



KYFFIN WILLIAMS (1918-2006)

John Williams of Caeau Gwynion

1959

Oil on canvas

24 3/4 x 29 7/8 in. (63 x 76 cm)

Signed 'K W' upper right

PROVENANCE

Private collection, and thence by decent;

Rogers Jones, 30 November 2025, lot 139;

Philip Mould & Company, London, acquired from the above.

LITERATURE

Kyffin Williams, (2007) *Portraits*. Ceredigion: Gwasg Gomer, p.104-5.

PHILIP MOULD
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& COMPANY



Kyffin Williams is regarded as one of the defining Welsh painters of the twentieth century, celebrated for his rugged landscapes of Snowdonia and Anglesey. Yet his portraits reveal an equally remarkable achievement. Painted with a powerful expressionist realism, they rank among the most compelling portrayals of rural life in North Wales. This portrait of John Williams, an Anglesey farmer, is among the artist's most expressive works in the genre, conveying with extraordinary immediacy the character and humanity of the farming communities he knew so well.

John Williams lived at Caeau Gwynion, a long, low cottage-farmhouse in the parish of Llansadwrn. Kyffin visited him often, sitting by the fireplace in the dark, untidy living-room while the elderly farmer recounted stories from his life. The artist later remembered him as *"a short and wiry little man with an untidy moustache, an unshaven face"* who had a habit of spitting forcefully whenever making a point.[1] Despite some issues in communication, the two men developed a rapport rooted in mutual accommodation. As Williams recalled, John *"always appeared to have lost his false teeth for it was difficult at times to understand what he was saying; but his English was better than my Welsh so I used to resign myself to understanding only part of what he related."*[2]

Here, the sitter's weathered face emerges from a dark, heavily worked ground. His cap, worn coat and stud-fastened shirt are rendered with unsentimental immediacy. The surface is scored and ridged with thick paint, so that the sitter appears to have been cut from the same tough material as the land he farmed. Williams employs a characteristically restrained palette of blacks, browns and ochres applied with sparing but expressive force. The face is built up in angular strokes and slabs of paint that resist any suggestion of softness.

Williams's own account of a related watercolour makes clear how necessary the harsher materiality of oil was to this portrait. After painting John Williams in watercolour, the artist recalled that it *"was to be a picture*



Fig. 1 | Kyffin Williams (1918-2006), *Anglesey Farmer*, watercolour.

of John Williams of Caeau Gwynion", but that the medium *"ran away with me"*, producing a *"gentle and thoughtful face"* quite unlike the old farmer who sat before him [fig.1]. [3] By contrast, the oil preserves the sitter's rugged individuality. Its dense, almost abrasive handling seems perfectly suited to conveying the forceful personality that Kyffin remembered.

Williams's sympathy for Welsh farmers was inseparable from his feeling for the land itself, and he often portrayed the people of rural Wales as extensions of the harsh, elemental landscapes they inhabited. These same landscapes dominate much of his oeuvre and are today housed in public and private collections across the United Kingdom.

Two further works by the artist, both titled Caeau Gwynion, Llansadwrn, appear likely to depict the farmer's home [fig. 2 & 3]. In each, the building is shown as a long, low cottage set within the surrounding landscape, corresponding closely with the location and description of the farmhouse.

[1] Kyffin Williams, (2007) *Portraits*. Ceredigion: Gwasg Gomer, p.104.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.



Fig. 2 | Kyffin Williams (1918–2006), Caeau Gwynion, Llansadwrn, Ink on paper. Oriel Môn



Fig. 3 | Kyffin Williams (1918–2006), Caeau Gwynion. Pencil on paper.

