



SATURDAY JUNE 2, 1906

✧ John Roberts the Harpist ✧

Many of our middle-aged readers will bring to mind a venerable-looking old gentleman - John Roberts, the harpist, of Newtown - who frequented this coast 25 to 45 years ago. Mr Roberts and his talented family were excellent players of the old Welsh triple harp, which, unfortunately in some respects, is fast going out of use.

“Gipsy blood ran in his veins, and he could converse freely in Romany and Gipsy language.”

Their harp recitals, however, did not succeed as well as they deserved to, and latterly they took to the humbler, though probably more lucrative, practice of playing in hotel vestibules during the summer season. One of the sons, James Roberts, noted as well for his piscatorial attainments as his harp-playing, died at Builth recently. John Roberts (Telynor Cymru), an excellent harpist and penillion singer, was born at Llanrhaidr in the year 1816.

Gipsy blood (of which he was proud) ran in his veins, and he could converse freely in the Romany and Gipsy language. After serving as a drummer in the Welsh Fusiliers, and



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obtaining his discharge, he settled at Newtown, where he lived up to his death, a period of over fifty years.

He won many medals and prizes at eisteddfodau for harp playing and penillion singing, among others a prize harp at Abergafenni Eisteddfod in 1842, the chief prize also at that of 1848, and the prize harp at the Cardiff Eisteddfod, 1850. Eisteddfod in 1842, the chief prize also at that of 1848, and the prize harp at the Cardiff Eisteddfod, 1850.

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Lady Llanover and others presented him with an ancient Welsh harp as a token of their esteem for his exertions in adhering to the national instrument of the country.

He had a large family of 14 children, most of whom, like himself, could play on stringed instruments, he and his nine sons often giving concerts together. "

John Roberts and members of his family had the honour of playing before Queen Victoria during her visit to Pale, Merioneth, in 1889, and before the Prince and Princess of Wales, now our King and Queen, and other Royal personages at various times.

He was a peaceable citizen and a venerable figure, and with his death, twelve years ago, it may be said that the race of old Welsh harpers

came to an end. John Roberts was, we believe, a grandson of Sion Robert Lewis, of Pentrefoelas, and be regarded that parish as his native place," though born somewhere about Llansilin.

There are, or there were, several gipsy tribes travelling Wales, the Woods, Ingrams, Boswell, Lees, Lovels, Taylors, etc.



The Woods are described as the chief tribe, and they with the Ingrams came into the Principality about 1750. They settled much about Llanbrynmair, Llanidloes, Machynlleth, etc, and there are many people bearing the name of Wood now residing round and about that country, and many by marriage have changed their surnames.

Years ago, not infrequently was it said, when some one had done wrong "O, hen frid Abram Wood, welwch chwi." Abram Wood was a noted chieftain, and he is said to have been buried in the now disused churchyard of Llangelynnin, midway between Towyn and Barmouth. His wife was Alabina.

John Roberts' grandmother was one of the Stanleys. His own wife was probably a Wood. She was called Perpinia, and bore him twelve sons and two daughters.

Old John was a most devout Churchman, and always attended services on Sunday, His grave, venerable features were befitting an archdeacon.

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Edited by Frances Reilly

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