuable papers on the subject to the *Monthly Repository*, and there are manuscript volumes by him in Dr. Williams's Library. He also published *The Beauties of Wales*, 1815. (Alexander Gordon in *D.N.B.*; **Walter J. Evans** in *Oriel Coleg Caerfyrddin*, 22.)

RICHARD REES

Of Alltycham, Pontardawe. A leader at Gelli-onnen (see J. E. Morgan, *Hanes Pontardawe*, 103).

JOSIAH REES, merchant

He was at Leghorn in 1803 when the South Wales Unitarian Association list was published, but had become British Consul at Smyrna by November 1813 when his son G. O. Rees was born.

GEORGE OWEN REES (1813 - 1889), physician

He became a famous physician. He studied at Guy's Hospital, in Paris, and at Glasgow, and practised in London from 1836 onwards. He was paralysed in 1886, and died at Watford 27 May 1886. There is a full account of him in *D.N.B.*, and also (with a list of his published papers) in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 1932-3. He was elected F.R.S. in 1843.

Sir JOSIAH REES, chief justice of Bermuda

Another of the younger Josiah Rees's sons. He entered the Middle Temple in 1847 and was called in 1851. He became chief justice in 1878, was knighted in 1891, and died in November 1899. He named his house 'Gelligron'. (*Middle Temple Register; Who was Who.*)

Author

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Sources

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Yr Ymfynnydd, 1900

and the references given above

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