

‘EX LIBRIS F.LL. GRIFFITH ET N.C.C. GRIFFITH 1937’*

BY SUSANNE WOODHOUSE

One of Francis Griffith’s¹ many outstanding achievements was “his unsurpassed library”,² “the finest private Egyptological library in existence”³ which became the Egyptological Library of the University of Oxford. Whilst this is well known, there is, to my knowledge, no account of how this magnificent private research and teaching tool was created, or how it has been maintained and developed since Griffith’s death in 1934. This article is the first endeavour to retrace the history of the Griffith Library from its beginnings, as far as they can be established, to the present day.⁴

During the early stages of his career, Francis Griffith was employed at the British Museum in London (1888-96) and at University College London (UCL) (1893-1901). Although at the British Museum, Griffith was not based in the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities Department – he was actually in British & Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography – he had access to its collection and the Museum Library which allowed him to work on his first publications. As Petrie’s assistant⁵ at UCL, Griffith was able to consult additionally the newly-opened Edwards Library from 1893 onwards. When leaving London for good in 1896, he could look back to prolific seven years in terms of publications, with the caveat that these were written in his spare time.

While in London, Griffith lived on a modest income,⁶ lodging first with Petrie and then with his sister Agnes, which was not only economical, but provided him with excellent company. These lodgings were located in the immediate vicinity of both institutions and their libraries, so that Griffith had little need to build up a private library. However, it is very likely that a man who would go on to amass the best private library for Egyptology will have acquired at least some Egyptological books throughout his life in order to further his research. A good

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¹ It is astonishing that the biographies for two monolithic figures of British Egyptology, namely Francis Griffith and Alan Gardiner, still remain to be written. For accounts of Griffith’s life, career and achievements see Bierbrier 2019: 194-195 (inc a bibliography); Thompson 2015: 172-174; Simpson 2008; Ray 2001; Gardiner 1934.

² Gardiner 1934: 77.

³ Anonymous 1937: 263.

⁴ It is hoped that material such as new acquisition lists or a card index of Griffith’s personal library will come to light in the future as it would allow a more detailed reconstruction of the development of this collection.

⁵ Paid directly out of Petrie’s own pocket (£20 p/a), owing R.S. Poole’s opposition to Griffith’s appointment to a UCL-salaried post (Simpson 2008; Janssen 1994: 134).

⁶ Griffith’s salary at the British Museum was “small” (Drower 1985: 223).

example showing that at this early stage of his career Griffith's meagre income was not an obstacle to obtaining rare books is his personal copy of *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien* by Richard Lepsius (1849). It came into Griffith's possession in late 1891 or early January 1892, as the accompanying handwritten note by Adolf Erman informs us.⁷ Though the German scholar leaves open whether a payment was required or whether the copy was for free, the Griffith correspondence held by the Griffith Institute Archive in Oxford can provide a clue to the nature of this acquisition.⁸ From Erman's letters and cards written in 1891 and 1892 it emerges that both men maintained a mutual exchange of their publications.⁹ It is therefore likely that the copy under discussion was received by Griffith as part of the publication exchange with Erman.¹⁰

Apart from Erman, Griffith exchanged his publications with a large number of colleagues since at least 1891, constantly including new scholars. The Griffith correspondence files show that he received publications from and send his latest works to scholars, e.g. in Austria¹¹, Czechoslovakia¹², France¹³, Germany¹⁴, the Netherlands¹⁵, Switzerland¹⁶, the UK¹⁷ and the USA¹⁸. While the majority of his publications was for the private use of the recipient, some material was destined for the institutional library the recipient was affiliated to, e.g. the British Museum, École Pratique des Hautes-Études or the Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, making Griffith's publications available to a wider circle of academics, but also providing review copies. For a scholar as prolific as Griffith, such exchanges were therefore a major way to constantly add the latest scientific works to their private libraries.

Naturally there will have been academic and rare books which could not be sourced through an exchange, and Griffith would have purchased such items, e.g. from Oxford-based Thornton's Bookshop¹⁹ and Blackwell's²⁰. However, this still remains to be corroborated by evidence which has been elusive so far.

It was Griffith's good fortune to marry, in 1896, Kate Bradbury²¹ (1854-1902), the daughter of Charles Timothy Bradbury (1827-1907), a wealthy cotton-manufacturer. Confidante of Amelia Edwards and a committee member of the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF), Kate had acquired a sound knowledge of Egyptology before marrying her husband.²² Having accompanied Edwards on her American lecture tour in 1889-90, her input in the publication of these lectures was considerable,²³ and her personal copy of *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers* bears the author's touching dedication 'My Katie, Nov. 1891, A.B.E.' (fig. 1).

⁷ The volume is held in the Rare Books Room of the Sackler Library. In his handwritten, very personal, note, Erman expresses his joy that he was able to procure the copy for Griffith.

⁸ Collection Griffith MSS 21: <https://archive.griffith.ox.ac.uk/index.php/correspondence> (viewed 27/07/2021)

⁹ Griffith MSS 21: letters 415, 416, 418.

¹⁰ The regular exchange of publications between both scholars ended with Griffith's death.

¹¹ Hermann Junker, Jakob Krall.

¹² Theodor Hopfner.

¹³ Charles Boreux, Gaston Maspero, Henri Sottas.

¹⁴ Freiherr von Bissing, Ludwig Borchardt, August Eisenlohr, Adolf Erman, Friedrich Hultsch, Günther Roeder, Heinrich Schäfer, Kurt Sethe, Wilhelm Spiegelberg, Georg Steindorff.

¹⁵ Pieter Boeser.

¹⁶ Jean-Jacques Hess.

¹⁷ Robert Atkinson, Sir Frederic Kenyon, Hugh G. Evelyn White.

¹⁸ Nathaniel Reich, James Breasted.

¹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thornton%27s_Bookshop> (viewed 27 July 2021).

²⁰ During Griffith's time Blackwell's was a fine bookseller and publisher : <<https://blackwells.co.uk/rarebooks/history.php> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackwell%27s>> (viewed 27 July 2021).

²¹ For Kate Griffith (née Bradbury) see Bierbrier 2019: 195; Forrest 2011: 30-33; Unwin 2007: 27-31, 35-36.

²² Gardiner (1934: 75) described her as a 'highly cultured woman ... with a keen zest for archaeology'.

²³ Moon 2006: 237.

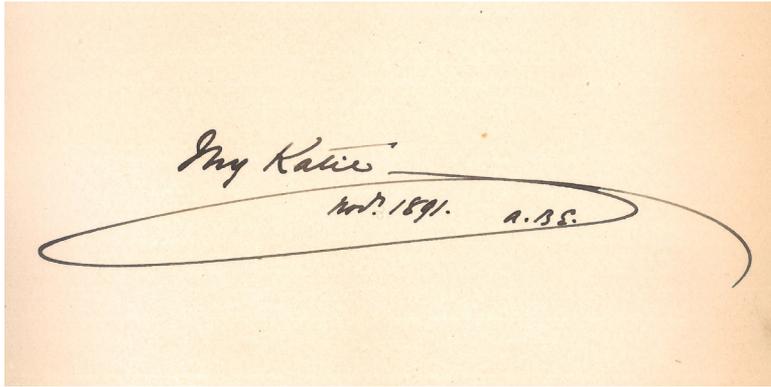


Fig. 1: Amelia Edwards acknowledged Kate Bradbury's friendship and support during the American Lecture tour as well as her help with the publication of these lectures. (© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)

With his new-found affluence, Griffith was able to resign from his post at the British Museum and to become a private scholar. He joined his wife and father-in-law at their home, Riversvale Hall,²⁴ in Medlock Vale, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire (now Greater Manchester) and 'was now free to indulge his taste for Egyptology untrammelled'.²⁵

However, this required access to a comprehensive Egyptological library whilst living at the relatively remote Medlock Vale, which prompted them to further systematically build up their private book collections in order to fully support their scholarly work.²⁶ There is no sign that Griffith's scholarly output was interrupted after his marriage, on the contrary, Griffith now produced several philological monographs which were highly praised.²⁷ This leads one to believe that he was able to consult all the books he needed, either in his private library or at the Manchester University Library where he was Honorary Lecturer in Egyptology between 1896 and 1908.

Although appointed the first ever Reader in Egyptology at the University of Oxford in 1901, Griffith nevertheless remained largely based at Ashton-under-Lyne during the first years in the post. During these early Oxford years, he first rented temporary lodgings and then stayed with his sister when his presence was required in Oxford.²⁸ On these occasions he will have frequented the University's Bodleian Library which he found "was well stocked with Egyptian books" due to the Egyptological projects the University supported since 1894.²⁹ The agreement between the Bodleian Library and the Stationers' Company, by which a copy of each publication registered with the Company was sent to the Library since 1610,³⁰ will also have contributed to these specialised holdings, in particular the older stock. Shortcomings at the Bodleian Library might have been foreign Egyptological publications, a disadvantage which could have been remedied by Griffith bringing some of his own books to Oxford.

Sadly, his wife died in 1902, but for the next five years Griffith continued to spend most of his time at Ashton-under-Lyne, where he worked and continued expanding his library.³¹ His father-in-law subsequently died in 1907, leaving Griffith much of his considerable fortune (£42,000: £5,000,000 at 2020 prices), allowing him to move permanently to Oxford, where he bought a large house (fig. 2) 'affording ample space for his ever-growing library'.³² Located on

²⁴ Unwin 2007.

²⁵ Gardiner 1934: 75.

²⁶ As executor of Edwards's will Kate Bradbury oversaw the setting up of the Edwards Library and she ensured that it was well-stocked and maintained in the future (Janssen 1992: 4-5, 9), demonstrating her interest in libraries and knowledge of Egyptology.

²⁷ Ray 2001: 191-192.

²⁸ Gardiner 1934: 75.

²⁹ Griffith 1901: 23-24. Stevenson (2015: 21) paints a different picture of the Bodleian Library's Egyptological holdings in 1879.

³⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodleian_Library (with fn. 21) (viewed 28/07/2021)>

³¹ Ray 2001: 194.

³² Gardiner 1934: 75.



Fig. 2: 11 Norham Garden, Griffith's home in Oxford between 1907 and 1931. (Photo: S. Woodhouse.)

the north edge of the University $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the Ashmolean Museum, 11 Norham Gardens quickly developed into an epicentre for Egyptology, the heart of which was the library. The bibliography of Ancient Egyptian monuments in Egypt and Nubia, later known as the *Topographical Bibliography*,³³ first took shape here, its book collection consulted by Griffith and his students, and colleagues donating their publications (fig. 3). Apart from publication exchanges, such donations were always to form a significant part of the new acquisitions, since the obituary of Griffith's second wife concludes with the following appeal: 'It is earnestly hoped that those who have hitherto presented their works, whether books or offprints ..., will continue to do so, and thus contribute to making Oxford an important centre of Egyptological activity'.³⁴

In 1909, Francis Griffith married Nora Christina Cobban Macdonald³⁵ (1870-1937). She had been a student of his and a skilled artist, likewise bringing a considerable fortune into the union. She participated in all her husband's scholarly activities, including his excavations in Egypt and the Sudan.

Then in 1924, Griffith was appointed the first Professor of Egyptology at Oxford University. The following year he made his will with the commitment that most of his now-substantial fortune would be left to the University of Oxford, in order to build and endow 'a permanent home or Institute for the study of the ancient languages and antiquities of the Near East if possible in or adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum'. Amongst other collections, this institution would house his private library as well the bibliographic project. By the time Griffith made his will, Rosalind Moss (1890-1990) was about to embark on the publication of the first volume of

³³ For the history of this project see Thompson 2018: 160-162; Moss 1990; James 1991 and visit the project's website <<http://topbib.griffith.ox.ac.uk/project.html#tabs-history>> (viewed 19/07/2021).

³⁴ Anonymous 1937: 263.

³⁵ For the life of Nora Griffith (née Macdonald) and her achievements in Egyptology see Drysdale 2021 and Bierbrier 2019: 195 (inc literature).



Fig. 3: Griffith's library in 11 Norham Gardens, Oxford. (© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)

the *Topographical Bibliography* and undoubtedly he wanted to ensure that the other planned volumes of this visionary project would be published in the future.

On his retirement in 1932, Griffith moved to Boars Hill, on the outskirts of Oxford, and his whole library moved with him. Work on the *Topographical Bibliography* carried on here, everybody continued to be welcome to consult the library, although, since the new location was 5 kilometres from the city centre, the journey to and fro may have deterred some.

A rare insight into the dependence of teaching staff and students alike on Griffith's private library is provided by a letter written by Eric Peet (1882-1934), second Reader in Egyptology and prospective Professor of Egyptology in Oxford, to his mentor Alan Gardiner, and dated 17 January 1934: 'A certain amount of time is spent in trying to ... put into the Ashmolean a few more essential reference books for students (*Wörterbuch* and Crum for instance). In a sense Griffith's library has been a curse for the department, for, whilst most generously throwing it open to everyone, he made no effort to put a few books into the Ashmolean where they could

be handled at all hours by everyone. Consequently when he moved to Boars Hill, Oxford has been left unprovided for'.³⁶

In charge of teaching, Peet thus bemoans the lack of Egyptological books in the centre of Oxford where even basic publications such as the *Wörterbuch* and Crum's *Coptic Dictionary* were now absent as the result of Griffith's move (and that of his library) to Boars Hill, Griffith's teaching having relied to a very large extent on his private library being accessible to his students. Neglecting the Ashmolean Museum Library had possibly been a deliberate economy on Griffith's part, since his library would after his death become available in an institution that was 'in or adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum' anyway.

In the interim, it was up to Peet to find a solution to allow the teaching of Egyptology without his students having to undertake a time-consuming trip to Boars Hill. From his letter, it is not clear whether Peet was aware of the intended bequest in Griffith's will. Venting his frustration by calling Griffith's library 'a curse for the department' rather gives the impression that he is ignorant of it – but even if he was aware, Griffith was still only 70, with potentially decades of life left to him. In favour of the latter is that Alan Gardiner speaks of 'an open secret that this unsurpassed library and entire fortune are ultimately to become the possession of Oxford University'.³⁷ With Griffith and Peet being on good terms there would have been no reason for Griffith to leave his successor in the dark about the future of his private book collection.



Fig. 4: The first Griffith Institute can be seen in the centre of the photo. (© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)

By the time of Griffith's death in 1934 his library comprised 'more than 20,000 volumes',³⁸ mainly on Egyptology but also covering Assyriology, Classics, Classical and general Archaeology, reflecting his broad approach to Egyptology³⁹ Importantly, his widow kept the library 'up to date' until her own death in 1937 after which the joint bequest of Francis and Nora Griffith made it possible to begin building the Griffith Institute, at which time it was hailed as 'finest private Egyptological library in existence'.⁴⁰

Until this new institution was opened, the library would remain on Boars Hill where it was 'open to accredited readers'.⁴¹ Ronald Ovenell from the Bodleian Library took

³⁶ Lewis 2019.

³⁷ Gardiner 1934: 77.

³⁸ Simpson 2008.

³⁹ Stevenson 2015: 24-25.

⁴⁰ See fn. 3. Nora Griffith kept adding new publications to the library, apparently helped by book donations from her husband's former colleagues. It is tantalizing that so far no evidence emerged which could shine more light on how the library was maintained between 1934 and her death.

⁴¹ Anonymous 1937: 263.

responsibility for the library⁴² until its transfer into the newly constructed Griffith Institute (fig. 4) in 1938.⁴³ The formal opening took place on 21 January 1939 in the presence of Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie.⁴⁴ The Institute was an independent department of the Ashmolean Museum, an arrangement that is reflected in the stamp which the bequeathed books received. The text 'Ex Libris F.L.I. Griffith et N.C.C. Griffith 1937' in the middle of the stamp acknowledges the former owners as well as the year of the bequest whilst the text surrounding it indicates the 'Ashmolean Museum Oxford' as the institution in which the bequest is embedded (fig. 5).



Fig. 5: The library stamp marking the bequeathed library items.

Griffith's wish to locate the Institute 'in or adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum' (fig. 6) provided immediate access to the Museum's object collections and made it possible to conduct interdisciplinary research through the existing library collections in the Ashmolean Museum Library. These two prerequisites for the study of Egyptology had already been set out in Griffith's Inaugural Lecture⁴⁵ held 8 May 1901, and they had now become manifest in the Griffith Institute.

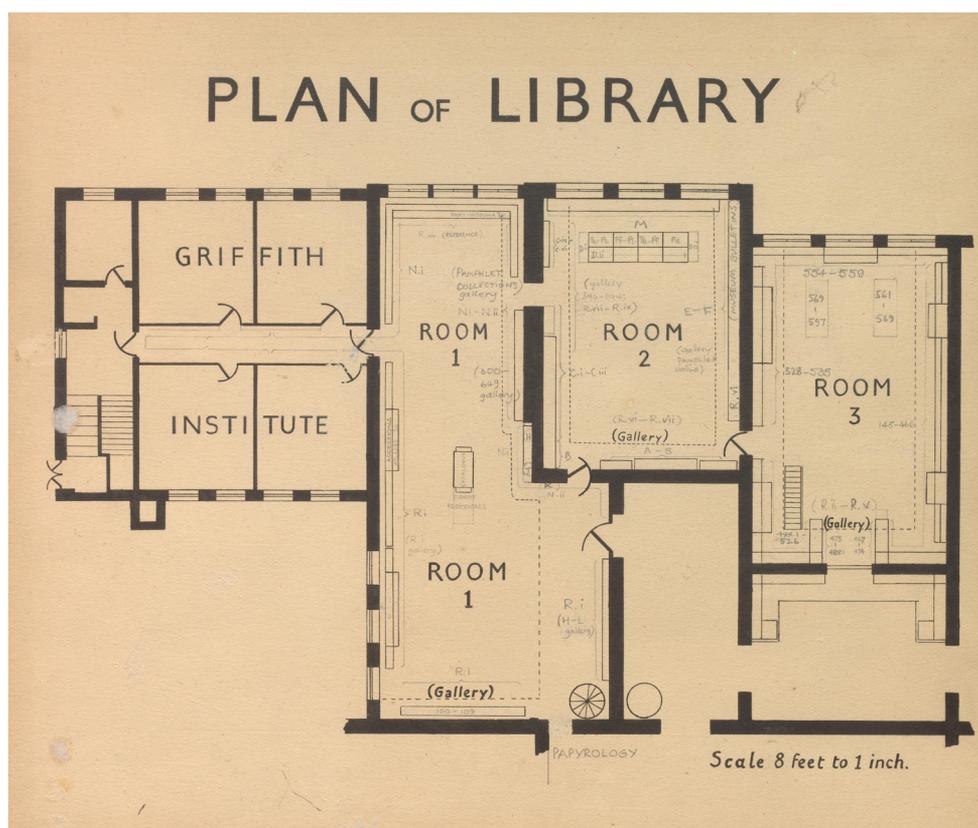


Fig. 6: This undated plan shows on the right Rooms 1-3 of the Ashmolean Museum Library and on the left the layout of the Griffith Institute which abuts on the Ashmolean Museum building. A doorway provides communication between both buildings. (© Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.)

⁴² R. Hobby, personal communication (email of 16 August 2019).

⁴³ The library was still reclassified in Boars Hills. Leeds 1938: 3-4.

⁴⁴ Parkinson 2014: 6.

⁴⁵ Griffith 1901.

The Griffith Institute Library was managed by the Ashmolean Museum Librarian, a position held by Ronald Ovenell between 1947 and 1972. By the 1960s he was reporting that the Ashmolean Museum Libraries and the Griffith Institute Library (fig. 7) were outgrowing



Fig. 7: The main Egyptology Reading Room on the second floor of the first Griffith Institute. (© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.)



Fig. 8: Ovenell's model for a new library building for the collections of the Ashmolean Library and the Griffith Institute Library. (© Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.)

adjacent to the Griffith Institute, communicating with it on the three upper floors. The Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies library-collections would have been transferred from the cramped confines of the Griffith Institute to the third floor of this purpose-built library. But despite Ovenell's efforts, this library project failed to find sufficient support.⁴⁹

It was not until 30 years later that the Ashmolean Library and the Griffith Institute Library were finally relocated in a new home, the Sackler Library (fig. 9), which was formally opened 24 September 2001.⁵⁰ Its holdings⁵¹ derive from a number of separately housed collections and

⁴⁶ Ovenell 1967: 6.

⁴⁷ MacGregor 2001: 74, 76.

⁴⁸ The model is currently kept in one of the Sackler Library offices.

⁴⁹ R. Hobby, personal communication (email of 16 August 2019).

⁵⁰ Legg 2001.

⁵¹ The collections are listed on the Sackler Library website <<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/libraries/sackler/collections-and-resources>> (viewed 28/07/2021).



Fig. 9: The Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies collections are accommodated on the first floor of the Sackler Library. (Photo: S. Woodhouse.)

are the embodiment of Griffith's vision of a research tool promoting interdisciplinary research. The collections, which can be searched on SOLO, the Bodleian Libraries' online catalogue,⁵² are maintained by four Subject Librarians, one being responsible for Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. External readers are welcome.⁵³

A wing in the Sackler Library building harbours the new Griffith Institute⁵⁴ with its Archive, a teaching room and office spaces. Here, the Topographical Bibliography Project and the Online Egyptological Bibliography (OEB) are based. Currently Griffith Institute staff is also preparing an exhibition on the occasion of the centenary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Under the title "Excavating the Archive" some of the Griffith Institute Archive material relating to the excavation of this famous tomb will be shown between April and December 2022 at the Weston Library (Oxford). With all projects requiring direct access to the Sackler Library collections they are ideally situated.

Irreplaceable copies of publications are housed in the Sackler Library's Rare Books Room and one of them is Griffith's personal copy of the first edition of the *Egyptian Grammar*, written by his former student Alan Gardiner (1879–1963).⁵⁵ This copy contains Gardiner's little-known hieroglyphic dedication to his teacher, a testimony of 'the humble servant's' huge veneration for Griffith (fig. 10).⁵⁶ The text speaks for itself:

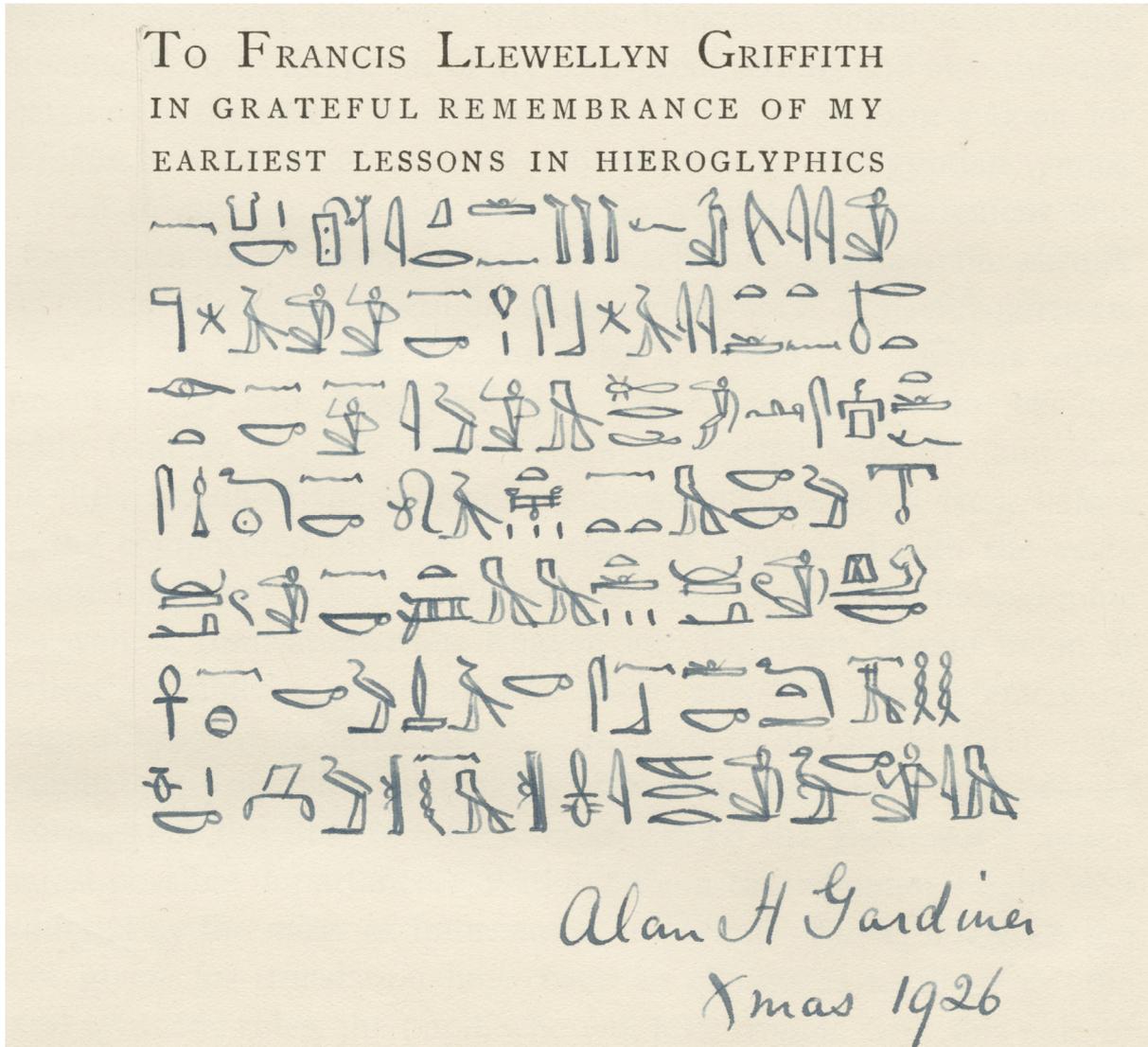
⁵² Search Oxford Libraries Online: <http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/primo-explore/search?vid=SOLO&lang=en_US&sortby=rank>

⁵³ A reader card must be obtained from the Admissions Office prior to consulting any of the Bodleian Libraries: <<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/join-the-libraries/find-admissions-office>>.

⁵⁴ <<http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/>> (viewed 28/07/2021).

⁵⁵ In a letter dated 23 December 1926, Gardiner informs Griffith that this very copy is in the post and that it would be 'extremely interesting to hear how you react to some of my theories. I only hope that you will not find too many howlers.' (Griffith Institute Archive: Correspondence Griffith MSS, grey box of unnumbered letters which will be included in the main file MSS 21).

⁵⁶ The Griffith Institute agreed to include a facsimile of the dedication in the 2021 reprint of Gardiner's *Egyptian Grammar*.



*For your Ka, the scribe with skilled fingers, beloved of Thoth:
I praise God for you because of this perfect teaching,
which you have made for me.
I was like a child which did not yet understand,
and you have lit the paths which were dark,
and you have solved what had not been solved before you.
May you live, prosper and be in good health forever and eternity,
whilst your heart is happy and at ease, as this your humble servant wishes.*

Addendum

Having expressed in footnote 4 my hope to one day locate new acquisition lists or the like for Griffith's library, I received an email from Francisco Bosch-Puche 5 August 2021, announcing just such a find. He had discovered the unregistered copy of an unassuming book, the spine of which is lettered "Accessions 1933-", and written inside the front cover is the name "Griffith". The listed publications on Egyptology (including Coptic), Assyriology, Papyrology and Theology in addition to Griffith's handwriting on the first pages leave no doubt that this accessions register pertains to Griffith's private library.

It lists the incoming new library items by date, specifying the title, the supplier and the assigned shelf mark from 30 January 1933 to May 1939 (no exact date), with the remaining pages left blank. Beginning the register on the penultimate day of January leads to believe that it continues on from an accessions log which ended 29 January 1933, and which has not yet been located. The cut-off point May 1939 indicates that, after the official opening of the Griffith Institute 21 January 1939, this book was continued for a few more months; after which it might have been replaced by a register commonly used for the Ashmolean Library through which the Griffith Institute library was administered.

The first 12 pages are in Griffith's hand, and a short horizontal line was drawn in pencil under his last entry 9 March 1934, poignantly separating this part of the register from the following entries. With library items arriving constantly, an unknown hand resumes their registration 16 March 1934, two days after Griffith's death. On 15 May Nora Griffith entered three books, only to finally take over her husband's library duties 22 May 1934. It is her handwriting which dominates in the accessions register until her death 21 October 1937, after which so far unidentified hands continue the work.

During 1933, the last year of his life, Griffith logged c. 220 new library items, and as there is no evidence for a librarian, it can be assumed that the ordering also lay with him and perhaps his wife. Judging by the entries, it seems that he had set up subscriptions for most of the periodicals, saving precious time. Yet, it was still a considerable effort to keep the monographs up-to-date which were mainly purchased from the booksellers Parker's⁵⁷, Blackwell's and Thornton's in Oxford, Quaritch in London, Geuthner in Paris, J.C., Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung and Harrassowitz in Leipzig, and Lehnert & Landrock in Cairo.

Publishers such as Kegan Paul, Clarendon Press in Oxford, Cambridge University Press, Liverpool Press, Chicago University Press and University of Michigan Press supplied monographs as well as periodicals. Learned societies were another important source for periodicals, and the Palestine Exploration Society, Egypt Exploration Society, Royal Anthropological Institute, Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, Société Asiatique, Société française d'Égyptologie and Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth appear throughout the accessions book.

Other institutions which regularly supplied their publications are e.g. Sotheby's, the John Rylands Library in Manchester, various academies of sciences, the Institut français d'archéologie orientale in Cairo and the Metropolitan Museum New York.

Colleagues were sending their own publications or helped with supplying publications of institutions they were affiliated to, but the individual records leave open whether the material was received by exchange or as donations. However, I was able to show from Griffith's correspondence that he maintained an extensive exchange of publications, and it is therefore likely that the majority of the material sent by colleagues was sent as part of an exchange.

This newly found accessions book allows us a unique look behind the scenes of Griffith's private library between January 1933 and May 1939. Not only were he and his widow the librarians, but in 1933 we are looking at a highly professionally run library with special publishers and booksellers supplying subject-specific monographs and periodicals, as well as colleagues sending publications in exchange as well as donations from all over the world.

⁵⁷ For the history of this family business see <https://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/broad/buildings/south/26,27.html> (viewed 17 August 2021).

The death of Griffith's widow is followed by a period of transition, during which the young Ronald Ovenell and potentially other Bodleian Library staff prepared and oversaw the transfer of "the finest private Egyptological library in existence" to the newly built Griffith Institute "directly adjacent to the Ashmolean Museum" where it started its new life as the University's Egyptological library in January 1939. Four months later the accessions book stops, marking the beginning of a new library administration and a new era.

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