

## GRIFFITH, GWILYM WYNNE (1914-1989), physician and Medical Officer of Health

**Name:** Gwilym Wynne Griffith

**Date of birth:** 1914

**Date of death:** 1989

**Spouse:** Gwyneth Rees Griffith (née Hughes)

**Parent:** Grace Wynne Griffith (née Roberts)

**Parent:** Griffith Wynne Griffith

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** physician and Medical Officer of Health

**Area of activity:** Medicine

**Author:** Brynley Francis Roberts

Gwilym Wynne Griffith was born in Liverpool December 18 1914, the son of [Reverend G. Wynne Griffith](#) (1883-1967), minister of Douglas Road chapel, Anfield and his wife, the novelist [Grace Wynne Griffith \(née Roberts\)](#) (1883-1963); [Reverend Huw Wynne Griffith](#) was his brother. The family moved to Porthmadog when the father became minister of Tabernacl Presbyterian church in the town and then to Bangor when he became minister of Tabernacl church there.

Gwilym Wynne Griffith was educated in Porthmadog and Friars' School, Bangor where he won the Robert Gee scholarship to Liverpool University medical school in 1932; he graduated in 1938. His primary interests lay in the field of public health and cancer and he became a leading authority on the epidemiology of the disease. He won the Rex Cohen Prize for his research on changes in the blood of cancer sufferers and in 1939 he published an article on an unusual form of leukaemia, the first of his many medical articles and research papers in both English and Welsh.

He served as a surgeon colonel in the RAMC in Europe and the Far East during World War II. Upon his return he was appointed Assistant Medical officer of Health for Flintshire and in 1948 he was appointed Medical Officer of Health for Anglesey. He gained his MD (Liverpool) degree in 1952 for research into medical statistics and he was elected Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society (FRSH) and Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine (FRSM). In 1961 he was invited to join the World Health Organisation at its headquarters in Washington DC where he was responsible for a wide-ranging research project published in 1967 under his name and Ruth Rice Puffer as *Patterns of Urban Mortality* (Washington, Pan American Health Organization). Late in the 1960s he returned to London as head of the medical branch of the Ministry of Health responsible for international health. He served on the executive board of the World Health Organization and he was a member of the expert panel on health statistics. One of his main achievements was the setting up of the cancer epidemiology unit at Oxford University. He retired to Anglesey in 1971.

Gwilym Wynne Griffith had wide interests and skills. An able mathematician and statistician, he was also a knowledgeable connoisseur of the arts. A passionate sportsman in his youth, he set up a cricket league during his early days in Anglesey and was an avid rugby fan. During his time at the Ministry of Health, he could be seen in the Oval on the occasional afternoon. He was a regular supporter of the National Eisteddfod and was admitted to the white robe of the Gorsedd of Bards in 1979. He also turned to writing in his retirement (he had published a short comedy for young actors, *Brown y detectif*, in 1935) and published *The day before yesterday* in 1988, his translation of *Hanes Môn yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg* (1927), written by his aunt, Elizabeth Ann Williams.

Gwilym Wynne Griffith married Gwyneth Rees Hughes of Liverpool in 1939 and they had 3 children. He died on April 16 1989 and is buried in the church of Llangwyfan on Anglesey.

### Author

**Dr Brynley Francis Roberts**

### Sources

Based on a tribute by Emyr Wyn Jones, *Y Faner* 19 May 1989 (with a photograph) and information from members of the family

### Additional Links

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