

## GRIFFITHS, DAVID ROBERT (1915-1990), Baptist minister and Biblical scholar

**Name:** David Robert Griffiths  
**Date of birth:** 1915  
**Date of death:** 1990  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Baptist minister and Biblical scholar  
**Area of activity:** Religion; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** D. Hugh Matthews

D. R. Griffiths was born in Brynhyfryd, Pentre, Rhondda in 1915. He was the son of the Reverend Robert Griffiths, minister of Moriah Baptist chapel, Pentre, and Mrs Mimah Griffiths, daughter of David Davies, Maes Twynog, Llanwrda. Five very talented children were born to them: Elizabeth Jane, Augusta, **John Gwyn (Professor J. Gwyn Griffiths**, Swansea University), David Robert and Gwylm. Like his brothers and sisters, D. R. Griffiths, was educated in the local Pentre schools before being accepted for training for the Baptist ministry in Regent's Park College, which at that time was in the process of moving from London to Oxford. Because of this, some of his theological education was received in London University - he was also associated with the Congregational New College - where he was awarded a B.D. Degree in 1937. Between 1937 and 1939, he studied in Regent's Park and Mansfield Colleges in Oxford and there he gained an Oxford degree in Theology, adding a London M.Th. in 1943. By then he was the minister of the Baptist church in Caerleon, where he had been ordained in 1940. In 1938, while a theological student, he won the first prize in a competition for translating Virgil's Fourth Messianic Eclogue into Welsh in the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff. His translation appeared in *Cerddi o'r Lladin*, edited by his brother J. Gwyn Griffiths and published by the University of Wales Press in 1962.

In 1944, he married Gladys Owen, born in Pontllan-fraith, daughter of John Owen, principal of the college in Caerleon. They had one daughter, Petra. Gladys Griffiths had graduated in French from Somerville College, Oxford, and was a teacher in Newport at the time of her marriage. Throughout her life, with the full support of her husband, she was a tireless campaigner for social rights and justice. She corresponded regularly with Professor Dennis Brutus, the South African poet and scholar who was imprisoned in 1963 for eighteen months on Robben Island in the same prison as Nelson Mandela. After his release from prison, Dennis Brutus always stayed in the home of D.R. and Gladys Griffiths on his visits to Wales.

The family moved from Caerleon to Leavesden in 1946 when D. R. Griffiths was appointed chaplain and lecturer in Religious Studies in an emergency teachers' training college set up to train ex-service men after World War II. They returned to live in Penarth a year later when he was appointed New Testament tutor in the South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff, in succession to his uncle, Reverend John Griffiths. After seven years in this post he moved in 1955 to be a lecturer in New Testament in the Department of Religious Studies in Cardiff University College. There he remained until his retirement in 1979.

During his years in Cardiff, he was a member of the translator's panel responsible for translating the New Testament and the Apocrypha into Welsh for *Y Beibl Cymraeg Newydd* and he was a member of the Western Panel of the translators of the *Diglott Bible*. This was the work prepared by The British and Foreign Bible Society and distributed privately in parts to those involved in translating the scriptures into local languages. D. R. Griffiths was joint-editor of the theological journal *Diwinyddiaeth* between 1954 and 1968. He gave the Pantyfedwen Lecture under the auspices of the Catherine and Lady Grace James Pantyfedwen Trust; the lecture was published by Gwasg John Penry Press in 1970 under the title *The New Testament and the Roman State*.

As a young man, D. R. Griffiths was interested in poetry and he was a member of Cylch Cadwgan, a group of young avant-garde poets and writers in the Rhondda. In 1953, they published a volume of poetry entitled *Cerddi Cadwgan*. D. R. Griffiths contributed nineteen pieces to the volume which also contained the work of his brother, J. Gwyn Griffiths together with the work of **Pennar Davies**, Gareth Alban Davies and Rhydwen Williams. Most of D. R. Griffiths's poems in *Cerddi Cadwgan* were parodies or satires, while the later *Defosiwn a Direidi* (1986), devoted entirely to his own work, is divided into three parts: Poems, Hymns, Short Humorous Pieces, the latter section containing some of the pieces published in *Cerddi Cadwgan*. Two of his hymns ('O Grist, Ffisigwr mawr y byd ...' and 'O! Roddwr pob ysbyrdol ddawn ...') were published in the Baptist hymnal, *Y Llawlyfr Moliant Newydd* (1956) while *Caneuon Ffydd* (2001) contains one of his original hymns and two of his translations.

In his latter years he preferred to be known as D. R. Griffith, in order to distinguish himself from **D. R. Griffiths**, 'Amanwy'. He died 16 May 1990. After the funeral service at Tabernacle chapel Cardiff he was buried in Penarth.

### Author

**D. Hugh Matthews**, (1936 - 2020)

### Sources

*South Wales Baptist College Records*

Robin Gwyndaf (ed.) *Defosiwn a Direidi - Casgliad o Gerddi ac Emynau* (1986), tt. 14-24

*Y Faner* 15 June 1990, 5 October 1990

*Y Tyst* 12 July 1990, 6 October 1990

*Defosiwn a Direidi - Casgliad o Gerddi ac Emynau* (1986) contains monochrome photographs

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