

GRIFFITH JOHN

BY

JOHN AARON

EP BOOKS (Evangelical Press),

Registered Office: 140 Coniscliffe Road,
Darlington, Co Durham DL3 7RT

admin@epbooks.org

www.epbooks.org

EP BOOKS are distributed in the USA by:

JPL Books, 3883 Linden Ave. S.E.,

Wyoming, MI 49548

orders@jplbooks.com

www.jplbooks.com

© John Aaron 2016. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

First published 2016, reprinted 2019

ISBN 978-1-78397-151-0

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

CONTENTS

Timeline	7
Introduction	11
1. Childhood and youth in Swansea (1831–55)	13
2. Shanghai (1855–61)	21
3. First journeys during days of rebellion	25
4. The Opium Wars	31
5. Hankou (1861–70)—first steps	35
6. ‘A perilous journey’ (1866) and a visit home (1870)	43
7. Hankou—the years of service	49
8. Griffith John’s priorities	55
9. A Time of Refreshing (1875)	65
10. The springboard to Central China (1871–85)	71
11. James Hudson Taylor and Timothy Richard	87
12. The Shanghai Missionary Conferences (1877, 1890 and 1907)	95
13. Home again (1880)	103
14. Revival, Hunan, and Revolution (1894–1900)	111
15. A death and a Jubilee (1905)	125
16. The last years (1902–12)	129
17. The forgotten missionary? How should Griffith John be remembered?	135
Further Reading	143

TIMELINE

- 1831 Griffith John born on 14 December
- 1832 Mother, Ann John, dies during a cholera epidemic
- 1839 Converted as an eight-year-old at Ebenezer Independent Church
- 1845 First experience of preaching, when only fourteen years old
- 1849 Father, also Griffith John, dies during a cholera epidemic. Elijah Jacob, his pastor, takes care of him
- 1850 Accepted at Brecon Theological College
- 1853 Accepted as a missionary by the London Missionary Society
- 1855 Ordained at Ebenezer; marries Margaret Griffiths; they sail for Shanghai, arriving 24 September
- 1850–64 Taiping Rebellion
- 1856–60 Second Opium War

- 1860 Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin)
- 1861 John arrives at Hankou, Central China (now Wuhan) on 21 June
- 1862 First Protestant church in Central China constituted at Hankou
- 1866 John and Alexander Wylie sail a thousand miles up the Yangzi River
- 1866 First hospital built at Hankou
- 1870 Returns to Britain because of Margaret's ill-health
- 1873 Death of Margaret John at Singapore during return voyage to China
- 1874 John marries Jeannette Jenkins in September
- 1875 Hankou Tract Society (later Central China Religious Tract Society) established
- 1877 First Shanghai Missionary Conference, 10–24 May
- 1880 John in USA and then Britain because of Jeannette's ill-health
- 1885 John's translation of New Testament into Easy Wen-Li completed; Margaret John dies in December
- 1890 John's translation of New Testament into colloquial Mandarin completed; Second Shanghai Missionary Conference

1895–96	Period of Revival in Hubei
1897	First Protestant baptisms in Hunan, the 'Last Province'
1899–1901	Boxer Uprising
1905	Death of Hudson Taylor, 4 June; Griffith John's Jubilee—50 years in China
1907	Third Shanghai Missionary Conference
1911	Retirement and final return to Britain
1912	Griffith John dies on 26 July in Clapton, London. He is buried at Sketty, Swansea

INTRODUCTION

Griffith John died in a nursing home in Clapton, London, over a hundred years ago, on 26 July 1912. *The Times* newspaper in its obituary column commented: 'We regret to record that Dr Griffith John, the great missionary in China, died yesterday afternoon.' A year previously, when reporting on his retirement from China, the Welsh daily newspaper, *The Western Mail*, noted:

In forming a judgement upon the real worth of a man's life it is difficult, during his lifetime, to predict whether history will or will not keep his memory green within the knowledge of future generations ... There is, however, no doubt about the reward the future holds in its palm for the memory of Dr Griffith John, the great Welsh missionary ... The mission field has always provided heroes. It has never yet raised a man who has excelled Dr John in pioneer work and wise judgement under almost insuperable odds.

But, for all his confidence, the writer was mistaken and Griffith John's name is all but forgotten today, except in a few limited circles. Some of the reasons for this are

discussed in a later chapter. What may be confidently stated, however, is that no one who has ever read the truly remarkable details of his life will easily forget him.

Representatives of two of the limited circles mentioned above were surprised when, unknowingly, they met in March 2014. A group of Chinese Christian pastors staying at Wales Evangelical School of Theology, Bridgend, visited a chapel in Swansea. All they knew was that the chapel had some connection with China. All that the minister of the church knew was that these pastors were from China. When he started talking to them of Griffith John, who was raised in, and sent out from, that chapel, he met with an excited response. The pastors inquired of their interpreter: 'Is this man speaking of *the* Griffith John?' What the minister had not known was that these pastors were from Hankou (present-day Wuhan), the centre of John's activities in China. What the pastors had not known was that the chapel was Ebenezer Chapel, where John was raised. They rejoiced that they had quite inadvertently found what they described as 'our mother-church'.

1
**CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN
SWANSEA
(1831–55)**

EBENEZER CHAPEL, SWANSEA

The early 1800s witnessed a rapid growth of industries in the Lower Swansea Valley. By 1820, 90% of the copper-smelting capacity of Britain was found here. The region was regarded as the world centre for copper-ore smelting and Swansea gained the nickname ‘Copperopolis’. A less welcome consequence was the great influx of population, resulting in an area of overcrowded and insanitary slums in the north of the borough. Outbreaks of typhoid and scarlet fever were common. It was here that Griffith John was born on 14 December 1831, in Emma Street, Hafod. He was the fourth child of Griffith and Ann John. Six months after his birth a cholera epidemic broke out in the Hafod area of Swansea.