

PLATE XXVII



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SIR IFOR WILLIAMS

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1881-1965

IFOR WILLIAMS was born at Pendinas, Tre-garth, near Bangor, Caernarvonshire, on 16 April 1881, the fourth of the six children of John Williams, a quarryman, and his wife Jane. His maternal grandfather, Hugh Derfel Hughes (1816-90), a farm labourer who came from Llandderfel, Merioneth, to work at the Penrhyn Slate Quarry, Bethesda, was a man of remarkable attainments:¹ at his best a considerable poet, he had a lively interest in antiquities, geology, and botany. On this side of the family there was a long tradition of literary activity. Hugh Derfel's uncle, Dafydd Hughes (1792-1862), was a fascinating character who found the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century a somewhat unsettling experience. A country tailor, he forsook the merry company of his fellow poets at their *eisteddfodau* to take up the cause of religion and total abstinence. He constructed his own printing press in the 1840s.² A volume of poems by him, *Eos Ial* (1839), reveals a competent skill in handling the classical Welsh metres, and his undoubted gift as a writer of carols is seen in the *carol plygain* (a carol for Christmas morning) 'Ar gyfer heddiw'r bore / 'N faban bach'. Portions of Hugh Derfel's account of his father and himself (written when he was twenty-nine) have survived and parts of it were published by Ifor Williams. The grandson comments:

He gives a simple description of the hard life of an ordinary countryman in that age—poverty, illness, suffering, the lack of all kinds of advantages—a bitter chronicle: and unconsciously he also makes plain both the virtue of the religion of the Methodists of the period to its possessor, and also the beginning of that delight in learning, literature and poetry which grew into an abundant crop throughout Wales. 'The old man' is here, and 'the new man' also.³

¹ Ifor Williams wrote the article on Hugh Derfel Hughes for the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (1959).

² For Hugh Derfel's description of his uncle, see *Y Tyddynwr*, i (1923), 307-9. Bob Owen, 'Dafydd Hughes (Eos Ial)', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1940, 156-79, gives biographical details and an account of the works printed by Dafydd Hughes.

³ *Y Traethodydd*, ci (1946), 174-83. For 'the old man' and 'the new man', see Ephesians 4: 22, 24.

Hugh Derfel, according to Ifor Williams, 'was a serious man: rarely did he smile. I never heard him make a remark in jest—being my grandfather had probably sobered him.' Of the other grandfather, who came from Anglesey, he wrote:

He was neither a poet nor a writer nor an antiquarian. But he was at all times wonderfully fond of fun. He was a good one for telling a story. He and an old gamekeeper, known as Wil Cip, would exchange stories for hours. An entertaining, amusing old man, bubbling with innocent mischief, who delighted in teasing children.¹

At Pendinas, which takes its name from the adjoining early Iron Age hill fort, the family was part of what was essentially a rural, closely knit Welsh-speaking community of quarrymen and small farmers, predominantly nonconformist in religion and radical in politics. It was a society which nurtured a profound respect for learning and strove amid hardship to secure the benefits of higher education for its children.

Ifor Williams received primary education in the church schools at Gelli, Tre-garth, and Llandygái: the instruction was entirely in English. His father died in 1893, aged forty-five. The following year Ifor Williams was awarded a scholarship at Friars School, Bangor. After four terms he had a serious accident which affected his spine. There followed six years of crippling illness during which he read everything that came to his hands—'from "Penny Dreadfuls" to Thomas Charles's biblical dictionary [*Geiriadur Ysgrythyrol* (1805)]'.² It was during these painful and often despondent years, he once remarked, that he learned the hardest lesson of his life—submission. By September 1901 he had recovered sufficiently to enter the school at Clynnog, Caernarvonshire, where candidates for the Calvinistic Methodist (Presbyterian) ministry were given grammar school education. There he passed the London University matriculation examination and won an open scholarship at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, where he began his studies in October 1902. He read for an Honours degree in Greek under W. Rhys Roberts and T. Hudson Williams, and was placed in the Second Class in 1905. He then proceeded to take the Honours examination in Welsh under John Morris-Jones and was placed in the First Class. During 1906–7 he was Scholar-Assistant to Morris-Jones and working for the degree of M.A. His subject for research was 'Y Gododdin', the series of poems attributed to the sixth-century Aneirin: it tells of the ineffective attempt, about

¹ *Meddwn i* (1946), 39.

² *Y Cymro*, 4 Feb. 1965.

A.D. 600, by the war-band of Mynyddawg Mwynfawr from Manaw Gododdin to regain Catraeth from the Angles of Deira and Bernicia. This was a formidable task for a young graduate to undertake but it gave ample scope for the exercise of those qualities which made Ifor Williams a supreme scholar. He was awarded the degree of M.A. in 1907 and was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Welsh. In 1919 he was promoted to be Independent Lecturer; a Professorship of Welsh Literature was created for him in 1920 and on the death of Sir John Morris-Jones in 1929 he became Professor of Welsh Language and Literature and head of the department. He retired from his chair in 1947 with the title of Emeritus Professor.

The lack of adequate annotated editions of early and medieval Welsh texts was a serious problem for university teachers at the beginning of this century. For example, at Bangor, the members of the Honours class in 1905–6 had to copy the text of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* from the College library copy of W. F. Skene's *Four Ancient Books of Wales* (1868)—J. Gwenogvryn Evans's collotype facsimile had been published in 1888 but his 'diplomatic' transcript did not appear until 1907. Students had to bear this burden of transcribing texts of the early poetry from Skene's edition for many years. In Ifor Williams's words, they lacked 'the essential tools'. He therefore began to produce them. Since there was no complete and reliable dictionary of the Welsh language 'on historical principles', he started to compile that vast collection of lexicographical slips, based on wide and careful reading of manuscripts, printed texts, and documents, which became an indispensable instrument of his work for over half a century and was counted among the *mirabilia Britanniae* by his colleagues and pupils.

The next few years soon brought a rewarding harvest. First an edition of *Breuddwyd Maxen* in 1908: the introduction in Welsh and the grammatical notes in English. The 'Bangor Welsh Manuscripts Society' was founded in 1907. Volumes iii and iv were published as one volume in 1909 (each of the Society's volumes was limited to 200 copies privately printed): *Casgliad o waith Ieuan Deulwyn o wahanol ysgriflyfrau* by Ifor Williams. This was an edition of fifty-one poems by the fifteenth-century poet Ieuan Deulwyn, based on a collation of thirty-two manuscripts. It was Ifor Williams's first experience of preparing a critical text. The introduction and notes show his firm confidence when dealing with historical and genealogical material. In 1910 he brought out his edition of *Lludd a Llefelys* on

the same pattern as *Breuddwyd Maxen*, and contributed an introduction and additional notes to a short anthology of passages from the works of the court poets of the Welsh princes compiled by Arthur Hughes: *Gemau'r Gogynfeirdd*.

Towards the end of 1910 the efforts of the Welsh societies of the three University Colleges succeeded in establishing a quarterly journal, and in March 1911 the first number of *Y Beirniad* appeared, with John Morris-Jones as editor. Ifor Williams was among the original contributors with a series of five articles on 'Y Gododdin' in which he laid down the guidelines of the arguments which he sustained at greater length and with more detail in *Canu Aneirin* (1938).

As an undergraduate he had copied many of the poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym in the reprint of the 1789 edition prepared by Robert Ellis (Cynddelw) in 1873. He now turned to the life and works of this fourteenth-century poet, one of the greatest poets of the Middle Ages by any standards, and in February 1914, in a lecture to the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion in London, he gave the substance of his discoveries. 'Dafydd ap Gwilym a'r Glêr' (*Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1913-14, 83-204) established new facts about the poet's family and connexions: these emerged from Ifor Williams's thorough and discerning analysis of documentary sources and of the poems themselves. It also examined the wider European context of Dafydd ap Gwilym's work: in medieval Latin verse and in the forms of the French courtly lyric. This major contribution has justly been assessed by later scholars as an *article remarquable*¹ which 'inaugurated a new era' in the study of the poet.²

Work among the great manuscript collections for his edition of Ieuan Deulwyn's poems had revealed to him the vast quantity of unpublished sources awaiting to be transcribed and edited for the use of students of Welsh literature. A group of enthusiastic young scholars was formed to bring out, with Ifor Williams as general editor, *Cyfres y Cywyddau*: a series of annotated editions of poems by the great masters of the *cywydd* form of Welsh verse. The first volume was published in 1914: *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a'i gyfoeswyr*, edited by Ifor Williams and Thomas Roberts of Llanuwchllyn. The cost of the volume was undertaken by Ifor Williams from the meagre resources of

¹ Th. M. Chotzen, *Recherches sur la Poésie de Dafydd ab Gwilym* (1927), viii.

² Rachel Bromwich, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1964, 9; *Tradition and Innovation in the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1967), 6.

an assistant lecturer's salary. He was responsible for the text of sixty-four *cywyddau* by Dafydd ap Gwilym, together with a lengthy introduction, using the material of his Cymmrodorion lecture, and notes. Dr. Thomas Parry describes Ifor Williams's edition as 'the first attempt to restore the text of Dafydd ap Gwilym's *cywyddau* according to the standards of modern scholarship' and he adds that it has been 'beyond value and has shown how to do justice to the poet'.¹

The war of 1914-18 disrupted the *Cywyddau* series. Another collaborator, Thomas Roberts of Borth-y-gest, had been preparing an edition of the poems of Dafydd Nanmor (c. 1420-90). He died of wounds on 11 October 1918. His will was drawn up on the battlefield and he left his transcripts of Dafydd Nanmor's poems to Ifor Williams for use as he 'thought fit in the preparation of the *Cywyddau* series'. *The poetical works of Dafydd Nanmor* (1923), carefully revised by Ifor Williams, who performed this moving act of *pietas* with delicate care, is a noble testimony to the ideals and industry of this group of young scholars.

Plans for the *Cywyddau* series were resumed with *Cywyddau Iolo Goch ac eraill, 1350-1450* (1925), edited by Henry Lewis, Thomas Roberts (Llanuwchllyn), and Ifor Williams. The general editor took a conspicuous share of the work and his preface indicates how he and his colleagues approached their tasks:

For many reasons, the introductions are historical rather than literary. One must seek to establish the dates of a poet before beginning on a serious discussion of his literary connexions, and a fair judgement on his poetic inspiration cannot be given until his authentic verse is first established.

What came to be a standard pattern had taken shape. The editing of the works of the *cywyddwyr* was now taken up by other scholars, teachers, and pupils, and during the last half-century an extensive amount of medieval Welsh poetry has been edited according to the standards which Ifor Williams had adopted. His last contribution to this area of Welsh studies was an edition of the works of Guto'r Glyn, collected by John Llywelyn Williams: *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn* (1939).

The study of Dafydd ap Gwilym's family associations led to two important articles on the fourteenth-century bardic grammar or metrical treatise attributed to Einion Offeiriad: 'Dosbarth Einion Offeiriad', *Y Beirniad*, v (1915), 129-34, and 'Awdl i Rys ap Gruffudd gan Einion Offeiriad: Dosbarth

¹ *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1952), ix.

Einion ar ramadeg a'i ddyled i Donatus', *Y Cymmrodor*, xxvi (1916), 115-46. It was a great pleasure to him twenty-five years later to be able to identify Einion with *Eygnon Yfferat* who is named in Ministers' Accounts for Cardigan, 1352-3—*Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, x (1940), 242. His grasp of some fundamental problems in medieval Welsh metrics may be seen in a review in *Y Cymmrodor*, xlii (1931), especially 289-307.

One of the momentous consequences of the Report of the Royal Commission on the University of Wales (under Lord Haldane's chairmanship) in 1918 was the establishing of the Board of Celtic Studies which held its first meeting in January 1919. It was mainly as a result of Ifor Williams's importunate and, to some of his seniors, obstinate pleading that the Board's *Bulletin* was founded. He was appointed editor of the Language and Literature section, a position which he held until 1948 (from 1937 he was also general editor in succession to Sir John Edward Lloyd). His optimism and confidence were both justified and rewarded. Towards the end of his period as editor he remarked that he was prouder of the *Bulletin* and of the co-operation of Welsh scholars in maintaining it than of any other project with which he had been concerned.¹ Volume One, part one, came out in October 1921; more than half of the Language and Literature section consisted of lexicographical and textual notes by the editor; part three, November 1922, contained his discussion of 'Gwyllon, Geilt, Wÿll' in which he drew attention to some of the similarities between the Myrddin Wylt and Suibne Geilt legends. From 1921 until 1944 (intermittently afterwards until 1958 when they ceased) his eagerly awaited contributions were regular features of each volume. It was in the *Bulletin* that he published the results of some of his most important researches. His lexical and semantic notes, textual analyses, examination of questions in Welsh literature and history, together with many annotated transcripts of unpublished material, reveal the phenomenal span of his scholarship and his wide-ranging mind. They also disclose the developing pattern of his major activities from 1920 onwards.

The preface to *Breuddwyd Maxen* in 1908 announced his intention to publish similar editions of each of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*. This was fulfilled in 1930 with *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*. Here he established the meanings of *mabinogi* ('boyhood', 'a story about boyhood', then simply 'story'), examined the orthographical and linguistic problems with masterly detail,

¹ *Y Cymro*, 17 Oct. 1947.

and argued convincingly that the Four Branches were brought together about the year 1060. Further, he perceived a point of vital significance for its bearing upon his later study of the poetry associated with Llywarch Hen: the verse passages (*englynion*) in the text belonged to a more primitive stage in the development of the story and, because of their metrical structure, they had generally preserved their archaic forms despite the many changes in the prose narrative. In 1930 (*Bulletin*, v. 115–29) he also published a text of ‘Trystan ac Epyllt’ from manuscripts of a late date (1550 onwards). The interest of this text was similar, for he showed that although the prose links are obviously late and confused the *englynion* derive from a much earlier period and seem to have been part of a long ‘Arthurian’ tale in prose and verse.

He then brought his whole attention to bear on the complex series of *englynion* which had been ascribed to Llywarch Hen. The preliminary results of his investigation were announced during a course of public lectures at Bangor early in 1932 and were later expanded in his Sir John Rhÿs Memorial Lecture to the British Academy (read on 1 February 1933). His thesis was that the *englynion* were not composed by the sixth-century Llywarch Hen—one of the ‘Men of the North’—but that they

are the verse elements in a cycle of stories, tales, sagas, told in pre-Norman times in north-east Wales, in the eastern part of Powys bordering on England, opposite to, and perhaps including portions of Shropshire and Herefordshire. The prose setting has disappeared: the verse has survived in twelfth-century and fourteenth-century manuscripts, a few stanzas even in eighteenth-century copies of earlier manuscripts now lost.

From these verse fragments he shaped the substance and context of two sagas composed in the middle of the ninth century concerning Llywarch Hen and Heledd. *Canu Llywarch Hen* (1935) gives a critical edition of these texts with detailed notes. The introduction again shows the precision with which Ifor Williams handled historical and genealogical evidence; it also gives a clear outline of the development of early Welsh saga and a sensitive analysis of the metrical techniques. Twenty years later he traced the development of the saga which, from about the ninth century, had grown out of the legendary traditions about Taliesin: *Chwedl Taliesin* (1957).

At the end of his British Academy Lecture in 1933 he observed that

Aneirin and Taliesin remain, and we still have before us the hard task of establishing, or disproving, the authenticity of the Urien and Gododdin poems.

The 'hard task' was to answer the question 'How old is Welsh poetry?' In his early work on 'Y Gododdin' he had recognized that about one-fifth of the stanzas written in a second hand in the thirteenth-century manuscript retained orthographical features identical with those of the Old Welsh glosses and therefore pointed towards an exemplar dating from probably the ninth century. Subsequently, as a preliminary to a deeper investigation of the problem he began a close study of all the Old Welsh written sources. The results were published in a number of illuminating articles in the *Bulletin*: 'The *Computus* Fragment'—Cambridge University Library MS. Add. 4543 (B iii, 245–72); 'Glosau Rhydychen'—the Old Welsh glosses in Bodley MS. Auct. F. 4. 32 and Bodley MS. 572 (B v, 1–8); 'Glosau Rhydychen: Mesurau a Phwysau'—Old Welsh glosses on the section *Incipiunt pauca excerpta de mensuris calculi*, Bodley MS. Auct. F. 4. 32, fol. 23 (B v, 226–48); the 'Juvencus' *englynion* and glosses in Cambridge University Library MS. Ff. 4. 42 (B vi, 101–10, 115–18, 205–24); 'An Old Welsh verse', in C.C.C. Cambr. MS. 199 (*National Library of Wales Journal*, ii. 69–75). Closely connected were the study (uncompleted) of the *Vocabularium Cornicum* in BM. Cotton. Vesp. A xxiv—the Old Cornish version of a Latin–Old English glossary compiled by Ælfric (B xi, 1–12, 92–100) and the notes on twenty-seven ninth-century Old Breton glosses in Venice Marciana MS. Zanetti Lat. 349—Orosius, *Historia adversus Paganos*—and three in Gotha Landesbibliothek M Br. I. 147—Isidore, *Etymologiae* (*Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xxi. 291–306).

By these investigations he both solved many crucial linguistic problems and defined the criteria for dating Old Welsh. He had a remarkable ability to elucidate the complexities of computistic tables and this is nicely demonstrated in his analysis of the *Computus* fragment, the Oxford glosses on *de mensuris calculi* and the Nennian 'cycle' (B vii, 383–7).

Another group of articles threw light on the crucial significance for the problem of the authenticity of Aneirin and Taliesin of various poems which, although preserved in late manuscripts, unquestionably belong to a much earlier period. The outstanding examples are 'Moliant Cadwallon', in honour of Cadwallon, king of Gwynedd, who died near Hexham in 634, which survives in an eighteenth-century manuscript but shows evidence of written transmission from at least the twelfth century and possibly dates from the seventh century (B vii, 23–26, 29–32); and 'Marwnad Cynddylan', an elegy on Cynddylan, ruler of

Powys in the seventh century and brother of Heledd (B vi, 134-41).

He realized that the evidence of the inscriptions on the early Christian monuments of Wales and the forms recorded in British-Latin sources had to be reassessed. Of his many contributions to the study of the epigraphic material special mention must be made of the account of the Trescawen stone and the examination of 'the personal names in the early inscriptions of Anglesey'—both published in the Royal Commission's *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Anglesey* (1937), cix-cxvii—and also of his Presidential Address to the Cambrian Archaeological Association on the Towyn inscribed stone—'in all probability, the words carved on [it] are the earliest examples *on stone* of the Welsh language', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, c. 161-72. He used the personal names in the inscriptions as 'test-material for the study of the development of Welsh from Brythonic or British, the language of the ancient Britons'. His answer to the question 'When did British become Welsh?' was given in a lecture to the Cambrian Archaeological Association at Bangor in 1937, later published in the *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 1939, 27-39:

British became Welsh when the unaccented medial syllables, and the unaccented terminations were dropped; the medial consonants during this process underwent regular changes or mutations. . . . Both the dropping of the unaccented vowels and the various mutations of consonants were gradual processes, and several centuries passed away before the orthography was adapted to the changed pronunciation. When, however, these changes had taken place in the living speech, British may be said to have become Welsh.

These changes had occurred by the middle of the sixth century.

The full maturity of Ifor Williams's scholarship, the massive strength of his learning, and the stimulating yet disciplined vigour of his ideas are all to be found in *Canu Aneirin* (1938). Accepting the eighth-century testimony of Nennius that Aneirin and Taliesin composed poetry at the end of the sixth century, two questions had to be faced and answered 'in cold blood' (as he put it): 'what certainty is there that a single line of Aneirin's work has survived from the sixth century to the thirteenth?', and had 'Brittonic become Welsh long before Aneirin's day, because no one could compose so skilfully in a newly-born language'? The evidence for a ninth-century written version was clear; the methods for dating Old Welsh

sources were now more precise. Obvious extraneous accretions had to be eliminated—for example, a poem on the death of Domnall Brecc, king of Dál Riada, who was killed in 642; a song to a young child (it was Ifor Williams's perceptive eye which recognized this gem); a floating fragment from the Llywarch Hen saga; anachronistic references to Aneirin. There were also later extensions to the poem. The next step was to establish a context and date for the military event at Catraeth which provided the occasion for composing a series of elegiac stanzas to celebrate the heroism of a number of warriors from north Britain—and probably from other British kingdoms.

The historical evidence was sifted with judicious thoroughness. Place-name identifications were submitted to linguistic tests—for example, the identification of Catraeth with the neighbourhood of Catterick Bridge in Yorkshire. He argued convincingly that the battle of Catraeth was fought some time between 590 and 617—that is, before Edwin became king of Northumbria. He analysed the military vocabulary and the terms which indicate the religious and social nexus of the poems. The ultimate question, however, was 'how old is the verse?' The linguistic and metrical data were patiently assessed in a way which shows Ifor Williams's brilliant co-ordination of linguistic techniques and his penetrating discernment of earlier patterns. His analysis of the alliterative structure is an excellent example of this. The linguistic evidence pointed to a stage shortly after the changes by which British had become Welsh, and it was now possible to show that substantial sections of the 'Gododdin' could have been composed by Aneirin. Beneath the layers caused by confusion and corruption during oral and written transmission—so Ifor Williams firmly believed—'the substance is here'. On historical and linguistic grounds, circumstantial though much of the evidence must be, his conclusion, based on a cool evaluation of all the relevant evidence, a unique knowledge of the language in all its stages, and an unprecedented understanding of the nature of the problem, was that 'we can now with considerable degrees of confidence begin to believe that the body of the poem is the authentic work of Aneirin Gwawdrydd, Mechteyrn Beirdd ("Aneirin of the Flowing Verse, High King of the Bards")'.¹ There can be no fundamental disagreement with this conclusion. In the lengthy notes to the

¹ For a précis of the introduction to *Canu Aneirin* see Colin A. Gresham, *Antiquity*, xvi (1942), 237–57. Kenneth Jackson discusses the work in a review article, *ibid.* xiii (1939), 25–32.

text he deploys the entire force of his knowledge of the language, and the vast resources of his lexical collection are used to the full. Here, as in his 'lexicographical notes' in the *Bulletin* and in the notes to *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* and *Canu Llywarch Hen*, he considers every form known to him of a particular word, examines its range of meanings and its various cognates, weighs the evidence and proposes an answer—or a choice of answers. Thus did he solve most of the extremely difficult linguistic problems in the text and also provide material and suggestions for other scholars. *Canu Aneirin* has become the constant and inspiring companion of every student of early Welsh poetry.

Peniarth MS. 2—'The Book of Taliesin'—written in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century is, in Ifor Williams's words, 'a pretty mixed bag'. In 1916 (*Y Beirniad*, vi. 129–37, 203–14) he had reviewed at length J. Gwenogvryn Evans's *Facsimile and Text* of the manuscript and his *Poems from the Book of Taliesin*. The latter was certainly a mixed bag, and Evans's misguided, carefree excursions into the territory of linguistic and historical criticism prompted John Morris-Jones (not altogether without Ifor Williams's ready assistance) to write a magisterial review which appeared as volume xxviii of *Y Cymmrodor* (1918). This book-length review of 290 pages, which dealt with the basic problems, had far-reaching influence on the study of the early poetry. But there was still much to be done with the 'Taliesin' collection. Over the years Ifor Williams sorted its contents, both in matter and chronology, discussed fifty of the fifty-seven poems, and, as usual, made many discoveries. He published detailed studies of some individual poems which, though old, were not by Taliesin. 'Moliant Dinbych Penfro' is a poem composed *circa* 875 in praise of Tenby (*Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1940, 66–83). Again, 'an early Anglesey poem' was shown to be a tenth-century elegy on Aeddon, an Anglesey chieftain (*Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 1941, 23–30; 1941, 19). In *Armes Prydein* (1955) he established that this long poem of political 'prophecy' and propaganda was composed *circa* 900 during Athelstan's reign—certainly before the Battle of Brunanburh. His reconstruction of the 'Taliesin legend' has already been mentioned. What, then, of the poems by the sixth-century Taliesin? The outcome of Ifor Williams's thorough inquiries was a firm assurance that the 'hard core' of Taliesin's poetry is preserved in twelve historical poems to sixth-century British rulers: one to Cynan of Powys, whose son Selyf was killed at the Battle of Chester; two to Gwallawg, ruler of Elmet;

the others to Urien Rheged and his son Owain in north Britain. An edition of these twelve poems, *Canu Taliesin*, appeared in 1960, shortly before the editor's seventy-ninth birthday. His scholarly treatment of the poems and their background was as masterly as ever and the notes as usual were full of information and fresh ideas. At one stage he had planned two 'large' books on Taliesin; unfortunately he was unable to achieve this and his full-scale edition of 'Chwedl Taliesin' was never finished.

He revealed fresh perspectives in the study of early Welsh tales and legends. 'Hen Chwedlau' (*Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1946-7, 28-58) gives a general summary of his thoughts on the methods of the professional story-tellers (*cyfarwyddiaid*) and illustrates how Nennius's account of Vortigern is derived partly from popular oral tradition and partly from a lost *Vita Germani*. And almost everywhere in the fields of medieval and modern Welsh literary studies he either opened or indicated new paths of investigation. In articles, transcripts, and books his range extended from an edition of Welsh versions of twenty-one fables by Odo of Cheriton—*Chwedlau Odo* (1926)—to the writings of William Salesbury and his contemporaries.

He made many contributions to place-name studies and enjoyed solving onomastic problems. In September 1942, however, when he was feeling the strain of war almost intolerable, he wrote:

I spent three weeks of hard unbroken labour on the Ravennas for Crawford. I had had his slips for years and had done one-third of them. An appeal came for the lot to be returned. I therefore applied myself to doing them and became completely lost in the task. There was no time to accomplish any feats, but I did my best. I was completely exhausted by today when I finished the last slip, and packed the lot for the post.

His comments on the individual names, 'often amounting to a wholly new contribution', were incorporated into 'The British Section of the Ravenna Cosmography' by I. A. Richmond and O. G. S. Crawford, *Archaeologia*, xciii (1949), 21-50. *Enwau Lleoedd* (1945) brings together within its sixty packed pages a wealth of place-name learning presented with the author's rare gift for lucid exposition.

It was natural, perhaps, for a grandson of the author of *Hynafaethau Llandegai a Llanllechid* (1866)—a description of the antiquities of those two parishes—to take a keen interest in archaeology. At Pendinas, too, he had lived on the threshold of prehistory. But Ifor Williams found for himself that archaeology,

history, and philology must be used together for a real understanding of the early periods. Shortly before 1914 he was enthusiastically excavating some round huts at Cororion, not far from Pendinas. The results were never published but the note 'information from excavator' appended to the report on these huts in the Royal Commission's Caernarvonshire *Inventory*, i (1956), 107-8, No. (346), indicates that he had not forgotten what he had been doing over forty years earlier. He always found pleasure in conducting groups of undergraduates to such sites as Tre'rceiri and Din Lligwy: for one with his experience of hill-walking along the Ogwen Valley and around Tre-garth climbing up the craggy slopes of Tre'rceiri was easy. To watch the careful probings of his fingers on an inscribed stone was like seeing a detective examining a vital piece of evidence. For many years he was Honorary Curator of the Museum of Welsh Antiquities at the University College of North Wales, and with R. Humphrey Davies he kept jealous guard over its contents.

'You cannot fully understand the spoken Welsh of Anglesey today', he remarked in 1938, 'without going back to Antiquity.'¹ This was an expression of his deep and lively awareness of the unbroken continuity of the language and its literature. He had, of course, a perfect knowledge and control of the spoken language: it was his mother tongue. In his linguistic notes on early and medieval texts he often illustrates a point by quoting words and phrases drawn from the speech of his own community at Tre-garth or from that of some other region. This interest in *llafar gwlad* was long-standing. At the Caernarvon National Eisteddfod in 1906 he was awarded a prize for an essay on the spoken Welsh of Caernarvonshire. Throughout his life he collected, recorded, explained, and cherished innumerable examples of the spoken language's resourceful resilience. The simple dignity of his spoken Welsh was a delight to the ear and it did not suffer when transposed to the printed page. A translation from Norwegian of Ibsen's *A Doll's House—Ty Dol* (1926)—brought the freshness and suppleness of speech rhythms to stage dialogue. *Cymraeg Byw* (1960), the B.B.C. Welsh Lecture delivered on St. David's Day (1960) gives the essence of his reflections and ideas on the opportunities and problems which challenge the Welsh language in the contemporary world. Almost to the end of his days he was actively at work finding or creating 'natural' Welsh equivalents for modern technical terms.

Ifor Williams believed that he had a duty to share the fruits

¹ *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1938, 52.

of his scholarship with those who had not received higher education and to remove any *medium parietem maceriae* which might be set up between the academic world and those outside it. Admiration of Hugh Derfel's efforts to educate himself, his own mother's struggle to give four of her six children a college education, and the enlightened zeal for learning among the quarrymen in whose society he lived until his marriage in 1913—all these were powerful influences. Moreover, he firmly believed that Providence had entrusted every person with a special gift—*dawn arbennig*: this was 'something to be grateful for, and a burden of responsibility'.¹ This deep awareness of duty and responsibility can be quickly sensed in his writings. It was also the primary reason why he travelled far and wide to lecture to literary societies, both large and small.

In 1922 he joined with Robert Richards in editing a new journal, *Y Tyddynnwr*. Its aim was to explain 'in Welsh to the workers of Wales' important matters in philosophy, economics, history, and science, subjects which, unlike theology, had not yet come to be familiarly treated in Welsh. Only four numbers were published.

He was one of the editors of *Geiriadur Beiblaidd*, a dictionary of the Bible which came out in fifteen parts during 1924–5. In 1939 he became one of the three editors of *Y Traethodydd*, a quarterly started in 1845 'for religion, theology, philosophy and literature'. He served for twenty-five years—until 1964—and wrote regularly for it until 1958. For many years he was chairman of the Executive Committee responsible for the publications of the Calvinistic Methodist (Presbyterian) Church of Wales. When he went to the Preparatory School at Clynnog in 1901 his intention was to enter the ministry of this church. Until the early 1930s he frequently undertook preaching engagements and his name appeared on the presbytery's list of 'recognized preachers' up to his death. His sermons and addresses were models of simple and memorable exegesis based on a solid foundation of biblical scholarship. Theology never lost its hold on him nor was he ever in doubt about the certainty of his faith.

In the pulpit, on a public platform, or when sitting among his Final Honours class (who were invariably among the first to share with him the excitement of his discoveries) his manner was completely relaxed and unassuming. His conversational style (he disliked the 'prepared lecture'), the constant touches

¹ *I ddifyrru'r amser* (1959), 66—from a talk given in 1948.

of gentle humour, and the charm of his speech were irresistibly effective. He had inherited his Anglesey grandfather's gift for 'telling a story' and his lectures, in College and outside, had a quality of their own. As a broadcaster he was outstandingly successful. Many of his talks have been published, together with other essays: they all bear witness to his distinction as a writer.¹

Soon after his appointment as Assistant Lecturer at Bangor he sought and obtained Morris-Jones's permission to give his lectures in Welsh—English was the common medium of instruction in all the departments of Welsh in the University then and for a considerable time after. There were many difficulties, some of them inherent in the social attitudes of those years. Not the least of them, however, was the lack of established grammatical terms in Welsh: the notes to *Breuddwyd Maxen* and *Lludd a Llefelys* express the dilemma. But Ifor Williams was not easily discouraged once he had made a decision and the difficulties were overcome, with the result that—in his own words—'Welsh gradually became a medium of learning, as is right and proper'.² His conviction that it was 'right and proper' was the reason why almost all his scholarly writing was in Welsh. He remained unmoved by the appeals of critics and admirers that he should make his fundamentally important works more accessible to a wider circle of the academic world by writing in English. 'The Poems of Llywarch Hên', the Dublin *Lectures on Early Welsh Poetry* (1944), and a short article on 'The earliest poetry', *Welsh Review* vi (1947), 238–43, give excellent outlines of some of his researches and conclusions. They also prove that he was as lucid and attractive a writer in English as in Welsh.

There were many strands in the strong fibre of his character. Perseverance and patience, self-discipline, tempered by the affliction of his youth, and an assured sense of vocation—all these could easily be discerned. The spinal injury had left its mark and it took many years for him not to be painfully sensitive of its physical effect, especially when he had to appear before a strange audience. Yet he could never be an academic recluse. His enthusiasm was contagious, whether he was giving an account of his latest pursuit in scholarship or describing his exertions as a gardener. It was exhilarating to be taught by him and to feel the virtue of his sheer delight in learning. His energy was boundless, and his powers of recovery were

¹ *Meddwn i* (1946); *I ddifyrru'r amser* (1959).

² *Y Cymro*, 17 Oct. 1947.

astonishing. The stubby pencil in the waistcoat pocket and the small notebook—or an old envelope or any scrap of paper—were always at hand to jot down questions or facts or ideas that came to him when travelling or during the restless hours of the night. ‘The fun is in discovering’, he once said. ‘There is no pleasure in writing it.’ However, when the demand was pressing, as it often was, he would write as one inspired. *Canu Aneirin* appeared in the early summer of 1938. The preface is dated 13 April 1938. Yet, on 17 November 1937 he wrote:

As for myself—labouring tirelessly on the *Gododdin*—when I have an opportunity. Page proof—up to p. 150; galleys up to l. 1000. Not a word of the Introduction written so far—too many other calls. But I must get down to it in spite of everything.

When the book appeared a few months later, there were 93 pages of introduction, 57 pages of text, 329 pages of notes and 23 pages of indices. During 1943–4, not long after delivering his lectures on early Welsh poetry at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies in March 1943, he suffered from severe exhaustion. In April 1944 he described the previous nine months as ‘an empty period’; this was ‘the miserable state of I. W. with the whole Taliesin in front of him’. Nevertheless, he managed to prepare the Dublin lectures for the press. By May 1945: ‘the war in Europe has come to an end, and we are in the middle of the “aftermath”—and prospects of confusion for yet awhile, I’m afraid.’ He had again been ‘for months without being able to sit at the table to write a word’, but

I am now getting better: in January I scribbled a book for *Pobun* on *Enwau Lleoedd*. . . . In February I sent a dozen of my B.B.C. talks [to the publisher]. Then in March I put into shape a little book on *Armes Prydain* for the University Press. That is beginning to be printed at Cardiff—though I have not yet had grace to shape an introduction. I have a good deal to say.

He had retired from his chair in 1947 and at the end of 1948 he was again in good spirits although he had not ‘yet got down to my work in the study’,

but the kettle is beginning to sing. A sign: I read the *Gogynfeirdd* right through once again. Then to my draft of the Taliesin—and I broke my heart. I had completely forgotten my own attempts! But things will gradually come back to the memory. There is an enormous task in front of me.

He now became advisory editor for the University of Wales *Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (he had been a member of the

editorial board from the start) and he continued to advise and contribute almost to the end.

The inspiration, encouragement, and support of his wife was beyond measure. His marriage in 1913 to Myfanwy Jones of Cae Glas, Pontlyfni, Clynnog, brought him all the happiness and succour he could have wished for. At Y Wenllys, Menai Bridge, and at Hafod Lwyd, Pontlyfni, she created a safe refuge to which he could return to work undisturbed, and a home where they and their two children, Gwenno and Gwynn, always gave a warm welcome to a large and devoted circle of friends and pupils.

No account or examination of Ifor Williams's monumental achievement would be complete without calling to mind part of a *confessio fidei* which he once made:

To work prudently one must plan beforehand. Nevertheless, on the foundation stone of every scheme it is well to inscribe a portion of St. James 4¹⁵ ['If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that']. Afterwards, let the craftsman proceed gladly, confidently and hopefully to construct the building. . . Faith is that force in a man's soul which can turn a dream into a programme—and realize it.¹

He had certainly planned carefully and he lived to see the greater part of his programme realized, although he used to say that he would like 'to re-edit all [his books] since fresh light is constantly breaking upon us as we struggle forward'.

He had a magnificent head on a broad-set body—but for his early accident he might have attained the fullness of stature of Hugh Derfel and the Pendinas men; as it happened he was like his Anglesey grandfather, 'short and broad'. His eyes were kind and sympathetic with a shrewdness that often laid bare the innermost heart.

By temperament and inclination he was reluctant to accept official responsibilities but he took on a large number as opportunities of dutiful service. His achievement and contribution both to scholarship and to Welsh life were widely and gratefully recognized, and he received many honours. From 1941 to 1958 he was Chairman of the Board of Celtic Studies, University of Wales. In 1932 he was Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecturer at the British Academy, and in 1933 became D.Litt. (Wales). In 1938 he was awarded the Cymmrodorion Medal 'for distinguished services to Wales' and elected a Fellow of the British Academy. He was made a Fellow of the Society of

¹ *I ddifyrru'r amser*, 54.

Antiquaries in 1939. In 1943 he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire (he resigned in 1963) and of the Board of Ancient Monuments for Wales—later becoming Chairman of the Board. From 1939 to 1954 he was President of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society, Patron from 1954 to 1957, and Vice-President from 1957 until his death. He was knighted in 1947. In 1949 he was elected President of the Cambrian Archaeological Association and in the same year he received the degree of LL.D. *honoris causa* from the University of Wales. He was Gregynog Lecturer at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in April 1950, and O'Donnell Lecturer in the University of Wales during 1955–6. He also served on the Court of Governors of the National Library of Wales and of the National Museum of Wales.

In the last years of his life failing eyesight troubled him and his energies were gradually diminishing. He died on 4 November 1965, less than a year after the death of Lady Williams. His unique contribution and unceasing devotion to scholarship will always be acknowledged with humble gratitude by all students of Welsh language and literature and will be a source of inspiration for many generations.

I. Ll. FOSTER

[The quotations from Sir Ifor's writings (except those on pp. 367 and 369) are in each case translated from the original in Welsh; the quotations from his correspondence are translated from his personal letters to the writer.

No complete bibliography of his writings has so far been published but it is understood that one is being prepared. Thomas Parry, *Mynegai i weithiau Ifor Williams* (1939), gives a most useful index to the linguistic notes published by Ifor Williams in books and articles up to June 1938. Thomas Jones's valuable study in *Gwŷr Llên* (1948), 243–67, gives an excellent account of the man and scholar. Ifor Williams wrote a short account of his career in *Y Cymro*, 17 October 1947. Reminiscences and appreciations by friends and former pupils were published in *Y Traethodydd*, cxx (1965), 2–4; cxxi (1966), 49–70; *Y Genhinen*, xvi (1965–6), 9–13; *Y Dyfodol*, 10 December 1965.]