

FROM QUARRY TO PULPIT

Angela Owen #1893

My late husband's Taid, John Owen, was born 6th May 1857 at "Colwyn", Beddgelert. His parents, Richard and Elin, were keeping a book shop and lending library. Richard became the famous bard Glaslyn. Elin was the daughter of John Jones, the well known choirmaster of Beddgelert Choir, and sister of William (Bleddyn) a folklorist and historian.

By the time John was three he and his parents had moved to Gwynant Street and his father had become a surveyor of quarries and mines. John went to Beddgelert School and showed a great aptitude for music and drama, winning certificates in music from the age of nine. An only child, unusual in those days, he had all his parent's attention. He eventually became a pupil teacher.

But when John was fifteen a brother, Richard, was born. This appears to have caused problems and John and his father fell out. John ran away to sea for a while, possibly with his father's brother who was a mariner.

On his return John went to the quarries in Ffestiniog, never again living at home. When his mother died in 1902 he took his father to live with him near Llanberis but the arrangement didn't work out and his father ended his days in the workhouse at Penrhyn-deudraeth.

But John's first love was music. He was a fine baritone and sang as he worked. By the time he was twenty John was working in the Cook Quarry above Llanberis. He lodged with a widow, Jane Trevor, and her daughter Elizabeth in a one room, single storey, semi-detached cottage called Foty on the hillside by the quarry. In 1877 Elizabeth gave birth to the first of six children. There is no record to be found of a marriage between John and Elizabeth.

John became more and more involved in music. He was a good composer, sometimes writing both the words and music as in "Ta-ta" and "Mae William ar ôl". Often he set other writer's words to music, the most well known being "Pa le mae'r Amen"

Later in life John published two books of poetry. One was "Y Llenor



Ap Glaslyn in Bardic robes

leuanc" under the pen name of Y Gwallt Gwyn. He wrote articles in "People's Paper" under the pen name Britwn, and sent contributions to "Heddyw", "Y Genedl Gymreig" and "Yr Herald Gymreig". He also wrote religious pieces such as "Tu Cefn i'r Byd" and "Y Ddwy Olygfa". In 1877 John was made a bard at the Caernarfon National Eisteddfod and took the name Ap Glaslyn. He was to be a member of the Gorsedd for fifty six years.

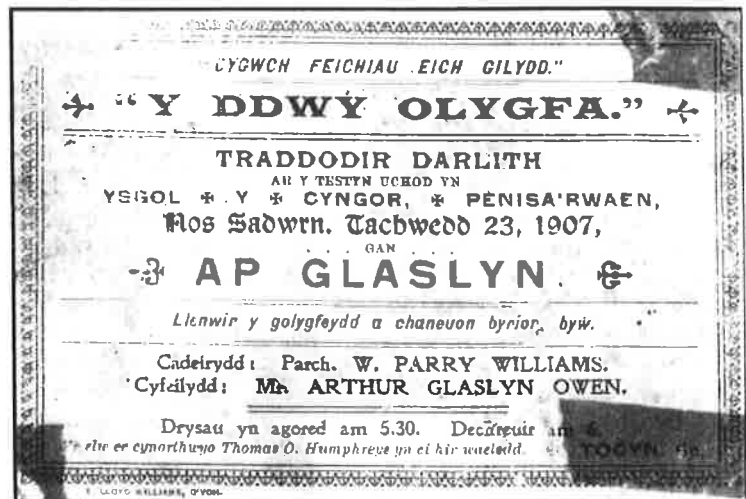
Over the years he won many prizes for literary and musical works. He won the Gold Medal at Llandudno Eisteddfod for his brilliant rendering of "Gwen o'r Ddôl". He sang in market places, sometimes in English. He was a member of Côr Meibion Eryri. On one trip to the Crystal Palace the soloist fell ill and Ap Glaslyn filled in to great acclaim. Several opera companies asked him to join and he chose the Carl Rosa.

Ap Glaslyn was a talented public speaker and actor. He acted with the Eryri Drama Company and later joined the Trefriw Drama Company. But acting took him from home too often so he concentrated on music. He was a corporal with the local militia and a Precenter in his local chapel. He also conducted and instructed two youth choirs at his home.

Unfortunately Ap Glaslyn had a taste for alcohol and sold the copyright of many of his works to buy drink. He was often away from home at night and his daughters were sent into service at a very early age.

But something happened that appeared to have a profound effect on Ap Glaslyn's way of life.

One evening he was in Edward William's book shop in Llanberis and was introduced to a thin dark stranger. David Roberts, the bard Dewi Havhesp, was in a bad way and was looking for somewhere to stay the night. Ap Glaslyn took him home, fed him and they talked at length. Dewi



A ticket to one of Ap Glaslyn's many lectures

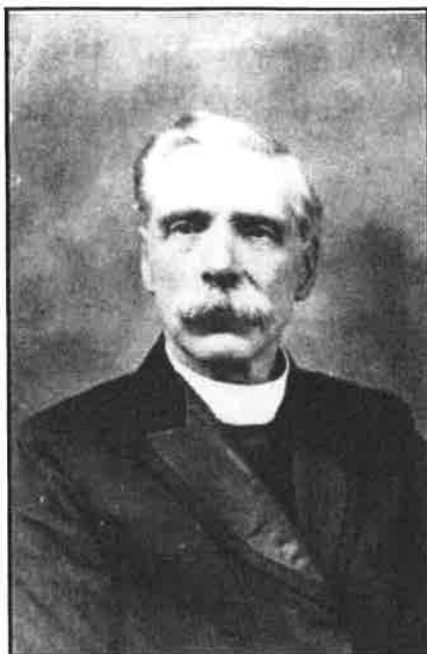
Havhesp's life was irregular. He had a drink problem and had spent time in jail. Next morning Ap Glaslyn gave him clothes and money.

The whole encounter made a big impression on Ap Glaslyn. He became involved with the Temperance Movement and worked with the Calvinistic Methodist Society in Caernarfon. He fell heavily under the influence of the 1904-5 revival. He is believed to have heard the Call when on a visit to his daughter Jane in Nebo near Caernarfon. He gave a musical lecture entitled "Y Tân Cymreig" (The Welsh Fire) about the Welsh revivals, travelling to Manchester and other places beyond Wales. By May 1908 he was studying in the college at Bala.

From 1912-15, on the recommendation of the Association of Calvinistic Methodists who met in Chester, he was appointed as a missionary among the navvies who were working on a new reservoir near Cerrigydrudion, now known as Llyn Alwen. He worked hard and his services were greatly appreciated. On his departure he was presented with a purse of gold.

Later he was to give a lecture entitled "O'r Llwyfan i'r Pulpud" (From the stage to the pulpit). Ap Glaslyn became involved with the Forward Movement in N. Wales and along with the Rev. William Jones they were two of the foremost evangelists. In the space of three weeks they covered Eifonydd. William Jones began in Prenteg and went on to Porthmadog, Tremadog, Borth, Criccieth, Garndolbenmaen, Trefor, Llanaelhaiarn and as far as Pwllheli. In the meantime Ap Glaslyn started in Nefyn, then on to Lithfaen, Aberdaron, Sarn, Dinas, Llangian, Abersoch, Llanbedrog and Rhydyclafdy to meet up in Pwllheli.

After preaching over a wide area of Caernarfonshire Ap Glaslyn was sent southwards to take up his first pastorate at Rhayader. He then moved further south to Gelli. On 10th May 1918, at the age of sixty, Ap Glaslyn was ordained a minister at the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church in Aberystwyth. He became pastor of Bute Square C.M. Church in Treherbert, ministering in English. Here he was joined by Elizabeth and his daughter Mary and they settled at 6, Co-operative Street, Ton Pentre. In 1921 they moved to 8 James St, Llanbradach, where Ap Glaslyn became minister of Moriah C.M. Church, where he ministered in Welsh.



Ap Glaslyn's grandson, Edward John, my husband's elder brother, who was born disabled, lived with the Ap for sixteen years and had many memories of his childhood. I quote :

"His study was always open to me. I can remember him showing me the last sermon he wrote before his death and discussing points with me. It was titled "Iddew a Groegwr". In those days a Methodist minister used to spend at least two Sundays every month preaching in other chapels. These could vary in distances from home. Those situated well away were no problem. Taid would leave by train or bus and return on the Monday. The problem arose when he had a calling within two or three miles say in Ystrad Mynach or



Caerphilly, too near to spend the weekend but too far for him to walk. But there were no buses or trains on a Sunday. This meant a frantic search for anyone with any sort of transport who would be ready to take and collect him. Some of the more bizarre vehicles I remember were a coal delivery lorry and a motor bike and side car. Taid sitting bolt upright in the side car holding on to his hat was really something to catch the eye.

In those days the payment of a minister for his Sunday was £2-10-0. When I was seven or eight Taid devised a little scheme for me when he was away. He told me that in his absence I was to preach a sermon and that he would pay me the going rate. So on a Sunday morning I would stand on the little wall separating our house from next door and thunder away. On his return Taid would give me 2 ½d which he said represented his £2-10-0".

Arfon and his brother grew up learning not to mention anything to Taid about his life before hearing the Call. There was a portable gramophone in Ap Glaslyn's house but they dare not play records, especially David Brazell singing "Pa le mae'r Amen", when Taid was in the house. One day he caught them at it and brought his walking stick down hard and smashed the record.

Ap Glaslyn was a staunch Liberal and a friend of Lloyd George. His local barber once said something against Lloyd George and Taid never entered his shop again. He used to catch the bus to Caerphilly instead. In his study Ap Glaslyn had a coal fire which he would never attend to himself. Edward John remembers him calling for his wife. She would come in with a shovelful of coal and go out slamming the door with a loud stage whisper "Yr hen gythral!".

Arfon and his family who lived nearby often went to tea at Ap Glaslyn's on a Sunday. A special treat was Nain's thinly cut bread with real salted butter. But woe betide anyone who took the last slice – that was Taid's! Elizabeth died in 1932. By then Ap Glaslyn's health had deteriorated and he had been forced to retire, although he did preach occasionally when his health permitted.

Ap Glaslyn passed away on the 16th April 1934 and is buried with his wife in Bethania C.M. Cemetery, Ystrad Mynach. ■