

## PRICE THOMAS, CLEMENT (1893-1973), pioneering surgeon

**Name:** Clement Price Thomas  
**Date of birth:** 1893  
**Date of death:** 1973  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** pioneering surgeon  
**Area of activity:** Medicine  
**Author:** Alun Roberts

Clement Price Thomas was born on 22 November, 1893 at Abercarn, Monmouthshire, the youngest of nine children of William Thomas, a grocer and Rosamund Gertrude Price, the daughter of a clergyman. After a secondary education at Newport High School and at Caterham School, Surrey he proceeded to University College, Cardiff in 1913 with the ultimate ambition of entering the dental profession. On the outbreak of the First World War he interrupted his studies, serving as a private in the 32nd Field Ambulance of the RAMC in Gallipoli, Macedonia and Palestine before resuming his studies in Cardiff in 1917, preferring now to become a doctor. In 1919, having won the prestigious Alfred Hughes Memorial prize medal in anatomy (designed by the celebrated sculptor **William Goscombe John**), he proceeded to the Westminster Hospital Medical School for his clinical training, qualifying in 1921.

Price Thomas's ambition was to become a surgeon. In 1923 he passed the Final FRCS and after a series of training posts at the Westminster Hospital in 1927 he was appointed to the consultant staff of the hospital as a general surgeon, where he came under the influence of another Welshman, Swansea-born **Arthur Tudor Edwards**, already acknowledged as a leader in the field of thoracic surgery. After **Edwards'** resignation from the Westminster Hospital in 1930 to organise a department of thoracic surgery at the London Hospital, Price Thomas took over direction of the thoracic surgery work at the Westminster. He also held surgical appointments at the Brompton Hospital for Diseases of the Chest, and elsewhere, including the Welsh National Memorial Association, and acted as a consultant in thoracic surgery to the Army and the Royal Air Force. He was also appointed consultant adviser in thoracic surgery to the Ministry of Health. During the 1930s and beyond he played a leading role in transforming the discipline from one viewed with much apprehension to one enjoying widespread acceptance, Price Thomas being particularly recognised for his contribution to the surgery of tuberculosis and of lung tumours. In 1947 he was the first surgeon to perform a bronchial sleeve resection to remove a bronchial carcinoid tumour.

Price Thomas's reputation was such that patients came from all over the world to consult him and when, in 1951, it was decided that King George VI required surgical treatment for a diseased lung it was Clement Price Thomas who was invited to perform the operation, which took place on 23 September in a specially prepared room on the first floor of Buckingham Palace. The immediate outcome of the thoracotomy was encouraging and as one of his first acts on resuming full sovereignly duties the King conferred the KCVO upon Price Thomas at Buckingham Palace on 14 December 1951. Sadly the King never fully recovered after the operation and died at Sandringham on 6 February 1952.

As the 1950s advanced Price Thomas chose to leave specialist thoracic work to a new generation of surgeons but continued to practice general surgery until the turn of the 1960s. Throughout his career he was universally recognised by medical students, surgical trainees and his more senior colleagues as a fine teacher, able to communicate his expertise in a friendly and authoritative manner. Enjoying the affection of his colleagues as he did it was hardly surprising that his services were in great demand among a wide range of professional and academic bodies. In relation to the Royal College of Surgeons of England he served as an examiner between 1948 and 1952, as a member of the College Council from 1952 to 1964, acting as its vice-president between 1962 and 1964. He gave three of the College's most prestigious lectures, the Tudor Edwards memorial lecture in 1959, the Vicary Lecture in 1960 and the Bradshaw Lecture in 1963. Among many honours that came his way were the presidencies of the British Medical Association, the Thoracic Society, the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, the Association of Surgeons, the World Medical Society, the Medical Protection Society and the Royal Society of Medicine. Honorary degrees were conferred on him by the universities of Wales, Belfast, Paris, Lisbon, Athens and Karachi.

An accolade which gave him as much pleasure as any in his later years was his election as president of the medical school where he had commenced his studies, the Welsh National School of Medicine, a position he held from 1958 to 1970. He came to meetings of the Council, and to degree ceremonies and other events as often as he could and took an active interest in the affairs of the School. Indeed the provost of the time, **Alan Trevor Jones**, noted in his diary not long after Price Thomas had started his presidency that he 'is very interested, almost too interested in everything'. The fact was that, despite periods of indifferent health including a thoracotomy for a cancerous lung in 1964, his presidential years coincided with what a later provost, Patrick Mounsey, characterised as 'one of the most exciting and productive periods in the school's development, the success of which owed much to his inspiring leadership, enthusiasm and wise guidance'. It was during the 1960s that plans to build a new state-of-the-art medical teaching centre came to fruition at Heath Park in the north of Cardiff, incorporating the University Hospital of Wales, a new dental school and hospital and also the Tenovus Institute for Cancer Research, the foundation stone for which he laid in 1965.

In 1925 Clement Price Thomas married Ethel Doris Ricks, daughter of Mortimer Ricks of Paignton and they had two sons, one of whom became a consultant surgeon in south Wales. Clem and Dorrie, as they were affectionately known, were a devoted couple whose home in St John's Wood was an hospitable place for a wide circle of friends and colleagues. Sir Clement died on 19 March 1973 aged 79 and was buried in the grave of his parents in the New Bethel chapel cemetery, Mynyddislwyn, now in the County Borough of Caerphilly. On 29 May 1973 a well-attended memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey.

### Author

Dr Alun Roberts

### Sources

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### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Clement Price Thomas](#)

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