

GRIFFITH, ROBERT DAVID (1877 - 1958), musician and historian of Welsh congregational singing

Name: Robert David Griffith
Date of birth: 1877
Date of death: 1958
Parent: Jane Griffith (née Williams)
Parent: Richard Griffith
Gender: Male
Occupation: musician and historian of Welsh congregational singing
Area of activity: History and Culture; Music; Religion
Author: Huw Williams

Born 19 May 1877, in Cwm-y-glo, Caernarfonshire, son of Richard Griffith, a slate quarryman, and Jane (née Williams) his wife. His mother was a cousin of [David Roberts](#) ('Alawydd ' and of [John Williams](#) ('Gorfyniawc o Arfon'). After moving to Mynydd Llandygái in 1885, the family returned to Bethesda in 1890, where he, too, obtained employment in Penrhyn quarry. Later he became an office clerk, and finally a commercial traveller until he retired. In 1928 he moved to Old Colwyn where he made his home for the rest of his life.

He received no higher education, but by cultivating himself he became an able musician and a diligent and successful researcher. In 1909 he formed a choir of 80 voices in Bethesda to perform with an orchestra some of the standard oratorios, and in 1921 Bethesda Choral Society was formed under his baton. He later conducted the Colwyn and District Choral Society (1929-36). He also took an interest in orchestral music; he was a zealous member of the [Roland Rogers](#) orchestra, and worked hard with the Gwynedd orchestra and Morfa Rhianedd youth orchestra.

Over a long period he was in demand as an adjudicator, a conductor at singing festivals, and a lecturer on musical topics. He also contributed regularly to *Y Traethodydd*, *Y Goleuad*, and *Y Drysorfa*, and wrote most of the articles about Welsh musicians in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940*. He was chosen to be musical editor of *Trysorfa'r Plant* when [J.T. Rees](#) died, and in 1951 was chairman of the Welsh Folk-song Society. He was mainly responsible for the annual selection of hymn-tunes for the Presbyterian singing festivals, and he served as secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales praise committee from its inception till 1958. He did not compose much, apart from a few religious pieces for children and the solo 'Y Sipsi'.

He began researching and writing about Welsh congregational singing about 1920, and contributed articles on the topic to *Y Cerddor*, commencing with the July issue, 1931. In response to an appeal by [John Lloyd Williams](#) he completed his researches to publish the results of his work as a book: *Hanes Canu Cynulleidfaoel Cymru* (1948). In 1952 the University of Wales conferred upon him an honorary M.A. degree. He died in his home in Old Colwyn, 21 October 1958, and was buried in Bronynant graveyard, Colwyn Bay. Some of his manuscripts are preserved in the library of the U.C.N.W., Bangor.

Author

Huw Williams, (1922 - 2002)

Sources

Y Cerddor, August 1920

Trysorfa y Plant, February 1942

J. Sutcliffe Smith, *Impressions of music in Wales* (Penmaenmawr 1948)(1948)

Baner ac Amserau Cymru, 6 November 1958

[*Y Traethodydd* 2002]

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