

GRIFFITH, GEORGE (1601 - 1666), bishop

Name: George Griffith
Date of birth: 1601
Date of death: 1666
Parent: Anne Griffith (née Pritchard)
Parent: Robert Griffith
Gender: Male
Occupation: bishop
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Thomas Richards

Born in 1601 at Penrhyn, Caernarfonshire (says **T. F. Tout** in *D.N.B.*). As a matter of fact, he was one of the **Griffith** family of Carreg Lwyd in Anglesey, member of a younger branch of the **Griffiths** of Penrhyn, possibly the most ecclesiastical house in the land: his grandfather was a rector, his uncle was a rector, two of his brothers were married to daughters of bishops, one of these brothers was chancellor of the diocese of S. Asaph as well as of Bangor. Griffith went to Westminster school and afterwards to Oxford (Christ Church); M.A. 1626, D.D. 1635. Under John Owen, bishop of St Asaph, father-in-law to his brother **William**, his promotion was rapid - domestic chaplain, canon, rector of Newtown, by 1633 rector both of Llanymynech and of Llandrinio (having surrendered Newtown). In the convocation of 1640 he is said to have urged the necessity of a new edition of the Welsh *Bible*.

The troublous days of the civil war were at hand, and the tribulations (to the Anglican clergy) of the act for the propagation of the Gospel (1650-53). **T. F. Tout** says that Griffith was not ejected from Llanymynech, a somewhat incomplete statement; he was allowed to keep Llanymynech on condition of surrendering Llandrinio, otherwise he would have been guilty of that pluralism which the act meant particularly to eradicate. Very soon Griffith was brought into open conflict with that stouthearted and iron-lunged Puritan **Vavasor Powell**, whose home ground lay in the highlands of Radnor and the flat reaches of lower Montgomery; they had a public open air debate at Newchapel on 23 July 1652, in which Griffith affirmed his 'grounded persuasion' that set prayers were the more edifying and more convenient; in fact, they boxed the whole compass of controversy in the realms of polity and worship. Both sides, as usual, claimed victory; **Powell's** party published its own version, and the learned Anglican no less than three. Notwithstanding his pugnacious defence of the Anglican position, George Griffith was allowed to remain at Llanymynech till the Restoration; he indirectly recognized this measure of indulgence, by signing certificates of commendation to the Triers in favour of Puritan ministers (more often, quasi-Puritans). On the other hand, it was he who presented **Rowland Vaughan** of Caer-gai with a copy of Dr. Jasper Mayne's belligerent sermon of 1652 to be translated into Welsh (*Pregeth yn erbyn Schism*, 1658).

At the Restoration he was made bishop of St Asaph, among the first group to be consecrated. He had some part in drawing up the act of uniformity, and is credited with composing the new office for 'baptizing those of riper years'; he was one of three bishops appointed to watch over the fortunes of the *Prayer Book* in parliamentary debates; it fell to their lot to cross out the word 'persons' (as it came up from the Commons) and substitute 'children' in the baptism rubric. In his diocese his administration ranged from the firm to the stringent; he insisted that the Welsh sermons in the parish church of St Asaph instituted by his predecessor (John Owen) should be kept up; he had strong terms of reprobation for some irregular clergymen, especially the incorrigible rogue Rice Wynne, rector of Castle Caereinion, a cleric who had been turned out by the Puritans fifteen years before; considerable sums of money were spent on repairing the cathedral and the episcopal houses. Towards the end of his life (1664) a signal tribute was paid him - in company with Dr. Humphrey Henchman, bishop of London, he was asked to act as arbitrator and settle refractory problems in the diocese of S. Davids. He died in November 1666, leaving behind him one great mystery unexplained: why, in answer to archbishop Sheldon's query in 1665 about the number of ejected ministers in the diocese of St Asaph, he roundly said that there were 'none such,' when Anglican and Puritan writers agree that there were several.

In 1684, eighteen years after his death, were published, at Oxford, his *Plain Discourses on the Lord's Supper*, and the next year, also at Oxford, his *Gweddi'r Arglwydd wedi ei hegIuro*, edited by **William Foulkes**, rector of Llanfyllin. There is ground for thinking that a second edition was published in 1716, but more certainty about the edition brought out in Caernarvon in 1806, under the auspices of the 'Bangor Tract Society.'

Author

Thomas Richards, (1878 - 1962)

Sources

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Further Reading

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