

## CECIL-WILLIAMS, Sir JOHN LIAS CECIL (1892 - 1964), solicitor, secretary Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and driving force behind the publishing of the Dictionary of Welsh Biography

**Name:** John Lias Cecil Cecil-williams

**Date of birth:** 1892

**Date of death:** 1964

**Spouse:** Olive Mary Cecil-Williams (née Evans)

**Parent:** Catherine Williams (née Thomas)

**Parent:** John Cadwaladr Williams

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** solicitor, secretary Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and driving force behind the publishing of the Dictionary of Welsh Biography

**Area of activity:** History and Culture; Law; Printing and Publishing

**Author:** Benjamin George Jones

Born 14 October 1892 in Paddington, London, one of two children of John Cadwaladr Williams, a doctor, and Catherine (née Thomas) his wife. (The son adopted the hyphenated name of Cecil-Williams by deed-poll in 1935). The family came from Uwch Aled. He was educated first in London and, for a year or so, in the village school at Cerrigydrudion. Returning to London he attended the City of London School from where he went to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he read law and graduated M.A. and LL.B. He registered in the Inns of Court OTC in 1914 and the following year joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers, serving in France and achieving the rank of captain. He was wounded three times. In 1920 he became a solicitor and practised in London, first alone and then in partnership. He retired in 1960.

He rapidly became known in London-Welsh circles as a man of great energy, for his enthusiasm for all things Welsh and as a first-class organiser. In 1934 he was elected honorary secretary of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, following [Sir E. Vincent Evans](#). He held the post for nearly thirty years and made it his life work. Having a private income he was not wholly dependent on his practice as a solicitor, and consequently he was able to give much of his time to the Society and to other cultural and charitable activities. In all this he was eminently successful. He boosted the membership of the Society to nearly 2,000, many from overseas; and like his predecessor he attracted many of the most notable Welsh people of this period. In 1951, on its 250th anniversary, the Society was granted a Royal Charter. In the same year he was knighted and the University of Wales awarded him an honorary LL.D. Although he spent all his life in London, he retained the sweet accent of Uwch Aled and maintained a fluency in his mother tongue. He was acutely aware of the historical antecedents of the Cymmrodorion and of its status as a Society, and always strove to maintain the high ideal of its aims. In the words of [Sir Thomas Parry-Williams](#), who was for a time President of the Society, Cecil-Williams maintained the office of secretary 'fiercely and untiringly to promote the welfare and protect the inheritance of Wales and the Welsh'.

Although [Professor R.T. Jenkins](#), together with [Sir John Edward Lloyd](#) and [Sir William Llewelyn Davies](#), deserve the praise for the form and content of the *DWB*, it is doubtful whether it would have been published without the efforts of Cecil-Williams. He never accepted that the project was too ambitious and too costly. With the help of his fellow officers he succeeded in raising the necessary money from county councils and organisations such as the Pilgrim Trust; and this guaranteed the publication in 1953 of the volume now acknowledged as one of the most important to appear in Wales in the twentieth century. He insisted on planning the first ten-year supplement in order to establish a precedent for publishing a continuing series.

He took a leading part in many cultural and charitable movements. He was a member of the Courts of the University of Wales, the National Library (and its Council) and the National Museum. He was a trustee of the Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum in Caernarfon castle, a member of the committee to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the founding of Virginia, and of the Goodwill Mission to the United States in 1957. He was president of the Southern Olympian Amateur Football League, 1951-59, and in 1959 was elected president of the Amateur Football Alliance. He was awarded the Hopkins Medal in New York in 1957, and in 1962 the Honourable Society awarded him its highest honour, the Cymmrodorion Medal. He was an honorary member of the Gorsedd of Bards under the name Seisyllt.

He married Olive Mary, only daughter of alderman Aneurin O. Evans of Denbigh, in 1935, and they had one son. Sir John died in London, 30 November 1964 and the funeral service was in Golder's Green Crematorium, 5 December

### Author

Benjamin George Jones, (1914 - 1989)

## Sources

'[Sir John Cecil-Williams, M.A., LL.D.](#)', *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1964, 162-66

*The Times*, 1 December 1964

*The London Welshman*, January 1965

personal knowledge

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