

## ROBERTS, SAMUEL ('S.R.'; 1800 - 1885), Independent minister, editor, Radical reformer

**Name:** Samuel Roberts

**Pseudonym:** S.r.

**Date of birth:** 1800

**Date of death:** 1885

**Parent:** Mary Roberts (née Breese)

**Parent:** John Roberts

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** Independent minister, editor, Radical reformer

**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Religion

**Author:** Robert Ivor Parry

Born 6 March 1800, eldest son of **John** and Mary Roberts (née Breese), of Llanbryn-mair, where his father **John Roberts** (1767 - 1834) was Independent minister, 1794-1834. He received his early education at the local school kept by his father, and at Shrewsbury, 1810-12. It is claimed that he was one of the earliest in Wales to master shorthand. In 1819 he entered the Academy at Llanfyllin, soon to be removed to Newtown under **George Lewis**, as a candidate for the ministry. On 15 August 1827 he was ordained as co-pastor with his father at Llanbryn-mair. He soon became prominent as a preacher, a frequent contributor to the press, and a keen competitor in eisteddfodau. In 1830 he published a small volume of poems, including a lyric exposing the cruelties of slavery; he remained a keen advocate of Abolition throughout his life. But after his failure in the Beaumaris eisteddfod (1832) with an essay on agriculture, in which he supported Free Trade, he devoted his literary gifts to pleadings in the press for social reforms, rather than to poetry and the eisteddfod.

On his father's death (1834) 'S.R.' continued as minister of Hen Gapel, Llanbryn-mair, assisted by his brother, 'J.R.', until the latter moved to Ruthin in 1848. His youngest brother, '**Gruffydd Rhisiart**', looked after the small-holding, Diosg Farm, where the family had been tenants since 1806. 'S.R.'s interest in agriculture was, therefore, personal and practical. His father's bitter experience of spending £700 on improvements to Diosg Farm in seven years, and having the rent doubled, accounts for his strictures against landlordism and tithes. He was also an ardent supporter of the Anti-Corn Law League. He held advanced views on scientific agriculture and rural sanitation. He pleaded for the construction of a railway through Montgomeryshire (completed in 1861) as an important item in the amenities of a country district. Meanwhile, he took an active part in the work of the Missionary Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was also a keen temperance advocate. In 1834-5 he was secretary of the movement to clear the debts of the North Wales Independent chapels. In 1839 he was engaged in a celebrated debate with **Dr. Lewis Edwards**, of Bala, concerning church government; he argued for the freedom of the individual congregation as against the centralization of authority. 'S.R.' remained all his days a rigorous Independent, and he viewed with alarm the projected Union of Welsh Independents in 1872. On the same plea, that the freedom of the individual was imperilled, he was opposed to trade unionism in industry. In 1843 he commenced *Y Cronicle*, a 1½d. monthly periodical which proved immediately popular. He himself claimed that over a million copies were sold in twelve years. With this organ, 'S.R.' became the most prominent champion of radicalism in Wales. Like many of his contemporaries, he protested strongly against the report of the commission on education in Wales (1847), and he remained a life-long adherent to the voluntary principle in education, as against state aid, even after the Act of 1870.

'S.R.' was an uncompromising pacifist. Between 1828 and 1834 he lectured and wrote frequently on behalf of the Peace Society. In 1850 he was a representative at the international peace conference in Frankfort. He denounced the Crimean War, and, later, the imperialism of Disraeli. He held enlightened views on capital punishment (which in those days was administered for a variety of offences), and he agitated for a less severe discipline in the army and in the schools. 'S.R.' condemned the physical force elements in the Rebecca and Chartist movements, although he supported the demand for extending the franchise. He was an early advocate of votes for women.

Owing to the unhappy relations that continued to exist between the tenants of Diosg Farm and the steward of the Wynnstay estate, 'S.R.' decided to emigrate to America. He sailed for Tennessee on 6 May 1857 to join his brother, **Gruffydd Rhisiart**, who had emigrated the previous year. But it soon became evident that they had been the victims of unscrupulous land-agents. Conditions deteriorated after the outbreak of the American Civil War (1861-5). His refusal to condone war, even for liberating the slaves, laid him open to misrepresentation by both parties. He was subjected to much calumny in the Welsh press at home and in the Welsh American journal *Y Drych*. He experienced considerable physical danger, and a severe illness in October-November 1864. Three years later he returned to Wales, and settled at Conway. In March 1868 he received a public testimonial of £1,245, subscribed by some 14,000 people. He paid a brief visit to America in 1870 to negotiate the sale of his property.

By now most of the reforms for which he had pressed had been secured. He still strove against trade unionism and state aid in education, but his influence had passed its heyday. His arguments against voting by ballot, on the grounds that it savoured of cowardice, were not popular. His closing years were clouded by a series of acrimonious disputes, and the denominational quarrel over **Michael D. Jones**. But in 1883 he received a further demonstration of popular esteem with a testimonial for £400, which included a government award of £50, for having been a pioneer in Postal Reform for over half a century. He died 24 September 1885, and was buried at Conway. He was unmarried.

### Author

**Reverend Robert Ivor Parry**, (1908 - 1975)

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numerous MSS. at N.L.W. (including S.R.'s diaries, 1857-62, 1864)

## Further Reading

D. Ben Rees, *Samuel Roberts* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru 1987)  
Wikipedia Article: [Samuel Roberts](#)

## Images

NLW: [Samuel Roberts, Llanbryn-mair](#)  
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Hugh Humphreys, [SR](#)  
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Thomas Edge, [Revd. Samuel Roberts, "S.R."](#)  
John Thomas, [Rev. Samuel Roberts, "S.R."](#)  
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Day & Son, [Samuel Roberts](#)  
Alfred Ford Smith, [Samuel Roberts, Richard Roberts and John Roberts, of Llanbryn-mair](#)  
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## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Llawysgrifau S.R. a J.R.](#)  
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