

MARY ELIZA HUME-GRIFFITH

INTRODUCTION

Mary Eliza Hume-Griffith was an English missionary and early twentieth century author, best known for her 1909 work, entitled *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia*. This was based on her travels, with her husband, through what is now Iran and Iraq, between 1900 and 1908.

Mary was also co-author, with her husband, Dr Alfred Hume-Griffith, of *Essays, Theological and Miscellaneous, Including the Contributions of the Late Rev. Albert B. Dod*. These were originally published in the Princeton Theological Review¹.

BACKGROUND

Mary was born Mary Eliza Welchman, in Bedminster, Bristol, Gloucestershire, on 1st November 1871. She was the only daughter and youngest child of four of George Welchman and his wife, Anna Maria, née Green. Mary was baptised in St Luke's Church, Bedminster when she was one month old.

When Mary was born, George was working as an accountant. By the time of the 1881 census, he had moved (from Knowle, where he was recorded in the 1871 census) to East Street, Bedminster and had become the manager of the tannery.

In 1888, George became manager of the tannery in Cullompton, Devon.

The children had a traditional religious upbringing. In 1878, George Welchman was elected Church-warden of St Luke's, Bedminster. All three of Mary's brothers later joined the Church. Alfred George Welchman graduated from the London College of Divinity, Highbury; William Welchman obtained an M.A. from Trinity College and Ridley Hall, Cambridge and went on to become Archdeacon at Bristol; Richard Herbert Welchman obtained a B.A. from Queen's College, Cambridge.²

In 1892, the late vicar of Cullompton, died at Exeter; his funeral was conducted at Cullompton church. Among the floral tributes was one from Mary Welchman, which read '*In loving memory of dear Mr Davis from Mary Welchman*'.³ She presumably had a close relationship with the church.

At the time of the 1891 census, George and Anna were staying in Stratford Le Bow, London. They were probably visiting their son, Alfred, who was curate of St Marks. Mary was then living with her youngest brother, Richard, in Cullompton, Devon.

¹ The Princeton Theological Review is an annual academic journal published by students of Princeton Theological Seminary (officially The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church), a private school of theology in Princeton, in the U.S. state of New Jersey.

² Clergy List, UK 1897

³ *Tiverton Gazette and East Devon Herald*, 6 December 1892

EDUCATION

Mary was probably educated in the local school in Bedminster – likely St Lukes.

Although she does not appear to have gone to university, Mary apparently continued her education, on a part time basis, into her twenties. In September 1892, she began attending a course of twelve weekly lectures given at the Exeter University Extension, entitled 'The Origin and Working of the English Constitution' (and went on to pass the subsequent examination).

In 1899, a Miss Mary Welchman (presumably she) attended a course of practical instruction in butter-making and dairy work, carried out under the Devon County Technical Education Scheme. At the end of the course, she won first prize for written work.

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION IN EXETER.
The results of the examination following on the course of teaching recently given on "The origin and working of the English Constitution" have just come to hand, and are eminently satisfactory, out of fifty-three candidates fifty-one passed and eleven obtained distinction. The list is as follows, names in alphabetical order :—
PASSED WITH DISTINCTION.—Clara Andrews, Florence Best, Helen David, Gertrude Daw, Arthur Everitt, Gertrude Gilbert (Ottery), Annie Gianville, Violet Craigie Halkett, Minnie King, Ida O'Malley, Florence Tozer.
PASSED.—Epea Abbott, Ada Agnew, Mary Ashwin (Poltimore), Evelyn Bankart, Lottie Benson, Mary Biddell, Agnes Daw, Ethel Delves, Alison Drew, May Drew, Mabel Edwards, George Eland, Clara Egle, Mary Garland, Etheldreda Gay, Gertrude Kennaway (Ottery), Florence Lake, Edith Mansfield, Jessie Douglas Montgomery, Kate Morgan, Alice Morrell, Ada Norman, William Parkhouse, Helen Pennell, Rosamund Pennell, Ethel Read (Honiton), Edith Rowe, Katie Rowe, Beatrice Rule, Rose Sanford, Emma Scott (Dawlish), Ama Shorto, Charlotte Slessor (Pinhoe), Francis Turner, Florence Vetch, Florence Wall, Harriott Walrond, **Mary Welchman (Cullompton)**, Emma Westron, Minnie Willey (blind).
The Examiner (Mr L Wyatt Davies), reports:—"The results of this examination were on the whole very satisfactory. In nearly every case the maximum number of questions was attempted, and very considerable skill was shown in the arrangement of the answers, to that generally a good average was maintained throughout the whole paper. Dates were as a rule correctly given; technical expressions had evidently been carefully explained and clearly understood, and very few answers were spoilt by want of care in reading the questions. The great majority of the candidates gave proof of a competent knowledge of the practical working of the English Constitution at the present time, of its historical development, and of its salient points of contrast with the constitutions of France and of the United States."

DAIRY SCHOOL RESULTS.—After a very successful course of practical instruction in butter-making and dairy work at Cullompton, carried out under the Devon County Technical Education Scheme, a competition was held on Saturday for prizes offered by the committee. The judging was undertaken by Mr. A. H. Whipple, Staff Instructor in Science and Agriculture to the Devon County Council. The prizes, which were distributed by Mrs. Forrester, were awarded as follows:—First class.—Miss Norah Farrant and Miss Lily Cook (Plymtree), equal 1; Miss Mary Morriah, 3; Miss Maude M. Batten, 4; Miss Annie Grabham (Plymtree). Miss Mary Welchman, and Mrs. Mary Kruger, v h c; Miss Caroline Pedler, Miss Sarah Cook (Plymtree), Mrs. Sophia Palmer, and Miss Sarah Dunning, h c; Miss Marie Hoyle, c. **Written work.**—Miss Mary Welchman, 1; Miss Marie Hoyle, 2. Second class.—Miss Minnie Knowles, 1; Miss Annie Pearcy (Plymtree), 2; Miss Rose Ellen Sprague, 3; Miss Elizabeth Horn and Mrs. Blacklock, equal 4; Miss Beatrice Ware and Miss Edith Kerlake, v h c; Miss Florence James, Miss Nellie James, and Miss Elizabeth Ingersent, h c; Miss Alice Bradley and Mrs Mabel Batten, c. **Written work:** Miss Beatrice Ware, 1; Miss Ingersent, 2.

Devon & Somerset News, 9 February 1899

Western Times,
15 February 1893

MARRIAGE

In May 1892, Mary's brother, William Welchman, married Elizabeth Marshall Griffith, daughter of the Reverend Edward Moule Griffith, priest and missionary in Ceylon.

On 27th February 1900, Mary married Alfred Hume Griffith⁴, brother to Elizabeth Marshall Griffith; Mary had presumably met him through her brother and his wife. The marriage took place in Cullompton parish church,

⁴ In later life, he affected the style Alfred Hume-Griffith

the ceremony being performed by William⁵, assisted by Alfred George. Mary wore a dress of Indian silk, a present from her brother, Richard Herbert.

PERSIA

In early February, they had learnt that Alfred Hume-Griffith had been appointed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), with little notice, to take charge of medical mission work in Kerman (South-eastern Persia (now Iran)). Their marriage was hurriedly arranged and they began preparing for the trip.

After a short honeymoon in Weston-super-Mare, Alfred and Mary immediately left for Persia. Departing England in early spring, they travelled across Europe to Baku. This was probably by rail, a likely route being Paris-Zurich-Budapest-Bucharest-Istanbul-Batumi-Baku. Here they were confined to a hotel room for a fortnight due to illness. From Baku, they took the Caspian steamer to En Zeli [Bandar-e Anzali], from where they made their way to Tehran where they rested whilst trying to arrange mules for transport to Ispahan [Isfahan].

Unfortunately, it appeared that the late Shah had commandeered all of the animals. Alfred and Mary were forced to endure an appalling journey, by various local forms of transportation, most of which were, from her account, designed to regularly unseat any riders and deposit them in a heap on the ground.



Persian conveyances: the takhtiravan (left) is a type of sedan-chair slung on two long poles to which mules are harnessed – one in front and one behind. The kajāvah (right) consists of two cage-like boxes slung one on each side of a mule

⁵ William officiated at a number of family weddings and baptisms including, in 1939, the wedding of his adopted niece, Doris

Initially, the only transport available was a 'springless cart'. After a week of being tortured by this contraption, they refused to go any further until alternative transport was found.

The journey from London to Ispahan took a total of nine weeks. Mary and Alfred entered the city on 9th May 1900. The mission doctor was on furlough, so Alfred was asked to stay and fill in until his return. They stayed for a year.

Whilst at Ispahan, Alfred was requested, by the chief of the warlike Bakhtari tribe, some 3-4 days distant in the mountains, to attend to one of his seven wives. In gratitude he presented Alfred and Mary each with a set of traditional Bakhtian costume.

Mary and Alfred in Bakhtian Costume: Dr Hume-Griffith's dress is that of a chief, and is of blue cloth lined with red flannel: hers is of richly-brocaded velvet; her head-coverings are of muslin, embroidered with silk.



The hospital, and also the house where Alfred and Mary lived, was in Julfa, the Armenian quarter of the city.



Ward in hospital at Julfa



X-ray machine in Julfa hospital

In the spring of 1901, Alfred and Mary continued on to Kerman. The journey from Ispahan took twenty days.



On route from Ispahan to Kerman

They stayed at Kerman for about ten months and Alfred established the first medical mission there. Mary and Alfred intended to make Kerman their home for 'many years'. Unfortunately, Mary had some (unspecified) health issues and Alfred and she were forced to give up the mission work. They left Kerman and travelled to Yezd, some halfway between Kerman and Ispahan.

In Yezd, Alfred took over the small medical mission there. He and Mary stayed there for a year before her continuing poor health necessitated a return to England in early 1903. They had spent approximately a year in each of Ispahan, Kerman and Yezd.

Back in the UK, Alfred took the opportunity to further his study at Edinburgh. He was awarded his Medical Doctorate, being commended for his theses on dysentery, with special reference to the disease in Persia.

TURKISH ARABIA

Later that same year, Mary and Alfred went back to the Middle East, this time to Mosul in Mesopotamia, Turkish Arabia [modern day Iraq]. On arrival, they rented a house, in the centre of the city, which had two compounds. Traditionally, the inner compound is the hareem, where the women live, and the outer compound is for the menfolk. Alfred & Mary lived in the inner compound and converted the outer into a dispensary and small hospital.

For a city of between 60,000 and 80,000 inhabitants, the hospital was tiny; the staff comprised Alfred, Mary and two native (Armenian) assistants who had been trained at the medical mission in Baghdad.

Eventually, Mary and Alfred managed to obtain a second, adjoining, house in which to live. They then converted the inner compound of the first house into a hospital for women and children.



House in Mosul

In one two year period, the hospital treated 24,519 out-patients, performed 197 major and 372 minor operations, had 288 in-patients and treated patients from 348 different towns and villages in the surrounding area (some as many as 10 days journey).



At the ruins of the Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh



Mary's favourite room in her house at Mosul

Mary and Alfred stayed at Mosul for nearly five years.

The Mosul climate was one of extremes with hot summers (highs of around 50°C) and cold winters. One winter (1905/6 or 1906/7 – Mary, writing in 1908, says 'two years ago') was record-breakingly cold, so that the River Tigris actually froze. It had been 150 years since this had last previously happened.

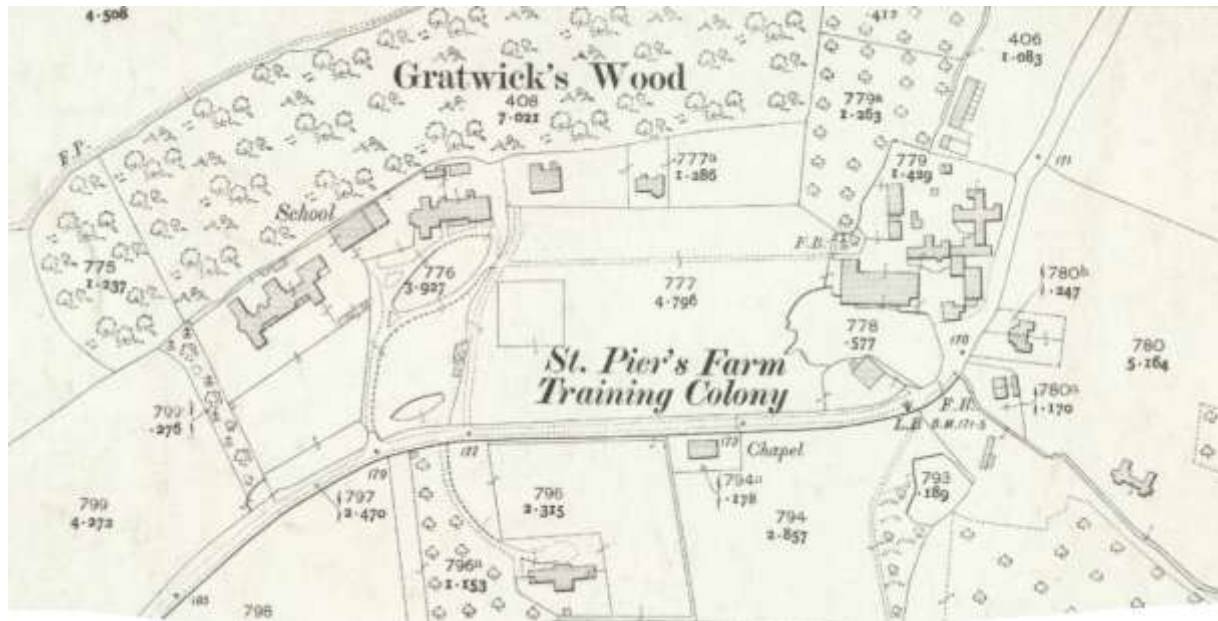


Bridge of boats over the frozen Tigris

This time, it was Alfred's health concerns that forced them to leave. He was invalided home in January 1908, having contracted tubercular trouble in Mosul. Later that year, he was awarded his Diploma in Public Health (D.P.H.) by Cambridge University.

Shortly after their return to England, Alfred and Mary adopted a daughter: Doris Irma [Hume-Griffith], who had been born Doris Irma Clarke on 26th May 1907, in Clapham, London. They had had no children of their own.

LINGFIELD EPILEPTIC COLONY



Ordnance Survey plan, 1912

In 1897, during a period of trade depression, a group of concerned social workers formed the National Union for Christian Social Service (NUCSS), also known as the Incorporated Union for Christian Social Service, and later as the Christian Service Union, to assist the unemployed. Later that year, NUCSS established a 250-acre farm colony at Lingfield in Surrey as a training institution, initially for a dozen men. Lingfield's intake mainly comprised able-bodied male paupers placed there by metropolitan poor law unions and parishes.

In about 1900, the idea was conceived of providing a suitable training school for epileptic children of the poorer classes, for whom no provision was made except the senile wards of workhouses or the very unsuitable surroundings and training of their own cottage homes. This became known as Lingfield Epileptic Colony.⁶

⁶ *British Medical Journal*, 1 June 1907

By the time of the 1911 census, Alfred was the Medical Officer and Superintendent of the Lingfield Colony - he had in fact been appointed in 1908.⁷ By 1817, he also had an office in Harley Street.

Mary was at the Colony as 'Doctor's wife'. Given her proclivity for good works, she no doubt assisted in some capacity.

Mary also spent her time writing. In 1908, a short account of their travels was published in *Wide World Magazine*.

A fuller account followed in 1909, in her book *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia*, which was received to some critical acclaim. The book was not a travelogue and was not arranged chronologically. Instead it was arranged by subject, many highlighting the situation, lives and plight, of Moslem women. Because of the practice of Purdah⁸, Mary saw them as 'imprisoned' behind the veil.

Royal Visit to
Lingfield Colony, 1911

ROYALTY at LINGFIELD TRAINING COLONY.

The Summer Festival and opening of the New Tucker Home took place on Friday afternoon in the presence of H.R.H. the Duchess of Albany, who performed the opening ceremony. The company present included Lady Evelyn Moreton, Lady Jane Taylor, Sir Charles Tarring, Mr. D. F. Basden, Mr. A. J. Taylor, Mr. C. R. W. Offen, F.S.S., Dr. Hume Griffiths, the Rev. and Mrs. A. P. Gutch, Mr. Sydney Alsten, Mr. S. R. Whitley, Mr. E. B. Groves, Miss Groves, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Hastie, Miss Hastie, Mrs. E. Soames, the Rev. F. Joseph, Mr. E. Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. G. Wade, &c.

On arrival Her Royal Highness was presented with a handsome bouquet by Miss Hume Griffiths, daughter of the Governor of the Homes.

The Tucker Home has just been built at a cost of about £1,100, a portion of which was left by George and Fanny Tucker to accommodate 24 epileptics over the age of 16. The Colony has experienced considerable difficulty of providing for these elder epileptics, as the Board of Education requires that they shall be housed separately from the younger children.

Mr. D. F. BASDEN introduced Her Royal Highness, and gave a brief history of the Colony from its commencement 16 years ago, when they started with only 25 children. They now had over 200, and the improvement that was made in them was very great. When they first came they had 100 to 200 fits a month, while now some who had been there some time hardly had one in twelve months. They were deeply grateful to Her Royal Highness for her graciousness in coming down to perform the opening ceremony.

Her Royal Highness next received purses towards the reduction of the debt on the building.

Mr. C. R. W. OFFEN then read a number of letters of regret at inability to be present from the Countess of Dufferin and Ava, Countess Clancarty, Countess Kinnoul, Lady Shaftesbury, Lady St. Helier, &c.

H.R.H. the DUCHESS OF ALBANY was next presented with a gold key, with which she opened the door of the Home, and said: "I have much pleasure in declaring the Tucker Home open." Then followed the dedicatory prayer, offered up by the Rev. A. P. Gutch.

SIR CHARLES TARRING moved a vote of thanks to Her Royal Highness, and said such institutions as that were the glory of their country, and he was glad to say that they possessed a Royal House who were always willing to render their aid for the benefit of those institutions. Her Royal Highness's name would always be closely associated with that Home, and would always be remembered by the children of the institution. They were deeply grateful to her for her graciousness.

Mr. ANDREW TAYLOR seconded, and the motion was carried amid enthusiastic applause.

Tea was served on the lawn in front of the main building, and the choir of epileptic children gave very creditable renderings of the chorus, "Hail, Alma Mater" (Wagner), the "Soldiers' chorus" from *Faust* (Gounod) and the part song "Comrades in arms" (Adolphe Adam). A piccolo quartette was given by the boys. An exhibition of Indian club swinging was given by the girls, and dumb-bell drill was executed by the boys.

After this the visitors inspected the epileptic homes and schoolhouse, and also the training colony for "unemployables." In this latter the Home manage to effect a cure of some 60 per cent. The colony is carried on under the direction of the Incorporated National Union for Christian Social Service. The Tucker Home was built by Mr. Geo. Wade, of Dormans Land, and he was congratulated by many on the excellent character of the work.

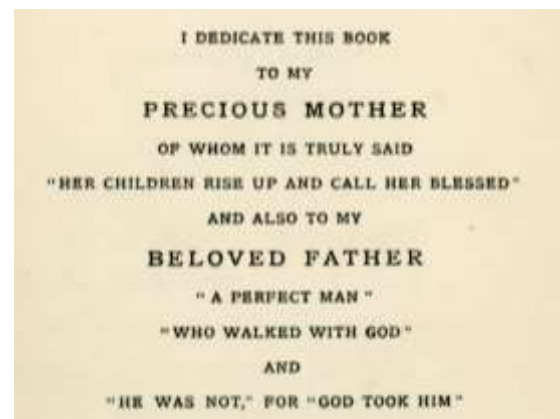
⁷ *The Record* 17 October 1918

⁸ Purdah (from Hindi-Urdu, meaning "curtain") is a religious and social practice of sex segregation prevalent among some Muslim, Zoroastrian, and Hindu communities in South Asia. The purdah garment is the same as a burqa, or yashmak, i.e. a veil to conceal the face.



Lingfield Colony, c1910

Mary also wrote children's stories, based upon her travels. *Stories of the East for Children of the West* was published in 1911 and has a dedication to her parents⁹; *Tales of the Arabs* was published in 1913.



Dedication to Mary's parents

Tales of the Arabs was dedicated 'To Doris in remembrance of her journey to and from Mesopotamia'. This dedication is slightly ambiguous; had Mary taken her 5 years-old daughter to see Mesopotamia?

Alfred Hume-Griffith died at Alfred in 1918, aged 43, leaving Mary widowed at 46. He had struggled with increasing ill-health since his return to England ten years earlier. He was buried in the local parish churchyard of St Peter & St Paul, the service being conducted by Mary's brother, Alfred George Welchman.

It is unclear where Mary spent the period 1919-23; another book of her children's stories, *Two Arabian Knights*, was published in the Autumn of 1921¹⁰.

⁹ Her father, George Welchman, had died in 1906; her mother, Anna Maria, would die in 1919

¹⁰ *Westminster Gazette* 30 November 1921

ST AUSTIN'S

In 1886, work started on what was called the Mount Hermon Estate development, in Woking, Surrey. It was situated on the west side of the road from Woking Station to Turnoak Corner (Guildford Road), on land formerly part of Crosslanes Farm.¹¹

St Austin's was one of the earlier houses to be built, in a 1¼ acre plot, on the north side of Mount Hermon Road towards Guildford Road. It would later be allocated the house number 5, Mount Hermon Road. It was probably built in the latter half of 1886.

1895 OS Plan



St Austin's was a private house until 1919. The occupier, John Gripper, died in August 1918 and his widow put the house up for sale in February 1919.

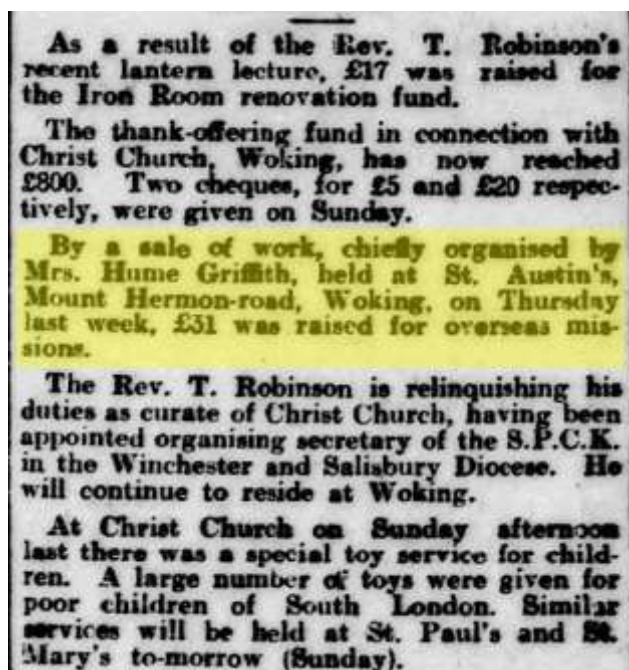
In 1921, presumably after a period of conversion, St Austin's opened as a ladies' rest home.

The first superintendent was Miss Fanny Louisa Anne Roberts. She was 72 and died just two years later, in May 1923. Mary, recorded in local directories and the electoral registers as 'Mary Eliza Griffith', took over sometime in the latter half of 1923.



St Austin's, c.1930

¹¹ *Surrey Advertiser* 2 January 1886



Surrey Advertiser, 22 December 1923

RETIREMENT

Mary Hume-Griffith returned, from Australia, to England on 27th April 1932. She gave her intended address as 10 Finchley Road, London.

Mary Godfrey Gray returned to England 4 days later on 1st May 1932. In 1933, the two women were living together at 2a Hillfield, Muswell Hill.

In 1937, Mary Hume-Griffith moved to Eastbourne, staying at 7,8 Howard Square, which appears to have been a house of multiple occupancy. The following year, she was at 12, Hartfield Road and, once again, living with Mary Gray.

No records have been found of Mary Hume-Griffith between 1940 and 1949.

From 1949 until 1957, Mary was living at the West Rocks Hotel, on Grand Parade. She then, presumably, became too frail/infirm to look after herself and, in 1957, moved to St Luke's Home, Cliff Road, Eastbourne.

West Rocks Hotel, 2024



Mary stayed at St Austin's for seven years, where she continued her fund-raising work.

In January 1930, Mary sailed to Algeria, returning on 1st April the same year. This could have been a holiday but was more likely some kind of missionary work.

In 1931, Mary retired (she was then 60). In September that year, she departed on a trip to Australia; also on the voyage was a Miss Mary Godfrey Gray, retired social worker, (who also gave her England address as St Austin's)¹².

¹² Mary Godfrey Gray was born Mary Godfrey Smith, in New Zealand, and had been adopted. It is conceivable that the trip was to find/meet her biological family and that Mary Hume-Griffith was accompanying her, as an experienced traveller and a friend

Mary Eliza Hume-Griffith died, at St Luke's Home, on 7th November 1958, within a week after her 87th birthday. In her will, Mary left several bequests of £25 to various family members and the same sum to Mary Gray. The residue of her estate was left to her adopted daughter Doris.

Mary's body was cremated and her ashes buried in the grave of her husband, Alfred, in Lingfield parish churchyard.

Published works:

Eight Years In Babylonia, 2-part article published in Wide World Magazine, 1908

Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia, Seeley & Co., 1909

Essays, Theological and Miscellaneous, Including the Contributions of the Late Rev. Albert B. Dod

Stories of the East for Children of the West, The Religious Tract Society, 1911

Tales of the Arabs, The Religious Tract Society, 1913

Two Arabian Knights, Church Missionary Society, 1921

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