

## GRUFFYDD, ROBERT GERAINT (1928-2015), Welsh scholar

**Name:** Robert Geraint Gruffydd  
**Date of birth:** 1928  
**Date of death:** 2015  
**Spouse:** Luned Gruffydd (née Roberts)  
**Child:** Siân Gruffydd  
**Child:** Pyrs Gruffydd  
**Child:** Rhun Gruffydd  
**Parent:** Ceridwen Griffith (née Ellis)  
**Parent:** Moses Griffith  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Welsh scholar  
**Area of activity:** Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Brynley Francis Roberts

R. Geraint Gruffydd was born on 9 June 1928 in Egryn, an ancient house in Tal-y-bont, Dyffryn Ardudwy. He was the second of the two children of Moses Griffith (1893-1973), researcher in experimental agriculture and later an independent agricultural advisor, and his wife Ceridwen (née Ellis), a teacher of Welsh and Latin. He had an elder sister, Meinir (1926-1992). Egryn had been the home of the parents of the wayward eighteenth-century lexicographer and grammarian, **William Owen Pughe**. There was a fundamental difference in scholarly attitudes between Geraint and **Pughe** but nevertheless, in an inexplicable way, Geraint felt the call of scholarship and research in Egryn and he took pleasure in believing that his journey began there. After a few years the family moved to Pwllpeiran, Cwm Ystwyth, a research farm in the uplands of northern Ceredigion, where Geraint was brought up. Though on the map it appears to be remote, the area had a lively and varied cultural scene. Moses Griffith had been one of the founders of Plaid Cymru and the party's first treasurer, and some of the foremost figures of contemporary Welsh life used to visit Pwllpeiran so that Geraint became familiar with hearing intellectual conversation on a range of political, religious and social topics. **Saunders Lewis** found in Moses Griffith a strong and generous friend in his bleak years and Geraint took pride in his association with the author and literary thinker who appointed him his literary executor.

He attended local primary schools in Dyffryn Ardudwy, Cwm Ystwyth and Pen-llwyn (Capel Bangor) before going to Ardwyn grammar school, Aberystwyth in 1939. In 1941 he went to Gordonstoun school, which was located at that time in Llandinam, Montgomeryshire, and then, in 1945, to University College Bangor intending to read English. Gordonstoun did not offer courses in Welsh and Geraint expected to be put into an 'inters' Welsh class in Bangor, but because of an unavoidable time-table clash he was placed in a more advanced class where he was inspired by his teachers, in particular **Ifor Williams** and **Thomas Parry**. He was proud to have been a member of **Ifor Williams's** last group of honours students and he used to enjoy recalling the occasion of the final lecture. A sign of his total commitment to master a subject is the anecdote that he spent the whole of the 1944 summer vacation in the National Library systematically reading every book, article and text in the bibliographies in **Thomas Parry's** *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* (1944). He graduated with first-class honours in Welsh in 1948 and then went to Jesus College Oxford to research on 'Religious prose in Welsh from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth to the Restoration'. He was awarded his DPhil in 1953.

His first post, in 1953, was as a member of the editorial staff of the University of Wales Welsh Dictionary which was housed at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. Geraint Gruffydd responded eagerly to the requirements of the post and to the opportunity that its location afforded him to have access, in every free moment, to examine and to get to know the wealth of early Welsh printed books and manuscripts. This was the initial step in creating a deep personal fund of knowledge on which to draw when he needed to. In 1955 he was appointed lecturer in Welsh at the University College of North Wales Bangor where he remained until 1970 when he was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Welsh at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth. He seized the opportunity to develop work that had been initiated by his predecessor **Thomas Jones** and established degree courses in Celtic studies. He served as dean of the Faculty of Arts in 1974. In 1980 he was appointed Librarian of the National Library of Wales where he commissioned a survey of the institution's administrative structures and was effective in developing the Library's links with public and university libraries in Wales and internationally. He became the first full-time Director of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in 1985 (previously, **J. E. Caerwyn Williams** had been honorary unpaid director). Geraint Gruffydd did much to set the scholarly and communal ambience of the Centre in the new developments that it faced in this period. He succeeded in nurturing a generation of young scholars and the seven-volume series (1991-96) of the poetry of the court poets of the princes of medieval Wales is a worthy memorial to his inspiring leadership. He retired in 1993 and was appointed Honorary Senior Fellow that year. A festschrift, *Beirdd a Thywysogion: barddoniaeth llys yng Nghymru, Iwerddon a'r Alban* (eds Morfydd E. Owen and Brynley F. Roberts), was published in 1996.

The subject of his PhD dissertation was a challenging one. It encompassed all aspects of the Renaissance and the work of the humanists, the Protestant reformation and the Counter-reformation as well as the early Puritans; it called for a firm grasp of (and real interest in) the theology of a period of religious ferment and mastery of the complex history of the ideas and politics of these years, allied to the ability to respond to these writings as literature. In practical terms, the appropriate bibliographical skills had to be acquired. The whole area of early modern Welsh literature opened before him and Geraint's scholarship blossomed over the years in a series of publications on the books and writers of the Renaissance, especially the achievement of **William Morgan** and the 1588 Bible. During these years he became an authority on early Welsh printed books. As a scholar Geraint Gruffydd was able to master new areas thoroughly and to undertake personal research, presenting detailed and secure textual analyses and innovative insights. In Bangor he turned to the work of **Dafydd ap Gwilym** and the poets of the gentry (y cywyddwyr), in Aberystwyth he was called upon to work on the earliest Welsh poetry (hengerdd) and the transition to the poems of the earliest medieval court poets, at the Centre the subject was the poets of the Welsh princes. He enriched the study of all these fields but the flow of other publications did not cease. Over the years he published articles on the writers and works of every period in the history of Welsh literature (not only those in the mainstream but also many lesser known authors and books), on literary criticism, memorial essays and, all too rarely, some poetry. Together with all this he regularly wrote essays where he shared his deep Christian convictions. A sign of his commitment to the ideals of research was the respect he always showed to his audience. Wherever he published his work - academic journal, society transactions, literary periodical, *Y Casglwr*, *Y Cilchgrawn Efynglydd* and many others - it was always characterised by the same thorough research and lucid writing.

He had an intense religious experience when he was a student at Bangor in 1947, an experience that deepened in Oxford. In Wales he was a member of the Welsh Evangelical Movement from its inception and he was a member of the editorial board of *Y Cylchgrawn Efengylaidd*. He acknowledged his faith joyfully and it never impinged upon his relationship with people or his research. He would have said that it enriched his life and work.

He married Luned (Roberts) in 1953. They had been students together in Bangor and she shared in his religious experience. They had three children, Siân, Rhun and Pysr.

Geraint Gruffydd served on many academic and public bodies, including the Welsh Books Council, the University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies, the Welsh Bibliographical Society, yr Academi Gymreig, and the editorial board of Gwasg Gregynog. He was President of the International Congress of Celtic Studies, 1993-2003, and consultant editor of the University of Wales Welsh Dictionary (1999 up to his death). He was a member of the Council of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and one of its Vice-presidents; he was joint editor of its *Transactions* 1988-92. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1991 and he was one of the founding Fellows of the Learned Society of Wales. In 1992 he was elected an honorary Fellow of Jesus College Oxford, and a Fellow of Aberystwyth University in 2004 (he was Vice-president in 1996-2001). He was awarded an honorary D.Litt. by the University of Wales in 1997 and the medal of the Cymmrodorion Society in 2013.

He was a humble man by nature, courteous and considerate, a reconciler but determined when furthering the cause of an institution or movement. He had a keen sense of humour and believed in the value of cooperation and in encouraging others to make a contribution to discussions and projects.

Geraint Gruffydd died at his home in Aberystwyth on 24 March 2015 aged 86; the funeral service was at Bethel church and he was buried in Cefn-Ilan cemetery, Llanbadarn Fawr, 1 April.

## Author

**Dr Brynley Francis Roberts**

## Sources

J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'Yr Athro Robert Geraint Gruffydd', *Beirdd a Thywysogion: barddoniaeth llys yng Nghymru, Iwerddon a'r Alban* (Caerdydd 1996) (eds Morfydd E.Owen and Brynley F. Roberts), Caerdydd 1996, xvii-xxvii

Huw Walters, 'Llyfryddiaeth Yr Athro R. Geraint Gruffydd' (to 1996), *Beirdd a Thywysogion: barddoniaeth llys yng Nghymru, Iwerddon a'r Alban* (Caerdydd 1996), 326-48

R. Geraint Gruffydd, E. Wyn James, (ed.), *Y Ffordd Gadarn: ysgrifau ar IĀ<sup>n</sup> a chrefydd* (Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr 2008)

Bobi Jones, 'Gair o gyflwyniad', *Y Ffordd Gadarn: ysgrifau ar IĀ<sup>n</sup> a chrefydd* (Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr 2008), 15-31

*Who's who?*

Meic Stephens, *The Independent* 22 June 2015

Peredur Lynch, Rhiannon Ifans, *Barn*, May 2015, 27-8, 29

R. M. Jones, 'Robert Geraint Gruffydd 1928 - 2015', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XV (2016), 277-306

## Further Reading

Huw Walters, 'Llyfryddiaeth yr Athro R. Geraint Gruffydd', in Morfydd E. Owen and Brynley F. Roberts (eds.), *Beirdd a Thywysogion*, pp.326-48

Huw Walters, 'Llyfryddiaeth yr Athro R. Geraint Gruffydd, 1996-2015', in E. Wyn James (ed.), *Y Gair a'r Ysbryd: ysgrifau ar Biwritaniaeth a Methodistiaeth* (Bangor 2019), pp.293-313

Wikipedia Article: [R. Geraint Gruffydd](#)

## Additional Links

VIAF: [149205](#)

Wikidata: [Q7273649](#)

**Published date:** 2017-02-15

**Article Copyright:** <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/>

[PDF](#) [Print](#) [Cite](#)

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

[Donate](#)

**APA Citation**

[×](#)

Roberts, B. F., (2017). GRUFFYDD, ROBERT GERAINT (1928-2015), Welsh scholar. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 8 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s11-GRUF-GER-1928>

[Copy to Clipboard](#)

Privacy & Cookies  
Copyright  
The Project  
Help  
Contact

LGC  
NLW

LLYFRGEL  
THE NATION



Ysgrifeddiadau  
Llywodraeth Cymru  
Copied by  
Welsh Government