

## MORRIS, JOHN WILLIAM, Baron Morris of Borth-y-Gest (1896 - 1979), lawyer and judge

**Name:** John William Morris  
**Date of birth:** 1896  
**Date of death:** 1979  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** lawyer and judge  
**Area of activity:** Law  
**Author:** Łukasz Jan Korporowicz

John Morris was born on 11 September 1896 at 189 Faulkener Street, Liverpool, the second child of Daniel Morris (1852-1946), a bank manager, and his wife Ellen (née Edwards, 1857-1946.) His sister Gwen was born two years earlier. The family were from Porthmadog and regularly spent holidays there during his childhood. He was educated at the Liverpool Institute High School for Boys.

Morris was intending to go to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, but on the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and spent the entire war in France. He eventually reached the rank of captain and was awarded the Military Cross. After the war, Morris finally went to Trinity Hall, Cambridge to study law. While there, he was elected president of the Cambridge Union debating society. In May 1919 he was admitted to the Inner Temple, and in 1920 he obtained an LLB degree and was elected Joseph Hodges Choate Fellow to spend a year at Harvard University. In November 1921, he was called to the bar by the Inn and joined the Northern Circuit. In 1935 he was made King's Counsel, and thereafter he practised law mainly in London.

In the first half of the 1920s, Morris was flirting with politics. Twice, in 1923 and 1924, he unsuccessfully attempted to enter the House of Commons as the Liberal candidate for Ilford. In the 1940s, he took on several advisory roles for government, being deputy chairman of the Home Office Aliens Advisory Committee, preparing reports for the Treasury, as well as chairing some other committees.

Despite his involvement in government work, Morris was still predominantly a lawyer. His judicial career began in 1938, when he was appointed Judge of Appeal for the Isle of Man. In 1945 he became a judge of the High Court of Justice, King's Bench Division, and in 1951 he was elevated to the Court of Appeal. In the 1950s, he was occasionally entrusted also with semi-judicial duties. In 1954, he chaired the Court of Inquiry into the Engineering and Shipbuilding Wages Dispute. In 1955, he was appointed as an independent referee to determine some vital points in the government dispute with the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

In 1960 he was made a life peer with the title Baron Morris of Borth-y-Gest, and for the next fifteen years he was a member of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords. He is considered to be one of the three leading Welsh judicial figures in the 20th century (the two others being [Lord Atkin](#) and [Lord Edmund-Davies](#)). As a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, he was keenly interested in the development of public law. In the period in question, Lord Morris did not cease his extra-judicial work. He was still appointed to prepare reports and to chair committees, such as that on jury service in 1963. He resigned from his judicial post in 1975 although retirement was not compulsory at the time. In the following years, he occasionally sat in the Appellate Committee as well as in the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. While in the House of Lords, Lord Morris was among the group of law lords who participated in the House's legislative work. Although not uncommon at the time, this was a not uncontroversial activity for a law lord.

In a tribute, [Lord Edmund-Davies](#) described Lord Morris as 'a devoted Welshman'. Although not fluent in Welsh, he was a member of the Gorsedd of Bards as well as a vice-president of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and president of the London Welsh Association (1951-53). He was counsel to the University of Wales (1938-1945) and then, from 1956 to 1974, he acted as a Pro-Chancellor of that University. In Wales, his legal skills were frequently put to good use when chairing the Caernarvonshire Quarter Sessions. A year before his death, Lord Morris participated in the House of Lords' debate over the Wales Bill, in which he spoke passionately about the need to preserve the use of the Welsh language and about creating a Welsh Assembly.

In recognition of his professional work, Lord Morris was awarded honorary memberships of the American Bar Association and the Canadian Bar Association. In 1951 he became an honorary fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He was awarded honorary LL.D degrees from the University of Wales (1946), the University of British Columbia (1952), the University of Liverpool (1966) and the University of Cambridge (1967).

Lord Morris died on 9 June 1979 at Porthmadog. He was buried in the family grave in the churchyard of St Michael and All Angels Church in Treflys, Porthmadog.

### Author

Łukasz Jan Korporowicz

### Sources

Louis Blom-Cooper and Gavin Drewry, 'Towards a System of Administrative Law: The Reid and Wilberforce Era, 1945-82', in Louis Blom-Cooper, Brice Dickson, Gavin Drewry (eds.), *The Judicial House of Lords 1876-2009* (Oxford 2009), 209-31

Lord Bingham, 'The Law Lords: Who has Served', in Louis Blom-Cooper, Brice Dickson, Gavin Drewry (eds.), *The Judicial House of Lords 1876-2009* (Oxford 2009), 122-127

Lord Edmund-Davies, 'Lord Morris of Borth-y-Gest, P.C., C.H., C.B.E., M.C.', *Cambrian Law Review*, 10 (1979), 5-6

'Tribute to the late Rt. Hon. Lord Morris of Borth-y-Gest', *Cambrian Law Review*, 6-7

*The Times*, 16 November 1979

Lord Edmund-Davies, 'Morris, John William, Baron Morris of Borth-y-Gest', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

House of Lords Debates, vol. 392, cc. 865-871

### Further reading

National Archives (Summary of the archival sources related to Lord Morris): [Morris, John William, \(1896-1979\), Baron Morris of Borth Y Gest, judge](#)

Archives Hub: '[Correspondence of the Morris Family, 1880-1942](#)'

findagrave.com: [Picture of the family grave](#)

Wikipedia Article: [John Morris, Baron Morris of Borth-y-Gest](#)

### Images

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