



G. T. GRIFFITH

*Edward Leigh*

## GUY THOMPSON GRIFFITH

1908-1985

GUY THOMPSON GRIFFITH, born on 7 January 1908, grew up in a family which had prospered through the making of locomotive springs in Sheffield. The youngest of three sons, he was much closer in age to the middle one, Bill, and he was always very fond of him. (Bill died a few months before Guy.) The family had a Methodist background, and the three boys went as boarders to the Leys School in Cambridge, which is a Methodist foundation. Bill, who was less gifted academically than Guy, left school young and entered the family business. Guy was a brilliant pupil in Classics—a subject which was very well taught at the Leys—and he had a pacemaker in a fellow pupil, Romilly Jenkins. They were intimate friends, sharing many interests and appreciating one another's verbal witticisms, and their friendship was maintained throughout their careers. Jenkins, a Scholar of Emmanuel College, won the highest awards in Classics and became the Professor of Medieval and Modern Greek at King's College, London, and later a Professor at Dumbarton Oaks. Griffith's career was to be entirely in Cambridge.

In 1926 Griffith and I came up to Gonville and Caius College as Minor Scholars in Classics. He had been a good athlete at the Leys, playing hockey and cricket in the school team, and he had a keen eye, a lithe frame, and quick reactions. But being uncompetitive by nature he contented himself with playing in the College hockey team, and he regarded games as a pastime. Work was serious and enjoyable. There were no set books for Part I of the Classical Tripos in those days. We read almost all Greek and Latin authors of any standing, our training was entirely linguistic, and we produced every week exercises in prose composition, verse composition, and translation. Our supervisor, W. T. Vesey, an unrivalled authority on Pindar and an admirer only of A. E. Housman, lambasted our exercises without mercy. One of us despaired, and suggested to Vesey that he should abandon verse composition, pointing at his slashed copy. 'My dear heart,' said Vesey, 'if you wrote that in the Tripos, it would earn a first class mark. But it is not good enough'; and he slashed the copy once again. Some of this rubbed off on Griffith; for throughout his career he published

only what he believed to be his best. Vesey and Griffith shared an interest as teacher and pupil and later as colleagues when Griffith became a Fellow of Caius. This was a love of horses. Vesey rode and hunted; Griffith followed the races at Newmarket and laid his bets with an expertise which he had acquired at the Leys. In Part I of the Tripos he added distinctions in Greek and Latin Verse Composition to his First Class. He and I chose to take Ancient History as the special subject in Part II, and we passed into the hands of a most inspiring teacher, B. L. Hallward, then at Peterhouse. He too set the highest standard, and we owed it largely to him that we both obtained the First Class with a Distinction in Ancient History in Part II, which was essential if we were to win a University Studentship and undertake research.

In the summer of 1929 we went to Vienna to learn German and to meet the distinguished epigraphist, Professor Adolf Wilhelm. When Griffith arrived, I went to greet him at Vienna station. He rushed off to buy an English paper, turned the pages and collapsed on the pavement. 'What's wrong?', I cried. 'The horse lost by a short head, and half my studentship money has gone.' So I had to lend him some of my studentship money. Thereafter we went different ways, he to Germany and I to Greece; but we were soon together again in Cambridge, as he was elected to a Research Fellowship at Caius in 1931 and I to one at Clare. We were deeply influenced by F. E. Adcock, the then Professor of Ancient History, who had a brilliantly epigrammatic style of expression both in lecturing and in writing. As a writer Griffith in my opinion surpassed him; for he had a very graceful style, lucidity of expression, and a charming wit. These qualities were much admired by Adcock. They were like one another also in their interest; for they concentrated their attention on political and military history, and within that form of history they confined themselves to subjects for which there was plenty of literary and epigraphical texts. Griffith was of the same mind as Adcock, when on my proposing to write on something less precise and to me less limited, Adcock remarked: 'That is a sticky wicket; I should not choose to bat on it.' Griffith's subject for research, as suggested by Hallward, was 'The Greek Soldier of Fortune', and the essay which he wrote won him the Hare Prize in 1933. It happened that in that very year an established and much respected scholar, H. W. Parke, published his book entitled *Greek Mercenary Soldiers, from the Earliest Times to the Battle of Ipsus*. Some young scholars might have switched to a different subject. Not so Griffith; he chose rather to limit the time span of his own work. In 1935 he published his own book,

*Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World*, and he wrote at the start with his usual courtesy and honesty. 'H. W. Parke's admirable study . . . made it unnecessary and undesirable for me to publish the earlier part of my own work.' This limitation, though disappointing at the time, redounded to Griffith's advantage; for he probed deeper into the most interesting period of mercenaries in warfare, and his attention was turned decisively towards Macedonia and the Hellenistic period. His book was acclaimed at once as outstanding in its control of literary and epigraphical evidence, its realization of the issues, and its graceful presentation. His chapters on the provenance and the payment of mercenaries in particular broke new ground. H. W. Parke in his review praised Griffith's 'judgement in what he discusses and still more in the point at which he leaves the many tempting side issues'. Fifty years later, it remains the classic study of the subject.

One remembers life in a Cambridge college in the mid-1930s as very enjoyable and relatively leisurely. During the racing season Griffith devoted two hours a day to the study of form and breeding, and he and his closest friend in Caius, Michael Oakeshott, then a bachelor Fellow, went together to the races often at Newmarket and once at Epsom for the Derby and at Ascot. In 1936 they published a book which was remarkable both for its expert knowledge and for its humour and elegance: *A Guide to the Classics—or how to pick the Derby winner*. It was no mere *jeu d'esprit*; for a new edition was published in 1947 with the title *A New Guide to the Derby: how to pick the winner*. 'All the learning was Guy's', wrote Oakeshott, and learning was the right word, for it was based on fundamental research, pursued over more than a decade. Moreover, this form of learning had become financially rewarding since that meeting on the station at Vienna. Life in College for bachelor dons was very comfortable in those days. Griffith was an excellent host at a College Feast; for he was naturally considerate, well-mannered and a witty conversationalist, and he was knowledgeable about wine, especially claret. His circle of friends was rather small; he was a private person, and he did not set out to make new acquaintances. That circle included all his colleagues in ancient history in Cambridge. Once a year we used to attend a weekend house-party of ancient historians from London, Oxford, Cambridge, and some other universities at a convenient hotel. Griffith took some of the Cambridge contingent in his stately Rolls Royce. His winnings on the turf, we understood, enabled him to indulge his taste in vintage cars, as in vintage claret. He was a very popular member of the company, which was led by Norman Baynes, Hugh Last, and

Adcock; for Griffith always discussed problems of ancient history with an open mind, treated the ideas of others with courtesy, and made his own comments with clarity and wit. Nor were his interests restricted. He was exceptionally well read in English literature, taught himself to play the violin, and listened much to classical music. It was a sign of his taste that Jane Austen was his favourite writer, and Mozart his favourite composer.

He was appointed a University Lecturer in 1937. In that year his first article was published, 'An Early Motive of Roman Imperialism (201 BC)' in *The Cambridge Historical Journal*. In it he paid a remarkable tribute to an eminent French scholar. 'M. Holleaux', he wrote, 'has crowned his labours with a book which will remain one of the most perfect pieces of historical research in the whole field of ancient history.' Another writer for whom Griffith had the highest respect was W. W. Tarn, then the outstanding historian of Alexander and the Hellenistic age. In fact Holleaux and Tarn resembled Griffith in their artistic style and lucid expression, and they appreciated his skill and penetration in the handling of difficult evidence and the organization of material. The mutual respect of Tarn and Griffith led to an enduring friendship and a collaboration in scholarship which was to bear fruit after the war. In 1939 he published 'The So-called *koine eirene* of 346 BC' in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, the first of his many articles on fourth-century history.

Marriage to Marjorie Rainey in 1940 brought abiding happiness. They were ideally matched in temperament and in understanding, and they were blessed with four children, who grew up with similar interests in ballet, music, the classics, and horse-racing. The roots which he was putting down in Cambridge were to hold him there firmly. But first there was service in the RAFVR from 1941 to 1945 as a controller of aircraft. His calm temperament, fine judgement, quick reactions, and unflustered mind were just what was needed. His experience was mainly with bomber flights, based in England and later in France. It must have been heart-rending for a man of his sensitivity, and it was typical of him that he spoke later only of the humorous side of those days. That he settled back into Cambridge life with relief is certain. He was singularly free from ambition. He was content to be a Flying Officer and then, as he put it to one of his ablest pupils, 'simply an academic don'. Within his College he did not seek any College office, and the committee on which he sat longest was the Wine Committee. Within the Faculty he did not put himself in the way of becoming Secretary or Chairman, and the possibility of a

Professorship elsewhere did not interest him. He immersed himself in teaching, lecturing, and writing and in the friendships which he had formed before the war.

His teaching was very important to him and to his pupils. Although he was shy and tended to be taciturn with undergraduates, his sincere friendliness and what one of them called 'his innocent, childish sense of humour' won their hearts. He succeeded Vesey as a teacher of verse composition, he kept pace with the changing curriculum for Part I, and he maintained Hallward's tradition as a supervisor in Part II. He produced a large number of distinguished pupils, and one of them described his influence aptly with the aphorism '*nihil tetigit quod non ornavit*'. As a lecturer he was thorough and expressed himself with elegance and a dry wit; but he was no exhibitionist and he never attempted to rival the rapid flow and glittering epigrams of Professor Adcock. He was unsurpassed as a supervisor of graduate students. He treated them entirely as equals. He never claimed to be an authority, he considered objectively any idea they put forward, and he gave it his serious and total attention. He often proceeded by asking a pertinent question in an unassuming way, as if he himself was almost a novice in these matters. A session of supervision with a research student (and many of them came from overseas) was an occasion for good manners, glasses of excellent sherry, and cultured conversation on music or politics. At a time when Adcock's successors in the Chair of Ancient History were developing the social and economic aspects of the subject, Griffith carried on the tradition of political and military history with an unostentatious mastery. His influence was profound in the study and the promotion of the fourth century and of the Hellenistic period. Although he was averse to lecturing abroad or attending conferences anywhere, he corresponded with most of his former pupils, of whom many were in teaching posts overseas, and he never failed to read and comment on any work which they or others sent to him. His letters were lively and witty. A collection of them would be very interesting.

His leading position among the younger scholars was recognized by his appointment as one of the two editors of *The Classical Quarterly* in 1947, and he acted for four years with great efficiency. He published an article in the first volume of a new periodical published in Germany, *Historia*, 'The Union of Corinth and Argos (392-386 BC)'. He was lecturing at the time, in 1950, on the fourth century, and he discussed this union as an example of isopolity, 'whereby two cities make an exchange of their citizenship to each other, each retaining meanwhile a perfectly independent status

and losing nothing of its sovereignty'. He was at work also on Alexander and the Hellenistic period. In 1947 he published an article in which he acknowledged the help of Tarn and Adcock on 'Alexander's Generalship at Gaugamela'; it has been described as the most sane and balanced article on the subject. In 1952 the third edition of Tarn's *Hellenistic Civilisation* appeared. It had been revised by Tarn and Griffith, and Tarn acknowledged his debt to Griffith in the Preface. 'I was fortunate in securing the cooperation of Mr. G. T. Griffith, who has indeed pulled the labouring oar throughout and taken a quite undue share of the work off my shoulders, for which I am most grateful.' A. H. M. Jones, who had succeeded Adcock as Professor, wrote in a review of this book: 'All scholars will be grateful for the painstaking scholarship which has gone to incorporating in the volume—or at least taking note of—the results of all recent discoveries and researches in the Hellenistic field.' This book too has stood the test of time. In 1951 he was elected to the Laurence Readership in Classics, and in 1952 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. This was a remarkable distinction in view of the wartime break; for he was a year or two younger even than W. K. C. Guthrie, who was elected to the Academy in the same year.

Griffith always made a very fair appraisal of other scholars. He had no axe to grind and no ambition to further. He was the ideal man to write the section on 'The Greek Historians' in *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* in 1954, and he added an Appendix in the enlarged edition of 1968. This was a most useful work of reference, and it was a delicate task, well discharged, which involved the evaluation of the works of other scholars. Between 1954 and 1978 Griffith wrote a number of short articles. Two were on fifth-century Athens. One, entitled 'Some Habits of Thucydides when Introducing Persons', had a bearing on the composition of Thucydides' history, which Adcock much enjoyed discussing with his colleagues. Griffith suggested that 'all of these introductory remarks were written some long time after the time of the actions in the context of which they were introduced'. The other, 'A Note on Plutarch, *Pericles* 17', which concerned the 'Congress Decree', came out in *Historia* in 1978. It was remarkable for the flash of common sense which demolished (for me) a theory (not mine) that the decree was a forgery. He wrote, as always, with good manners. 'This detail' (to which he had drawn attention) 'suggests to me that either the decree reported by Plutarch is authentic or its fourth century forger was a real master of counterfeit. The latter is not quite out of the question; but the former seems much more

likely.' He avoided open criticism, and he very rarely reviewed a book. Indeed he once remarked to a younger colleague: 'If you are reviewing a book and find it was written by a fool, there is no need to say so. It is rather his personal misfortune.'

He wrote two articles on Athens in the fourth century. One in 1966 in honour of Victor Ehrenberg, 'Isegoria in the Assembly at Athens', was in line with the interests of Ehrenberg; and the other, 'Athens in the Fourth Century' in 1978, arose out of a seminar on imperialism, held in Cambridge, and seemed to me less original and less polished than I had come to expect. His other articles were all on Macedonian subjects. They were not written to promote or justify a particular view of Philip or Alexander but as exercises in the interpretation of the evidence. They are models of their kind. Three of them were read to the Cambridge Philological Society. In 1956 in discussing the equipment of the Macedonian phalangites he balanced the odds, as he might have done in selecting a potential winner of the Derby, and came to the conclusion that 'there is no means, so far as I know, of showing conclusively that the phalangites of Philip and Alexander had or had not breastplates'. In 1964 he discussed the originality of Alexander in appointing financial officers to act alongside but independently of the satraps and gave a subtle analysis of the relevant passage in Pseudo-Aristotle, *Economica*, ii. In 1968 he presented with great clarity a complicated argument about the letter of Darius and the reply of Alexander in Arrian, *An.*, 2. 14, and suggested that the former was false and the latter genuine. In 1963 in *JHS*, lxxxiii, he gave his views on the vexed problem of how many hipparchies of cavalry Alexander had at various times; and in 1965 in *Proceedings of the African Classical Associations* he investigated the relations between Alexander and Antipater. In a characteristic sentence he warned us of the need to distance ourselves from modern concepts. 'There is a danger that the impact on the Macedonians of war-weariness, too, may be underrated. We have come to think of war as a matter of pushing buttons and working machines, preferably when sitting down; even the infantry, though they still sweat it out when battle has commenced, get *to* the battle on wheels, and march only if they must.' Some had suggested that Antipater was planning revolt in case he should suffer the fate of Parmenio; Griffith knocked that idea on the head by pointing out that Antipater at that time sent his son Cassander to join another son already in the service of Alexander at Babylon.

Articles of a general kind were written in *Greece and Rome*, xii (1965), as the introduction to *Plutarch, The Age of Alexander* (1973),



and on Philip for the seventh edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1974). In 1966 he edited a collection of studies by scholars of several nationalities under the title *Alexander the Great, the Main Problems*. He wrote the introduction, but with typical modesty did not include any article of his own. The book was intended as an aid to the teaching of advanced students and was rightly judged as such by A. R. Burn in a review in *JHS*. 'To take Alexander as a Special Subject for Honours, with Mr Griffith for supervisor and this book available, would clearly be an inspiring experience for a young scholar.' The fact that Griffith showed no sign of wanting to write a book at this stage was a grief to Adcock who still regarded Griffith and me as his pupils. In his retirement Adcock depended on his friends and particularly on Griffith, who being in Cambridge was able to visit him and did so constantly, however inconvenient it may have been at times. One evening I told Adcock that I had been invited to write a large-scale history of ancient Macedonia, and he at once urged me to bring Griffith into the project as a collaborator. I made the offer and Guy accepted, much to my pleasure, but he made it clear at once that within the scope of the first two volumes he was willing to write only on the reign of Philip. I agreed, with some unexpressed reluctance, as I had worked and written on Philip in the past, and he began to collect his material. In 1970 he published an article in *The Classical Quarterly* on Philip's early interventions in Thessaly, which stated the case for the view he intended to adopt in our Volume II.

I published Volume I in 1972 and retired in 1973 to live in Cambridge. My part of Volume II was completed in 1974, and it included a chapter on the internal organization of Philip's Macedonia, the set-up in the Balkan empire, and the coinage of Philip, which Griffith did not wish to tackle. His part was completed in 1976. Between 1973 and 1976 we met regularly, sometimes as often as once a week, to discuss the many problems which emerged, and we had a very happy time together. The process of writing took longer for Griffith, because he was more of a conscious stylist than I and because he liked to submit his first draft to scholars working in this field—many of them his ex-pupils. Volume II was published in 1979. Griffith's part, being almost 500 pages of text, was really a book in itself, and it was immediately acclaimed as outstanding: 'the considered work of an expert who has clearly spent many years thinking about the problems which he discusses' (*The Classical Review*, xxx. 78), and 'a work which certainly deserves to rank with the greatest feats of Greek historical scholarship' (*Phoenix*, xxxv. 267). Such praise set the

crown upon a lifetime of application to the study of Philip and Alexander and of his own contemporary world.

Philip's diplomatic skills were described by Griffith with one eye on examples of modern diplomacy. Thus in regard to Philip's dealings with Arybbas, king of Molossia, Griffith wrote as follows: 'The diplomatist leaves doors open until the time has arrived for them to be closed. If Philip put the fear of God into Arybbas now, with the knowledge that God's instrument could well prove to be the young Alexander, it was still politic not to deprive him of all hope, or all belief in honesty as the best policy for himself. Short of some unforeseeable alternative, Alexander would return; but it could be left an open question whether he would return to rule jointly with Arybbas, or to rule alone.' Demosthenes had compared Athens to a boxer who guarded himself too late; Griffith improved on this by saying that 'she was like a very mobile boxer who can do everything in the ring, except punch'. He liked to ask and answer questions of general application, for instance in regard to the Phocians melting down the art-treasures of Delphi. 'Were the Greeks, then, more philistine than we might care to think? Probably. The keenest sense of period in art no doubt does belong most to ageing civilizations of failing creativity.' His humour was always near the surface ('really anybody could write something like Isocrates if he abandoned his mind to it') and sometimes on it, for instance when the Amphictyonic Councillors were making a tour of inspection on Amphissaean territory. 'They (the Amphissaean) came down through the olive groves in full force and under arms. They seized some of the hieromnemons, and the party as a whole had to run for it, back to Delphi up the steep; they made it, but only just. Blood pressures will have been high among the shorter-winded of the hieromnemons etc.'

The nicest tribute perhaps was paid by Professor M. Zahrnt in *Gnomon*. 'Dabei möchte er gleich betonen, dass er G.'s Ausführungen mit Vergnügen gelesen hat, einerseits wegen des lebendigen Stils, der geistreichen Analogien und des unüberhörbaren Humors, mehr aber noch wegen der Souveränität mit der G. nicht nur ein in sich geschlossenes Bild von diesem Herrscher zeichnet, sondern auch den Voraussetzungen für sein jeweiliges Handeln und seinen Motiven nachspürt. Gerade dies wird seiner Darstellung einen bleibenden Platz unter den in letzter Zeit nicht seltenen Arbeiten über Philipp sichern.'

He wrote a short note on the puzzling name of a cavalry regiment (in *Megas Alexandros*, 1980) and a few pages on the origins of the phalanx (in *Studies in Honor of Charles F. Edson* in 1981). But he

was suffering from bronchial troubles which forced him to stay at home during the winter months. He decided not to extend our collaboration into Volume III, but he read and commented on what I was writing with his usual acumen, tact, and humour; for he was anxious to see the project completed. Alas, it was not to be so. Shortly after he was admitted to Papworth Hospital, I visited him, and he joked about the historical standards of Polybius and Diodorus with selfless courage. A few days later he died peacefully in his sleep, on 10 September 1985.

N. G. L. HAMMOND

I am grateful to Professor Michael Oakeshott and to some of Griffith's former pupils for their help.