

GRIFFITH family, of Cefn Amwlch, Penllech, Llŷn

This family claimed descent from **Rhys ap Tewdwr Mawr**, prince of Deheubarth, through Trahaearn Goch, lord of Cymydymaen. Associations with Penllech can be traced back to the early years of the 14th century, but the first of the family to be definitely described as of Cefn Amwlch is one Dafydd Fychan who was alive in 1481. Suspected of recusancy during the years 1577-1581, and strongly antagonistic to the earl of Leicester's designs on the Forest of Snowdon, the Griffiths played no major part in county administration until 1589, when GRIFFITH AP JOHN GRIFFITH was picked as sheriff in that year. Griffith died and was buried at Oxford in 1599, leaving as heir to the estate, JOHN GRIFFITH I, who was Sheriff of Caernarvon in 1604 and 1618, and M.P. for Caernarvon from 1604 to (?) 1611. He died before March 1628. Another son, **Edmund Griffith I**, became dean of Bangor in 1613 and was promoted to the bishopric in 1633.

It was during the lifetime of JOHN GRIFFITH I and particularly of his son, JOHN GRIFFITH II, that the star of Cefn Amwlch rose to the ascendant with the successful challenging of the supremacy of the **Wynn** family of Gwydir and their allies in Caernarvonshire. A graduate (1609) of Brasenose College, Oxford, and afterwards a student at Lincoln's Inn, John Griffith the younger chose the law as his career, and was soon making a name for himself in the London courts as 'a busy solicitor of causes.' Marriage with Margaret, daughter of **Sir Richard Trevor** of Trevalun, whose wife had important court connections, and a close friendship with the earl of Northampton, lord president of the council of the Marches, helped to further his career, which reached its peak in 1620, when, after a stormy campaign, he defeated **Sir Richard Wynn** of Gwydir in the county election of that year. This triumph, marking a decisive stage in the long and bitter feud with the **Wynns**, was followed by another in 1622, when Griffith obtained the constablership of Caernarvon castle, and by others again in 1626 and 1628, when he was returned for the second and third times as M.P. for Caernarvonshire. He also succeeded his father-in-law, **Trevor**, as vice admiral of North Wales in 1626. In Parliament he showed himself an ardent satellite of the duke of Buckingham, and was 'much troubled' at his death, having spent 'most of his substance in his service and had nothing but fair promises of preferment.' Returned to Westminster for the fourth time in 1640, now as member for Beaumaris, Griffith appears to have left the House by the Autumn of 1642 to join king Charles at Oxford, and it was there that he died in July 1643, apparently of the plague. His younger brother, EDMUND GRIFFITH II, was a successful cloth merchant in London, and died before 1660 at Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire; while another brother, OWEN GRIFFITH, who died in 1671, was a king's attorney.

The heir to Cefn Amwlch was John II's son, JOHN GRIFFITH III, known to his boon companions as 'prince Griffith,' and somewhat of a stormy petrel. He took part in the Ile de Rhé expedition of 1627, and was one of the first to bring home news of its impending failure. 1640 saw his election as M.P. for Caernarvonshire, but two years later he was expelled by the House for an alleged 'wicked assault' on lady Elizabeth Sedley. For the next six years he was continually in trouble, and finally in 1648, convicted of murder by a Cheshire coroner's jury, he fled to France to escape his fate, and died before 1650, unmarried, in Paris.

Thereupon Cefn Amwlch came to his brother WILLIAM GRIFFITH I, who at one time had had aspirations to a high legal post in the city of London. A staunch churchman and Cavalier, he was a man of some consequence in post-Restoration Caernarvonshire, being made sheriff in 1661. His death, in 1688, was preceded in 1687 by that of his son JOHN GRIFFITH IV, and the estate was left in the hands of their widows, both named Elizabeth, the younger of whom, relict of John Griffith and daughter of **Robert, 2nd viscount Bulkeley** of Baron Hill, being at the time the mother of two infant sons, William and John.

WILLIAM GRIFFITH II the heir, was M.P. for Caernarvon 1708-13, and for Caernarvonshire from 1713 until his death in March 1714-15. JOHN GRIFFITH V, his brother, succeeded him both as squire of Cefn Amwlch and as knight of the shire, and died in June 1739, leaving a son WILLIAM GRIFFITH III, who married Sidney Wynne (**Sidney Griffith**) of Voelas, the celebrated '**Madam Griffith**,' whose name occurs in connection with **Howel Harris**. Their son, JOHN GRIFFITH VI, who inherited the estate on his father's death in 1752, was the last of that name, and the last, also, of the Griffith line. As a young lieutenant he fought in the battle of Minden (1759), and died, unmarried, in December 1794, leaving the Cefn Amwlch estate to his cousin **JANE WYNNE** of Voelas, to whom he was greatly devoted. She married the hon. Charles Finch, brother of the earl of Aylesford, and eventually both Cefn Amwlch and Voelas came to their eldest son, who assumed the name of CHARLES WYNNE GRIFFITH -WYNNE. An alumnus of Brasenose College, Fellow of All Souls, and a student at Lincoln's Inn, he was appointed sheriff of Caernarvonshire in 1814 and of Denbighshire in 1815, served as M.P. for Caernarvonshire, 1830, and died in 1865.

See further the article **Wynne** (Wynne-Finch).

Author

Emyr Gwynne Jones, (1911 - 1972)

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Additional Links

NLW Archives: **Voelas and Cefnamwlch Estate Records**

Gwynedd Archives Service: Caernarfon Record Office: **Cefnamwlch Estate Papers**

Wikidata: **Q20733082**

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