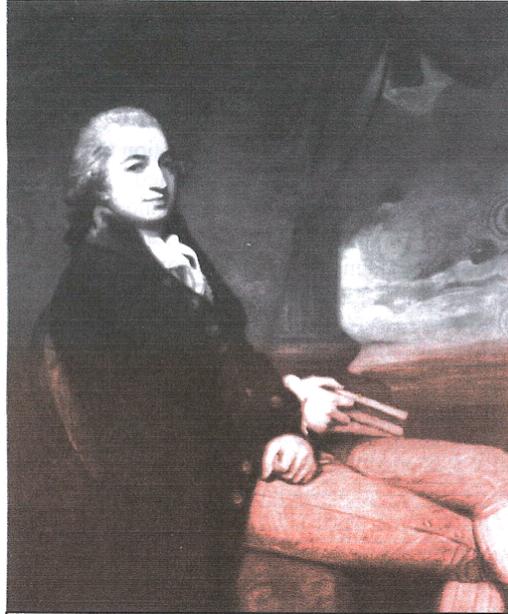


## Richard GRIFFITH in India (1770-1780)

Richard GRIFFITH was born at Abbey Street, Dublin, on 10 June 1752, the son of Richard GRIFFITH (c.1714-1788) & Elizabeth (1727-1793), daughter of Thomas GRIFFITH & Jane FOXCROFT.



His parents moved to London about 1764, though his father continued to spend most of his time in Ireland. When he was young and his parents impecunious, he was brought up by his mother's mother, Mrs. Jane FOXCROFT, in Portarlinton. Later, young Richard, with his illegitimate half-brother John GRIFFITH (c. 1749-1780), attended Angelo's Academy in London. Angelo was a fencing master. Riding and other matters important for young gentlemen were also taught but the curriculum included subjects such as mathematics, too.

A director of the Honourable East India Company, John MANSHIP [director 1758-1809 with gaps], presented Richard with a writership in the Company, a very valuable and much sort-after appointment. John MANSHIP "had no son. His daughter had eloped with a friend of Richard Sheridan's. So when he met Elizabeth and her likely son at Windsor in the summer of 1768 he became putty in her hands - determined to do a good action. Elizabeth writes all about it to Richard, then in Ireland, and tells him the nomination is worth £1500. Manship probably didn't need the money, and was a reader of the Letters (A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances), which present the Griffiths as sentimentally deserving paupers." [Letter 13 April 1999 from Betty Rizzo to Alan Roberts]. John MANSHIP was also a subscriber to *The Delicate Distress* by Elizabeth.

An article about his son, Sir Richard GRIFFITH, says Richard was appointed to this writer-ship through the influence of Lord Abercorn [Dublin University Magazine, April 1874, p.433.], a connection by marriage of the Griffith family, so perhaps he had something to do with it, too.

"The rank of Writer was the lowest into which the covenanted, or civil servants of the EIC were divided. The others in ascending order were Factor, Junior Merchant and senior Merchant, being on the basis of seniority and length of service, taking at least eight years to reach the rank of Junior Merchant." [J R Owen A Nabob at Holyhead in the journal *Maritime Wales*, 2004, No 25, Gwynedd Council].

The H.E.I.C. ship 'Vansitart' left Portsmouth on 22 Feb 1770, 16 May found at Simon's Bay, The Cape, 'Huntingford', Captain Pigou, and two Dutch ships, 22 July saw the Coramandel coast, 23 July off St Thomas Mount with 6 other Indiamen & several country ships, Madras 25 July, and at 4 August off Ingerlee (or Injellee) at the mouth of the Hoogley where the pilot sloop took passengers and some stores for Calcutta. She was a ship of 676 tons with 3 decks, built 1763, Captain Lewin and 129 ships' company. Passengers for Bengal included 9 writers, 6 newly appointed like Richard GRIFFITH. Twenty three people are shown as having died and 14 as deserted ('Run'). [IOR- L/MAR/B/46C,46V (1) & (2)].

Richard arrived in Bengal in August 1770 as a writer and made steady progress. In 1771 he was Assistant in the Secretary's Office in Fort William, Calcutta, and, in February 1772 Assistant in the secretary's department to the Council of Revenue at Patna, Bihar, once the capital of India some 350 miles from Calcutta [IOR G 28/2C].

There are three entries in the early years from Fort William, relating to his salary in rupees; the first dated 25 Aug 1770 - "No. 140. Mr Richard Griffith Arrival 29 June 1770. Station on arrival Writer. Present Station Writer Salary per An 135 Moly Allow. R23.5.3 House Rent R 23.5.9 Amnt FF Ann R 918.6. Gratuity Acc. b Fwd 918.6." The second of 15 Nov 1771: "No. 124 Mr Richard Griffith, Assistant to the Secretaries (sic) Office, Arrival 4th June 1770, Station on arrival Writer, Present station Writer, Salary p ann.. R135, Mon allow 33.5.3, House rent 43.3.3 Amt p ann 918.6 Gratuity 918.6, ditto Amount b fwd 918.6." The third, on 10 Nov 1772: "No. 126 Mr Richard Griffith, Assistant at Patna, Arrival 4<sup>th</sup> June 1770, Station on arrival Writer Present station Writher, sal p ann 135, Monthly allowance 33.5.3, House Rent 43.3.3, Amt p ann, 918.6, Amt b fwd 918.6." He seems to have been given a starting date two months to his actual landing, but salary-wise nothing has changed for the last couple of years, so extra remuneration must be from elsewhere. [IOR- L/F1011, Records of Service 1702-1928].

From 4 Feb 1773, the Patna Revenue records hold a number of his translations from the "Persian" of missives from locals. On 13 Dec 1793, Henry RICHARDSON & Richard GRIFFITH are amongst those shown as Assistants to the Revenue Department, with Henry RICHARDSON also as Persian translator and Richard GRIFFITH as Assistant Persian Translator. A Persian Translator received 100 Rs per month [IOR ref: G/28/4].

There is a letter of 21 March 1771 from Mr. Wynne at Fort William, Secretary to the Committee of Revenue, to Mr John Cartier, President and Members of the Controlling Committee of Revenue, on the subject of the establishment of a Committee of Revenue at Fort William for the inspection, control and regulation or the all revenue affairs of the Company [OIR 354.541].

Although the H.E.I.C. List of Civil Servants for 1776 shows him as Revenue Assistant, Patna, in 1775 he became Acting Accountant there and was confirmed in the position in March 1776 -

"Mr William Haverkam Accomptant to this Department having obtained permission to go ..... for the recovery of his health, .... & as we understand he has not any design in coming back: Agreed Mr Richard Griffith who has now charge of the office be appointed in his room." [minutes of the Provincial Council, 25 March 1776].

As was the custom at the time, Richard traded on his own account as well as working for the Company. In August 1775 he was granted the exclusive contract to purchase opium for the Company in Bihar, the contract later set to run from 31 December 1775. A letter from "Warren Hastings & Co Council" from Fort William, Calcutta, dated 18 Aug 1775, addressed to Mr Isaac Sage, Chief &c. of the Provisional Council of Revenue at Patna, begins: "Gentlemen, We have resolved to grant to Mr. Richard Griffith the exclusive priviledge (sic) of providing the Opium produced in the province of Bihar on his contracting to deliver the whole quantity he can produce in that province as well as the districts of Ghazipore & Naipore at such places as you shall appoint where it is to be manufactured by that Gentleman under the Superintendence (sic) of such person or persons whom you will think fit to inspect it.". Terms of payment were then set out. It continues: "On receipt of this letter you will cause an advertisement to be published at Patna & throughout the Province of Bihar similar to that transmitted to you the 23 Novemb. 1773 prohibiting all other persons under the company's protection under the penalty of confiscation from purchasing opium in the Bihar Province & that you shall so afford the same support and Protection to Mr. Griffith which you gave to the late Contractor, the additional duty of one sicca [10,000] rupee p soer must be levied on all opium not provided by Mr. Griffith which may be imported from Ghazipore or Gurrookpore or any other part of the Nabob Asaphul Dowlali's dominions and you will accordingly enforce the order given you for the seizure of any opium provided by other persons." [IOR ref: G 28/7, p. 500]. On 14 September 1775, he asked for the contract to run from 31 Dec 1775, which was agreed to [IOR ref: G 28/7, p.514]. The price of raw opium was paid to the growers by stages, the first payment being an advance made when the grower agreed to supply from the ensuing year's crop

Richard Griffith immediately had problems. The Chief & Council of the Dutch Factory at Patna wrote a letter, dated the 14 August 1775 & signed by Greg Heklotts and Dd. Hinloch, to the HEIC Council at Patna which they dealt with at a Consultation of 16 Oct 1776, (English translation from the Dutch): "Gentlemen, One of our Gamastahs being sent by our chief to the opium districts on our company's business acquainted him last night, that

having been since six or seven days at Fulwaise, one of the opium aurungs the day before yester (sic), four peons and harcaraks, who said to belong to Mr Griffith, arrived also there and addressed themselves to him, asked him who he was, and what was his business at that place, he answered them to be a Gomastah of the Dutch Company in whose service he was there, that the peons answered him that they had ordre (sic) from their master, to tell him immediately to Depart because he had nothing to do there, that our Gomastah replied them he was not obliged to obey that order, upon which said peons, they were not ordered by their master to use any force but would inform him what had happened, and after which men would oblige him to remove that after this, yet eight peons and harrazzafs more arrived yesterday, being thus twelve in all, who again told our Gomastah in name of Mr, Griffith to depart from there, and if he refused they would carry him away by force" -he wouldn't do so they did, and took him to Mr. Griffith at Patna. He was warned against being found there or anywhere on the same business and let go.. The Dutch said that "opium must be considered as a branch of our Trade in the province" and complained of this action. However, later correspondence makes clear that the Free Trade permit granted to the Dutch did not include opium. [IOR ref: G 28/6].

On 29 Jan 1776 he wrote to complain of agents of Dutch and French Factories infringing this privilege {Consultation of Patna Revenue Department 1776 (IOR ref: G 28/7, p .32)}. It seemed this was a continuing problem. Other letters are of an administrative kind - the warehousing & inspection of the supply, the ruinous state of the godown and the expense of repairs, the amount supplied & request for payment. [IOR ref: G 28/7].

"Although the Council in Fort William did not give in to all the Dutch complaints, it issued a proclamation in 1775 allowing the Dutch unhindered trade in textiles, although the opium trade was still strictly controlled. Under the directorship of John Mathias Ross (1776-1781) mutual relations were further improved. Ross was a personal friend of Hastings and his stepdaughter, Johanna Ribaut, was married to the well know orientalist and protege of Hastings, Nathaniel Brassey Hillhead. Ross maintained good relations with many other British in Bengal, and he used his position to enter into all sorts of trade operation. He negotiated with Richard Griffith, who was appointed opium contractor for the EIC, for extra deliveries of opium over and above the VOC official allocation. A British merchant, Cuthbert Thornhill, carried this opium to Batavia. Moreover, he accepted huge amounts in British capital bills, apparently making profits by lending out the money he thus received between the time the money was accepted and the bills issued." [Femme Maasia War, Competition and Collaboration: Relations between the English and Dutch East India Companies in the Seventeenth and Eighteen Centuries].

Later, on 23 Sept 1776, Richard was reporting that he had provided a total of 1,418 maunds of opium that year [IOR ref: G 28/7, p. 691. One maund equalled 80 pounds, say 36 kilograms, so the total was over 50 tons]. He must have produce large amounts during his contract

Further letters throughout 1777 were again of administration - quarterly returns of opium supplied, accounts & payments and the like — but also some accommodation of the Dutch. On 14 April 1777 a letter from Mr Wordsworth, appointed an Assistant (to the Governor General & Council?), "Directing a Quantity of Opium in its crude state" to be delivered to the Dutch [IOR ref: G 28/8 & 9, pp.310-311].

Richard Griffith gave up the opium contract about August 1777. On 11 Aug 1777, the Governor General & Council advised they had granted to Mr Mackensie the Exclusive priviledge (sic) &c. of providing opium [IOR ref: G 28/9, pp. 844-846]. Until 13 Oct 1777, there is correspondence concerning Mr. Griffith's winding up of his opium contract business.

Richard was advancing to better things. Following the introduction of stricter procedures over the payment and receipt of cash at revenue collection stations, of which Patna was an important one, there is a letter of 20 Oct 1777 appointing Richard Griffith also to the new position of Assistant to the Treasury, with a copy of the Regulations for the Treasury [IOR ref: G 28/9, pp. 1259-1264]. On 12 Jan 1778, the Assistant to the Treasury lays before the Board a Statement of the Balance in hand and requests for putting the Treasury on the footing required by Regulations [IOR ref: G 28/10, p. 40 & 41].

It is very likely that Richard Griffith was in contact with his half-brother, John, throughout his time in India, but there is no evidence that they spent any time together. John went to India almost a year before Richard. He served

in the Honorable East India Army, where he became an Infantry Captain. He was an Ensign sent to Bombay 1 Oct 1769 and transferred to Bengal in 1771, Lieutenant 26 Oct 1770, Captain 3 Sept 1779. He died in Calcutta in July 1780. In his will dated 2 Sept 1777 at Farruckabad, he describes himself as "Descended in a direct line from the last monarch of Wales", (not entirely true, though his father did have a pedigree going back to Coel Godebog, a king of the Britons in ancient times, if the pedigrees and the bards are to be believed), and refers to son Henry. [Hobson's Index at National Army Museum]. He names Richard Griffith of Patna as executor.

A General Letter from Patna of Feb 1779, para. 38, advises that Messes George HERBERT and Richard GRIFFITH are resigned the service on Family concerns and proceed by way of Suez with dispatches for you. The Council of Revenue at Patna had a letter on 7 Jan 1788 acquainting them of Mr Griffith's resignation [IOR ref: G 28/13, p. 13] and wrote a letter that day (to the Governor General?), concerning Arrangements of the Officers in Consequence of this resignation [IOR ref: G 28/13, p. 14]. There are other letters that mention the matter on 31 Dec 1778 & 8 Jan 1779 [IOR ref.: O/6/14, p.59 & 354.541, p.445].

Richard does not appear among the officers at Patna after that. On his return to Europe, he took with him dispatches from the authorities at Fort William to The Court (or Board) of Directors of the EIC at India House, Leadenhall Street, London, and delivered them there on November 1779 [IOR: B/95]. "Griffith was recommended to be restored to the rank he had held at the time of his resignation whenever he wished to rejoin the EIC, as it was stated that his conduct whilst in the Service merited the Court's favour. (IOR O/6/14, p. 59, G/28/12: Gupta) ." [J R Owen A Nabob at Holyhead].

On 17 Sept 1780, he married Charity Yorke BRAMSTON, daughter of John BRAMSTON of Oundle, Northamptonshire, and never went back to India.

Writing in the early 1900's when over age 70, one of his granddaughters said he "had made a fortune of £90,000, which he eventually lost in shares in the Grand Canal." (She adds, "He studied the Eastern languages with great success, and had frequently acted as interpreter.") [Lady Mary Frances Elizabeth Stawell My Recollections, p. 1.]. On the other hand, a son writing in the 1840's says it was "£60,000 I believe" [Charles James Griffith's Journal for 1847.]. Either way, he had acquired a considerable fortune.

additional references —

Bowen H V The Business of Empire, Cambridge 2006. p.290. footnote 91  
A Nabob in Holyhead, Richard Griffith, Post Office Packet Agent 1815-20 Maritime Wales 25,2004, pp. 27-33

Lincoln Bowen & Rigby (Eds.) The Worlds of the East India Company, University of Leicester, 2002  
- article by Femme Maasia War, Competition and Collaboration: Relations between the English and Dutch East India Companies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

WS Griffith -April 2009