

DE FREITAS BRAZAO, IRIS (1896 - 1989), lawyer

Name: Iris de Freitas Brazao
Date of birth: 1896
Date of death: 1989
Spouse: Alfred Casimiro Brazao
Parent: Amanda Braithwaite
Parent: Manuel de Freitas
Gender: Female
Occupation: lawyer
Area of activity: Law
Author: Fiona Davies

Iris de Freitas was born on 29 October 1896 in Bay Street, Kingston, Bridgetown, Barbados, the daughter of Manuel de Freitas, a businessman, and Amanda Braithwaite (1875-1978), a mixed-race Barbadian. Her parents were not married but she was acknowledged and supported by her father despite him having two legitimate children with his wife Antona. Between 1897 and 1910 Iris and her mother moved to 1 Lombard St, Georgetown, British Guiana (now Guyana).

She attended St Ursula's Roman Catholic school in Georgetown from 1910 to 1916. Due to travel restrictions during World War I she did not start university immediately and returned to Barbados to study at Queen's College for two years. After a short period studying in Toronto, in 1918 she commenced her studies at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where she studied law, jurisprudence, botany, modern languages and Latin, gaining her BA in 1922. In 1923 she attended St Anne's College, Oxford, and as this was her second degree she was able to complete her BA in jurisprudence in two years. In Oxford she was taught by Dr Ivy Williams (1877-1966), the first woman to be called to the bar in England. After completing her Bachelor of Civil Law (a postgraduate legal qualification) and all her bar examinations, she concluded her studies for her LLB in Aberystwyth in 1927.

She enrolled with the Inner Temple Inns of Court in 1922 and was called to the bar in 1929, becoming the first female Barrister-at-Law in the Commonwealth Caribbean. She soon established herself as a barrister and was welcomed on her first appearance in the Supreme Court. She was the defence attorney in a 1932 murder case and saw her client acquitted, winning praise from the judge for her advocacy. She joined the civil service as a Temporary Legal Assistant in the Attorney General's Chamber and from April 1934 became the first female crown prosecutor in British Guiana. During her career she also worked for the Franchise Commission, the Public Service Commission and as Legal Advisor to the Governor of British Guiana.

In 1937 Iris married Alfred Casimiro Brazao, a magistrate who later became Solicitor General. They lived in British Guiana where she continued to work as a barrister, practising under her maiden name. Alfred died in 1953.

Iris de Freitas died on 21 May 1989 in Georgetown, Guyana.

In 2016 after staff at Aberystwyth University discovered a postcard sent by Iris in 1922/23 with a picture of her in academic dress, a room in the Hugh Owen Library in the university was named in her honour. In 2018 in celebration of Black History Month in the United Kingdom Iris de Freitas was included in a list of 100 'Icons of Black Wales'. In 2021 the Caribbean Court of Justice honoured her as one of the 'Pioneering Caribbean Women Jurists'.

Author

Fiona Davies

Sources

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'Iris de Freitas Brazao', WOWW, Narberth Museum, 7 August 2019

B. Brereton, 'A Trailblazing Caribbean Woman', Trinidad and Tobago Express, 11 April 2024

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Joanne Collins-Gonsalves, *Iris de Freitas Brazao, Legal Luminary and Trailblazer* (Edmonton 2023)

A. Wightwick, 'Brilliant, Black and Welsh: A celebration of 100 African Caribbean and African Welsh people', Wales Online, 28 September 2018

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Iris de Freitas Brazao](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q27898857](#)

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