

JONES, GRIFFITH (1683 - 1761), cleric and educational reformer

Name: Griffith Jones
Date of birth: 1683
Date of death: 1761
Spouse: Margaret Jones (née Philipps)
Parent: Elinor John
Parent: John ap Gruffydd
Gender: Male
Occupation: cleric and educational reformer
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: Mary Clement

Born at Pant-yr-efel, Cwmhiraeth, Penboyr, Carmarthenshire, 1683; christened 1 May 1684, son of John ap Gruffydd and Elinor John. Educated in the village school, he afterwards became a shepherd. He then determined to be a clergyman, and, after some preparation, entered Carmarthen grammar school, under John Maddocks. About 1707 he applied for ordination, and, according to **John Evans** of Eglwys Cymyn (1702 - 1782), was rejected more than once, but owing to the influence of Evan Evans, vicar of Clydeu, Pembrokeshire, he was at last ordained by bishop George Bull on 19 September 1708 (deacon) and 25 September 1708 (priest).

His first curacies were at Penbryn, Cardiganshire (1708), Penrieth, Pembrokeshire (1709), and Laugharne, Carmarthenshire (1709), where he was also master of a S.P.C.K. school founded by **Sir John Philipps** and John Pember. On 3 July 1711 he was appointed rector of Llandeilo-Abercwywn, Carmarthenshire. At Laugharne and Llandeilo-Abercwywn he became known as a great preacher, and thousands gathered to hear him from all parts of South Wales. Bishop Adam Ottley, on 8 May 1714, complained about his 'going about preaching on week days in Churches, Churchyards, and sometimes on the mountains, to hundreds of auditors.'

On 18 June 1713, Griffith Jones became a corresponding member of the S.P.C.K., and on 13 July 1713 he appeared before the Committee in London as a candidate for the post of schoolmaster and missionary to Tranquebar, India, under the East Indian Mission, but afterwards declined the appointment.

Between 1714 and 1716, Griffith Jones had to appear several times before bishop Ottley, chancellor Edward Jones, and David Havard, bishop's deputy at the bishop's Court at Carmarthen, for ignoring Church laws and customs.

On 27 July 1716 he was appointed by his patron, **Sir John Philipps**, to the rectory of Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire. Here, S.P.C.K. duties received much of his attention, and, together with **Moses Williams** and **Erasmus Saunders**, he supported efforts for a new edition of the *Welsh Bible* in 1717 and 1727. From 30 June to 19 August 1718 he toured Wales, England, and Scotland with **Sir John Philipps**, preaching at many places, and on 11 February 1719-20, married Margaret Philipps, sister of **Sir John**. In 1722 Griffith Jones and forty-four other clergymen of the archdeaconry of Carmarthen (all named in the petition) were summoned before the Exchequer Court at Westminster, London, for not paying the fees due to Edward Tenison, the archdeacon, but the decree cannot be found in the Public Record Office.

On 22 September 1731, he wrote to the S.P.C.K. proposing a 'Welch School' at Llanddowror. By 1731 the S.P.C.K. Schools in Wales had ceased to increase. Of the ninety-six schools founded, sixty-eight were established during 1699-1715 and twenty-eight during 1716-27. No S.P.C.K. school was founded in Carmarthenshire after 1713, and a number had disappeared before 1713. It is not known when the Welsh Circulating Schools really commenced, but in 1737 there were thirty-seven schools with 2,400 scholars. The schools were held for three months in the same place, usually in the winter months when farm work was slack. The pupils were taught to read the Welsh Bible and to learn the Church Catechism. Night schools were also held for those who could not attend during the day. The schoolmasters were trained by Griffith Jones at Llanddowror. The movement was a great success from the beginning, and when the founder died in 1761, the annual report for that year, **Welch Pietty**, recorded that 3,495 schools had been set up, with over 158,000 scholars in twenty-five years.

Beside organizing his schools, Griffith Jones wrote about thirty school books, pamphlets, and theological treatises. After Griffith Jones's death in 1761, **Bridget Bevan** carried on the schools very successfully until her death in 1779. The schools were not popular with some Church dignitaries, and, during 1745-52, five pamphlets appeared attacking Griffith Jones and his schools, especially his connection with Whitefield and other Methodist leaders. These were written by **John Evans** of Eglwys Cymyn and his circle, at the suggestion (so he said) of Edmund Gibson, bishop of London. In 1764, a report on the schools was made by a commissioner for Catherine II of Russia, and it is remarkable that news of the schools should have reached so distant a land within three years of Griffith Jones's death.

Griffith Jones's wife, Margaret, described as a pious and charitable woman, died 5 January 1755; Griffith Jones died 8 April 1761, aged 77, at **Madam Bevan's** home in Laugharne, where he had resided after his wife's death. Both were buried in Llanddowror church.

Author

Dr Mary Clement

Sources

Ottley Papers at the National Library of Wales

S.P.C.K. Manuscripts - abstracts of letters and minutes, London

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Henry Phillips, *A sketch of the life and character of the reverend and pious Mr Griffith Jones late rector of Llanddowror in Carmarthenshire the first projector and conductor of the Welch circulating schools throughout the principality of Wales* (London 1762)

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D. Ambrose Jones, *Griffith Jones Llanddowror* (Wrexham 1923)

F. A. Cavenagh, *The life and work of Griffith Jones of Llanddowror* (Cardiff 1930)

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On Griffith Jones's birthplace and ancestry, see *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 1923, 269-78

Further Reading

J. Morgan Jones and W. Morgan, *Y Tadau Methodistiaidd (1895-1897)*, i, 22-33

Wikipedia Article: [Griffith Jones](#)

Works

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Griffith Jones, *The Christian faith: or the apostles creed scripturally explained by questions and answers*(London 1762)

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Griffith Jones, *Espaniad byr ar gatecism yr Eglwys, sef, Holiadau ac atebion Ysgrythurol ynghylch egwyddorion a dyledswyddau'r grefydd Gris'nogol: yn bum rhar*(Llundain 1767)

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