

GRIFFITH (née WYNNE, SIDNEY, currently known as 'Madam Griffith' (died 1752), Methodist and associate of Howel Harris

Name: Sidney Griffith
Pseudonym: Madam Griffith
Date of death: 1752
Spouse: William Griffith
Child: John Griffith
Parent: Jane Wynne (née Griffith)
Parent: Cadwaladr Wynne
Gender: Female
Occupation: Methodist and associate of Howel Harris
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

Daughter of **Cadwaladr Wynne** of Voelas, Ysbyty Ifan (see **J. E. Griffith**, *Pedigrees*, 326; her christian name came from her grandmother Sidney Thelwall of Plas-y-ward, Ruthin); married **William Griffith** of Cefn Amwlch, c. 1741 (her son was born in 1742). Her husband was a boor and a drunkard, and her life with him was unhappy.

In 1746, a sermon by **Peter Williams** (1723 - 1796) brought her into Methodist circles. She first met **Howel Harris** in Llŷn, early in October 1748. At the beginning of 1749 she was with **Daniel Rowland** at Llangeitho; **Rowland** took her with him to the association meetings at Erwood on 1 February, after which she visited Trevecka. When **Harris** was on his homeward journey from Llŷn, 19-20 July, she accompanied him to the Llangeitho association of 26 July, and he escorted her as far as Builth on her way home. It is clear that **Harris** was deeply influenced by her on these journeys, but it should be noted that she sided with **Rowland** and not with **Harris** in **Rowland's** opposition to **Griffith Jones** of Llanddowror and to **James Beaumont**. When **Harris** got back from London to Trevecka (23 September), he found 'Madam Griffith' awaiting him there, with the news that her husband had become bankrupt and had beaten her and turned her out of the house for refusing to give up to him some of her capital. **Harris** would have had her stay at Trevecka, but by that time Mrs. George Whitefield had poisoned Mrs. Harris's mind against her, so she had to start northward again; further, some of the Methodist exhorters had begun tattling, notably as she claimed prophetic powers and sought to interfere in the workings of the Methodist polity. But on her journey she was taken ill, and **Harris** and his wife had to go to Llanidloes to fetch her back to Trevecka. At the end of the year, the scandal had caused a rupture between **Harris** and Whitefield. During 1750 things grew worse and worse on her account, and though the greater Methodist leaders like **Rowland** and **Williams** of Pantycelyn gave no credence to the insinuations concerning **Harris** and Mrs. Griffith, the rank and file of the exhorters (who, it should be remembered, were the mainstay of the 'Rowlandist' wing of Methodists) could not be restrained. It should however be observed that the two women lived together peaceably enough at Trevecka, and that others among the exhorters, sufficiently austere and puritanical, spoke with the highest esteem of Mrs. Griffith's character. As for **Harris**, he regarded her as 'the eye of Christ's Body' (it may be remarked that before this he had cast others, men and women, in this role), implicitly obeyed her advice, and took her around with him everywhere as a sort of ark of the covenant. **Morgan John Lewis**, who had himself at one period been an 'eye,' expostulated in vain with **Harris** (May 1750); 'Madam Griffith' herself failed in June to reconcile **Harris** with **Rowland** and **Howell Davies**. By September she was becoming a financial burden upon **Harris**; her husband gave her no maintenance, and **Harris** had to support her, pay for her son's education, and stand surety for her.

By the beginning of 1752, Mrs. Griffith's health had gravely deteriorated; **Harris** took her up to London and handed her over to her brother **Watkin Wynne**; she died in London, 31 May 1752. She had given **Harris** a bond for £400 to indemnify him for costs incurred on her account, but the executor (**Wynne**) could not meet the bond - her husband had died on 1 February; it should however be said that in former days she had given **Harris** large sums (possibly amounting to £900 - see **M. H. Jones**, *The Trevecka Letters*, 188) for the building of Trevecka. Disregarding the extreme accusations brought against **Harris** concerning his relations with Mrs. Griffith, one cannot acquit him of considerable folly in his conduct, and his own letters and diaries during these years contain expressions which have been made to bear very unfavourable interpretations. That the business gravely damaged his reputation is obvious - to give examples at random, see the footnote in *Cymm.*, xlv, 54, the letter of 1750 from Noah Jones of Walsall to **Thomas Morgan** in *NLW MS 5459D*, and **Richard Bennett's** references to satirical ballads of the Carmarthen countryside. It was certainly one (though only one) of the causes of the schism among Welsh Methodists in the years following 1750. But **Bennett**, a judicious researcher who had worked carefully through **Harris's** diaries and correspondence during the years in question, brought in this verdict: 'a mind which had lost its balance and was in dire need of rest and recuperation; ... a mental rather than a moral degeneration impelled him along this foolish course.'

Author

Emeritus Professor **Robert Thomas Jenkins**, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

R. Bennett, *Methodistiaeth Trefaldwyn Uchaf, 1738â€“1852* (1929), 153-238 passim
other (scattered) sources

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Sidney Griffith](#)

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