

## JEFFREYS, GEORGE, 1st baron Jeffreys of Wem (1645 - 1689), judge

**Name:** George Jeffreys  
**Date of birth:** 1645  
**Date of death:** 1689  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** judge  
**Area of activity:** Law  
**Author:** Arthur Herbert Dodd

Born at Acton, Wrexham, on 15 May 1645, the sixth son of John Jeffreys and his wife Margaret, daughter of Sir Thomas Ireland of Bewsey, Lancashire ('a very pious good woman ' according to her son). His grandfather JOHN JEFFREYS (died 1622), chief justice of the Anglesey circuit of the Great Sessions, who had first adopted the family surname, laid the foundations of Acton estate by expanding and consolidating the holdings of these descendants of [Tudur Trevor](#) (with their motto ' Pob dawn o Dduw') in Wrexham common fields; by marrying as his third wife the widow of [Sir Edward Trevor](#) of Brynkinallt, he established a link with another ancient local family. His father, JOHN JEFFREYS II (1608 - 1691), fought for Charles I, but was reconciled to the Protectorate and served as sheriff in 1655. Of his elder brothers, Sir Thomas (knighted 1686) was a British consul in Spain, where he married a Spanish wife and adopted her faith; and William was vicar of Holt, 1668-75. George Jeffreys was educated from 1652-9 at his grandfather's old school, Shrewsbury (with periodic tests of his progress by his mother's friend [Philip Henry](#)), then at S. Pauls (1659), Westminster (1661), Trinity College, Cambridge (1662) - which he left without graduating - and the Inner Temple (1663). His legal career began in the city as Common Serjeant (1671), but after being passed over for [William Dolben](#) as Recorder (1676) he turned to the Court, becoming solicitor general to the duke of York (the future James II) and a knight in 1677, recorder of London when [Dolben](#) resigned (1678), in 1680 chief justice of the Chester circuit, counsel for the Crown at Ludlow and J.P. for Flintshire, and a baronet the next year. By supporting the designs of the Crown during the personal government of Charles II (1681-5) and that of James II, he rose rapidly to be lord chief justice and privy councillor (1683) and under James a peer and lord chancellor (1685); but he remained an unswerving Anglican, which is probably why James drew back on the point of making him viscount Wrexham and earl of Flint (October 1685). On 26 March 1688 he had the distasteful duty of conveying to his old rival [Williams](#) (now solicitor general) royal orders to suggest names of local Dissenters suitable to serve as magistrates - a preliminary step towards the issue of the Declaration of Indulgence nine days later. He finally surrendered the Great Seal (which James threw into the Thames) in November 1688, but was thwarted in his attempt to follow the king abroad, and died in prison on 18 April 1689. Details of his career are given in *D.N.B.*

His judicial repute, for all his political animus and the unbridled temper which arose in part from the painful malady of which he died prematurely at 44, stands high with lawyers (e.g. Birkenhead, *Fourteen English Judges*, 1926, 84-6, 96-8). Professionally, and at first politically, he was the bitter rival of [Sir William Williams](#) (1634 - 1700) whom he tried to break by a ruinous fine for publishing a libel (1680), rejoicing also in his discomfiture as a prosecutor when the Seven Bishops were

acquitted. One of the seven was Jeffreys's protégé, [William Lloyd](#) of S. Asaph, who spoke highly of his patron, as did also Jeffreys's cousin [Sir John Trevor](#) (1637 - 1717), another 'protégé.' [Bishop Lloyd](#) was, however, disappointed in his hope that as justice of Chester Jeffreys would atone for the slackness of the Denbighshire magistrates (including his nephew Griffith Jeffreys, sheriff 1683) by rigours against local Dissenters; at the Mold assizes of 1682 he quashed proceedings against [Philip Henry](#) and let off with a scolding [Henry's](#) friend Ambrose Lewis, the Puritan schoolmaster who, after conforming in 1662, had come under fresh suspicion - and that despite the panic arising from Monmouth's recent ovation at Chester. After the death of his first wife he married Anne, widow of Sir John Jones of Fonmon, Glamorganshire (son of the Cromwellian 'lord' [Philip Jones](#), 1616 - 1674). The peerage became extinct with his son John, who married a daughter of [Philip, 7th earl of Pembroke](#); the parent line at Acton, carried on by his nephew SIR GRIFFITH JEFFREYS (died 1695), a Jacobite - who rebuilt Acton Hall and whose wife Dame Dorothy Jeffreys (died 1729) was a great benefactress of Wrexham - came to an end in 1714, the estate being sold in 1747. The portrait of the first lord Jeffreys by Sir Godfrey Kneller, formerly at Acton, now hangs at Erthig, Wrexham.

## Author

Emeritus Professor Arthur Herbert Dodd, (1891 - 1975)

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [George Jeffreys, 1st Baron Jeffreys](#)

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