

## **“Idris” table water & soft drinks.**

**(From notes by Edwin L. Jones).**

**Thomas Howell Williams was born in Vallen in Pembrokeshire sometime in the mid eighteenth hundreds. His father was a farmer on a small holding who lived very frugally and struggled to make ends meet, up early and work late yet forever in debt. This was a Welsh speaking family and young Thomas did not come into contact with English until at the age of eight. He was sent to a village school at a place called Tavern Spite in Carmarthenshire. He was taught by a young Surrey man named Bensley and many times Thomas english was improved by means of the rod.**

**When Thomas was twelve years old his father discovered that his son had to commit to memory the Church Catechism and being a fervent non-conformist Baptist he was having none of that and removed his son from the school.**

**Young Thomas was now sent to the town of Monmouth to be apprenticed to his uncle who was a draper but his stay at Monmouth only lasted a few months. One day when the uncle was absent Thomas had a difference of opinion with the man who had been left in charge. The man grabbed the yard stick and threatened Thomas with it so the lad ran out of the shop never to return.**

**By some means or other he was able to get to Ebbw Vale and joined his cousin who owned a chemist shop and there he served as an apprenticeship for four years.**

**Now at the age of sixteen, he left Ebbw Vale and joined another cousin who also owned a chemist shop in Crickhowell. This cousin had a true scientific mind and it was here that young Thomas greatly improved his knowledge of chemistry and was allowed to improve his business skills during the frequent absences of his sickly cousin. While at Crickhowell Thomas joined the local Volunteer Militia and developed into such a good shot that he won over £100 in prizes with his rifle.**

Thomas often did the prescriptions for a certain Dr. Lucas, (whose daughter incidentally later married and became Lady Glanusk). Thomas skill was much appreciated by the local medical men and some asked him to become their unqualified assistant. He became ambitious to qualify as a Doctor but his financial means would not allow it.

In order to improve his position Thomas moved to London at the request of a Manufacturing Chemist at Aldergate by the name of Herrings and Company. He stayed in London for a year then returned to Wales and went into business in Brynmawr with a man named Llewellyn who had invited Thomas to join him in opening a shop of their own. Thomas paid £70 as his share of the business. Sadly, Llewellyn took to drink and at the end of twelve months the partnership was dissolved. Llewellyn only survived another year or two before he died of his addiction.

Thomas Williams returned to London and at their request went back to Herrings and Co. He stayed with them for six years and then entered business on his own at Seven Sisters Road, North London. Stock and good will cost him £150 and business at first was poor but within four years it was bringing in £500 per annum plus he was also earning £300 from shares in a similar concern.

His big success came about through a simple accident. In order to improve business he had sent out circulars stating that he was qualified and prepared to carry out analysis of all kinds of food, drugs and so on. Nothing came of it until one evening the chief medical man of the district called wanting to know if what the circular stated was true. Thomas assured the chief examiner that he was capable of such work whereupon the examiner produced the remains of a packet of powder which a young girl had allegedly used to attempt suicide and the examiner said he had to give evidence to the magistrate on the following day and state the nature of the powder taken.

“Oh, I can easily analyse that.” said Thomas.

“I don’t want you to do that” said the doctor, “I want you to coach me in the method of analysis so that I can face cross examination tomorrow”.

Later that evening the chief examiner returned with two other colleagues and Thomas went through the whole process of chemical analysis and all three were delighted. Very soon those three doctors and their associates were sending people with prescriptions to Thomas's business which made him a very wealthy man. In addition he became owner of a general stores and chemist shop in Ebbw Vale.

During a visit to Paris he saw a new form of mineral water siphon. On returning home in 1875 he set up a mineral water business in London using siphons imported from Paris. He chose the name "Idris" for his product because it was short, distinctive and attractive but above all it was Welsh.

In 1893, Thomas changed his name to Thomas Howell Williams Idris. Now a very wealthy man he served on the London County Council; became Chairman of the Main Drainage Committee and twice stood for Parliament.

The name Idris survives to this day but is now part of the Cadbury's Schweppes conglomerate. Next time you have a bottle of Idris mineral water with your drop of short, raise your glass to Thomas who knew this area well.

Cheers.

Eifion Lloyd Davies. (With thanks to Edwin L. Jones).