

HERBERT, Sir JOHN (1550 - 1617), civil lawyer, diplomat and secretary of state

Name: John Herbert
Date of birth: 1550
Date of death: 1617
Spouse: Margaret Herbert (née Morgan)
Parent: Matthew Herbert
Gender: Male
Occupation: civil lawyer, diplomat and secretary of state
Area of activity: Law; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration
Author: Arthur Herbert Dodd

The second son of Matthew Herbert of Swansea and grandson of Sir George Herbert, the first known M.P. for Glamorgan and the son of Sir Richard Herbert of Ewyas, illegitimate son of [William Herbert, earl of Pembroke](#) (see [Herbert, earls of Pembroke](#)). He was admitted an honorary member of the College of Advocates (November 1573), joint commissioner of the Court of Admiralty with [Dr. David Lewis](#) (1520? - 1584) in 1575-84, and Master of Requests (with [William Awbrey](#) from 1590), 1586-1601. He took his D.C.L. at Oxford in 1587, and was among the Doctors chosen for disputation before Elizabeth when she visited Oxford in 1592. His 'perfection in languages' (illustrated by continued fluency in Welsh after a lifetime in England) led to his employment first in such tasks as the interrogation of foreign prisoners (1574), then on trade embassies to Denmark (1583 and 1600), Poland (1583-4), and Brandenburg (1585), and on political missions to the Dutch (1588) and to France in 1598 with secretary [Cecil](#) whom he served as secretary after their return. After being suggested as resident ambassador to France in 1598 and as chancellor of the duchy next year, he was appointed (April 1600) second secretary of state (a novel title), a privy councillor (10 May), and soon afterwards secretary to the Council of the North, performing his duties there by deputy. He assisted the ambassador to France in the abortive negotiations with Spain at Boulogne (May - August 1600), took part in the trial of [Sir Gelly Meyrick](#) and others concerned in the Essex revolt (1601), was knighted and added to the Council at Ludlow (1602), and was away on his third Danish mission (September 1602-March 1603) when Elizabeth died James I continued him in his offices; he was a commissioner for the Scottish Union and for ecclesiastical causes in 1603 and on other commissions in 1608; but the king preferred in [Cecil](#)'s absence to use unofficial secretaries like his favourite [Philip Herbert](#), later 1st earl of Montgomery. Moreover [Cecil](#)'s removal to the Lords threw on Herbert the task of defending royal policy in the Commons; and although he had sat there since 1586 - first for English boroughs, then for Glamorgan (1601) and Monmouthshire (1604-11) - he was no politician. When his patron and colleague [Cecil \(now earl of Salisbury\)](#) died in 1610, Herbert was chagrined at not succeeding him as principal secretary, the office remaining vacant till 1614; although retaining his secretaryship in name he took no further part in public affairs, and did not sit in the 1614 Parliament. He died at Cardiff on 9 July 1617, after (perhaps in consequence of) a duel fought with Sir Lewis Tresham in May. By his wife Margaret, daughter of William Morgan of Cefn Coch (or of Pen-clawdd), he had an only daughter.

Author

Emeritus Professor Arthur Herbert Dodd, (1891 - 1975)

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Herbert](#)

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