

HUGHES GRIFFITHS, ANNIE JANE (1873 - 1942), peace campaigner

Name: Annie Jane Hughes Griffiths

Date of birth: 1873

Date of death: 1942

Spouse: Thomas Edward Ellis

Spouse: Peter Hughes Griffiths

Child: Thomas Iorwerth Ellis

Parent: Robert Joseph Davies

Parent: Frances Davies (née Humphreys)

Gender: Female

Occupation: peace campaigner

Area of activity: Activism

Author: Meg Elis

Annie Jane Davies was born on 5 April 1873, at Cwrt Mawr, Llangeitho, Ceredigion, the sixth of ten children of [Robert Joseph Davies](#) (1839-1892) and his wife Frances (née Humphreys, 1836-1918). She had three sisters, [Sara Maria](#) (1864-1939), Mary (1869-1918) ac Eliza ('Lily', 1876-1939), and six brothers, Robert Brian ('Bertie', 1865-1879), David Charles (1866-1928), Edward (1867-1869), [John Humphreys Davies](#) (1871-1926), Walter Ernest Llewelyn (1874-1941), and George (b. and d. 1877).

She received some of her education as a child at school in Llangeitho, and then at various schools in Aberystwyth, London and Chester. She enrolled at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1892, spending three years there, but did not intend to read for a degree. In 1895, she went to London to keep house for her brothers John and Walter, who were students there; she obviously enjoyed the Welsh life of the capital, although she divided her time between London and Aberystwyth, as she would for the rest of her life. It was through her brother John that she met [Thomas Edward Ellis](#), the Liberal Member of Parliament for Meirionethshire; they corresponded from 1897 until they married in 1898. His letters to her have survived, but following her husband's death, Annie destroyed her side of the correspondence.

They originally intended to marry in May 1898, but the date had to be postponed because of Gladstone's death, with Tom Ellis being the Government Chief Whip, and the marriage eventually took place in June 1898. The couple enjoyed barely tenth months of married life. Tom Ellis was not in good health in late 1898, and had not fully recovered the following year, although he relentlessly pursued his parliamentary and literary work; the invitation, therefore, to spend Easter in the warm climate of Cannes in the south of France seemed an opportunity to relax and regain his strength. It was not to be, however, since he was taken ill, and died there in early April 1899.

Annie gave birth to a son, [Thomas Iorwerth Ellis](#), on 19 December 1899, with the Queen's physician, [Sir John Williams](#), being summoned from Buckingham Palace to attend to her. A family legend has him directing the midwife, after the birth to 'Give him a slap on his behind, so she can hear him cry'.

Calling her a 'single mother', with all its contemporary connotations, would be misleading. She had means, and the support of her family and connections, both in London and Wales. She was a well-known public figure in Wales because of her connection with the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and with the National Library, and in London, not only because of Tom Ellis's parliamentary connections but also due to her membership of the Welsh chapel at Charing Cross, where she associated frequently with many of the young women from Wales who had come to work in the capital. In 1916 the [Reverend Peter Hughes Griffiths](#), minister of Charing Cross, became her second husband.

She was active with the League of Nations (the predecessor of the United Nations) and by 1923, she was President of the Welsh National Council of the League of Nations Union. When the idea of a peace petition from the women of Wales was mooted, Annie Hughes Griffiths was selected as one of the honorary treasurers.

The history of the peace petition is a testimony to the strong desire for peace after the devastation of the First World War. Following conferences at Llandrindod and then at Aberystwyth in May 1923, it was women who proposed, seconded and supported the call for women from all over Wales to collaborate in appealing to the women of America to bring pressure to bear on the United States to join the League of Nations.

The work of collecting the names fell to a small number of campaigners, who then appointed local organisers to spread the word and to set about achieving this aim. The staggering number of 390,296 signatures was collected, thanks to the ceaseless efforts of local committees, meetings held to explain the purpose of the petition, and volunteers who literally went from door to door collecting names. When it was decided to appoint a deputation to take the petition to America, Annie Hughes Griffiths was the obvious choice to lead it.

Four women sailed to America on the steamship *Cedric* with the oak chest which contained the petition; accompanying Annie were Mary Ellis, one of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, Elined Prys, a social worker, and Gladys Thomas who went with Annie as a companion on the voyage. They landed in New York harbour on 11 February 1924.

Influential women in America had been diligently making arrangements to publicise the petition and the deputation, and the high point of the visit was a grand luncheon at a New York hotel, where over four hundred women attended to see the petition being presented. These women represented scores of organisations, amounting in all to millions of members. If proof was needed of the wisdom of selecting Annie to lead the deputation, it was seen in the reception the crowd gave to her address: this was an address she gave several times to various associations and assemblies during the journey, for New York was not their only destination. Arrangements were made for the women to travel on to Washington, and to the White House, to meet President Calvin Coolidge. It should be emphasised that the main aim of the journey and the petition was to make a connection between the women of Wales and the women of America. The meeting with the President was an informal one, since the organisers were at pains to stress that this was a non-political and non-partisan event, particularly bearing in mind the strength of isolationist sentiment in the United States at the time.

Annie kept a diary of her time in America, together with notes for her speeches there. Interviews which she gave to newspapers in America itself and following her return to Wales demonstrate clearly her pride at the response the petition received, and her hopes that the women's efforts would bear fruit. Despite the disappointment that the United States ultimately did not join the League of Nations, her enthusiasm for peace and humanitarian causes, all based on her strong Methodist upbringing, never waned.

Annie Hughes Griffiths died at Neuadd Wen, Llanbadarn Road, Aberystwyth on 7 October 1942, at a time when the Second World War was raging. She was buried at Gwynfil chapel, Llangeitho, with her brother, J. H. Davies. The grave is imposing, dominated by a large Celtic cross, reminiscent of the one on her first husband's grave at Cefnddwysarn. The wording on the gravestone is 'hefyd ei chwaer' ['also his sister'], her name and dates. Nothing more.

Author

Meg Elis

Sources

NLW Archives: [T. I. Ellis and Mari Ellis Papers](#)

T. I. Ellis, *Thomas Edward Ellis, Cofiant* (Lerpwl 1944-1948) - Cyfrol II

T. I. Ellis, *John Humphreys Davies (1871-1926)* (Lerpwl 1963)

Mari Ellis, *Y golau gwan: llythyrau Tom Ellis AS at Annie Davies* (Caernarfon 1999)

Dylan Iorwerth, *Cardis: portreadau o Badarn Sant i Dave Datblygu* (Talybont 2022)

Images

Gyde & Pickford, [Annie Jane Hughes-Griffiths](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Welsh Women's Peace Petition](#)

VIAF: [14266074](#)

Wikidata: [Q56176704](#)

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