

## GRIFFITHS, VAVASOR (died 1741), Independent minister and tutor

**Name:** Vavasor Griffiths  
**Date of death:** 1741  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Independent minister and tutor  
**Area of activity:** Education; Religion  
**Author:** Robert Thomas Jenkins

We possess very few verifiable details of his life. The earliest definite date is 1711, when he was at the academy kept by **Samuel Jones** (died 1719) at Tewkesbury; a letter by the future archbishop Secker (Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 346), speaks highly of Griffiths's linguistic attainments, adding 'he seems to be not much under 40. Secker may well have over-estimated Griffiths's age; but on the other hand the '1698 or 1699' often given as his year of birth raises considerable difficulties - making him, e.g. an ordained minister when he was only sixteen or seventeen. Everything points to his having been a native of Bugeildy parish, Radnorshire; indeed, Maesgwyn may have been the family home. In **John Evans**'s lists, c. 1715, Griffiths's name comes third of the three ministers of the (substantial) congregation at Maesgwyn; but he may not have been formally ordained before 1726, for it was in that year (after a refusal in 1725) that the Presbyterian fund board started paying him an annual £6 as pastor of Maesgwyn. In the meantime (1722 at latest), he was keeping school at his house; it was an endowed school, whose master got £10 a year (perhaps more), charged upon the rent of the farm - the farm itself, of course, also contributed to Griffiths's subsistence. In February 1733 or 1734 the Presbyterian board invited Griffiths to succeed **Thomas Perrott** at Carmarthen Academy, but he declined on the score of ill-health. It is however clear that he was already taking older pupils preparing for the ministry - we know, e.g. that **Lewis Rees** studied with him in 1734. In 1735, Griffiths fell in with the board's wishes, on condition that the academy should be removed, not indeed to Maesgwyn, but to Llwyn-llwyd, near Hay, and amalgamated with the school already kept there by **David Price**, minister of Maesyronnen, near Glasbury. The Congregational fund board joined in this scheme, paying Griffiths an extra £5 a year as pastor of Maesgwyn, over and above the £10 each which the two boards paid him as tutor. In 1736 or 1737, Griffiths moved his home to Chancefield, on the outskirts of Talgarth, Brecknock, still retaining his pastorate, and teaching at Llwyn-llwyd as well as at Chancefield. His best-known pupils are **Jenkin Jenkins** and **Richard Price**, for it is very doubtful whether he ever taught **Howel Harris** and **Williams** of Pantycelyn, who were more probably pupils of **David Price**'s. Griffiths must not be held responsible for the Arianism of **Jenkins** and **Price**; he was a strict Calvinist, otherwise **Edmund Jones** of Pontypool would hardly have been so lyrical in his praises of him. He resigned from the Academy before 8 December 1740. He died in 1741, according to the Cilgwyn church book (*Y Cofiadur*, i, 29). We have a letter of his to **Howel Harris** (T.L. 267, 18 August 1740), and **Harris**'s diaries contain several laudatory references to him. It is most probable that he was the 'Vavasor Griffiths, Esq.,' who in his will (1741) left £20 to the vicar and wardens of Bugeildy; but here again we cannot be absolutely certain.

### Author

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

### Sources

*Hanes Eglwysi Annibynnol Cymru*, ii, 529, 531  
*Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd*, xxviii, nos. 3 and 4  
G. D. Owen, *Ysgolion a Cholegau yr Annibynwyr* (1939), 25-8  
Jonathan Williams, *A General History of the County of Radnor* (Brecknock 1905) (2nd ed.), 210-11  
Isaac Thomas, *Y Gronfa Gynulleidfao ac Annibynwyr Cymru*, *Y Cofiadur*, 1958, 25  
and the references above

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**Published date:** 1959

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