

HIMBURY, DAVID MERVYN (1922-2008), minister (Bapt) and college principal

Name: David Mervyn Himbury
Date of birth: 1922
Date of death: 2008
Gender: Male
Occupation: minister (Bapt) and college principal
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: D. Hugh Matthews

David Mervyn Himbury was born in Ystrad Mynach, Glamorganshire, on 22 July 1922. His father, Reginald Harry Himbury, had come to Wales from Rampisham in Dorset to seek work in the coal mines. He married Olwen Thomas, whose family lived in Aberystwyth; the **Reverend Idris Thomas**, a Baptist minister in Cefn-mawr, was her brother. Mervyn had a younger brother, John (1932-1970). Reginald Himbury was an ardent Anglican throughout his life, and when he married Olwen Thomas, she was confirmed and joined the Church in Wales. Mervyn Himbury's visits to his grandmother in Cardiganshire made him a Baptist and at the age of ten he refused to attend the Anglican Sunday School and went instead to the Baptist Meeting in Hengoed. There, when he was fourteen, he was baptised on profession of his faith and received into membership of the church. His mother returned to become a member of the church at the same time.

Mervyn Himbury was educated in the local primary school and in Lewis Pengam School (1933-41) before going to Cardiff University College in 1941 to read for a degree in history. A year later, he was accepted as a candidate for the Baptist ministry and registered as a theological student in Cardiff Baptist College. He graduated with a first-class honours degree in history in 1945 and in 1948 added a Bachelor of Divinity degree. He was President of the Students' Union in 1945-46. The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Dr Williams Trust in London awarded him scholarships which enabled him to register as a research student in Regent's Park College and St Catherine's in Oxford, and in 1950 he was awarded a B.Litt. for a thesis entitled, *The Christian Magistrate in Dissenting Thought to 1660*.

On completing his college courses he was ordained in the summer of 1950 as the minister of Chester Street English Baptist church in Wrexham, but barely six months later he responded to the summons of the Baptist College in Cardiff to return as professor of Church History. He took up his new post in January 1951 and in 1957 marked the ter-jubilee of the College with the publication of his book entitled, *The South Wales Baptist College (1807-1957)*.

He married Gwladys Marion Phillips from Caersalem, Llanelli, in 1951. Two sons, Philip Maelor Himbury and Dewi Michael Himbury were born to them. The family settled in Peterston-super-Ely in the Vale of Glamorgan and while there Mervyn Himbury had pastoral oversight of Croes-y-parc Baptist church.

As a history tutor, he was eager to pursue his research, but the University of Wales Regulations at that time prevented him from registering as a doctoral student. Largely due to his efforts, the Regulations were changed to enable teachers in affiliated organizations to research for higher degrees. The change, however, came too late for him to benefit. His career was about to change from the academic to the administrative side of University life.

In 1958, Dr Ernest Payne, his supervisor during his Oxford days but by then the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, urged him to apply for the post of Principal of the Baptist College in Victoria, Australia. He agreed and he was appointed to the post, sailing with his family to Australia in 1959. Eleven years later, **Ithel Jones**, the Principal of the Baptist College in Cardiff, also emigrated to Australia to become pastor of the Baptist church meeting in Collins Street, Melbourne.

In Australia, Mervyn Himbury's task was to guide the Baptist College in Victoria in its quest to become a residential college affiliated to the University of Melbourne. This was accomplished in 1965 with the opening of the new campus of Whitley College, named after Dr W. T. Whitley, an English Baptist who had emigrated to Australia in 1891 at the invitation of Australian Baptists to establish the first Baptist College in Collins Street Baptist church in Melbourne. At the time Whitley College opened, it was the custom of Melbourne University to confer an M.A. degree on the heads of its Colleges who had equivalent degrees from other universities. Mervyn Himbury fell into this category. He supervised the development of the new college for the next twenty-one years until his retirement in 1986 when he was appointed honorary assistant minister to **Ithel Jones** in Collins Street. In 1989, Whitley College named its new theological centre The Mervyn Himbury Theological Centre in his honour. He was also given honorary fellowships by the University of Wales and the University of Melbourne.

Mervyn Himbury did not have much opportunity to return to academic research while he was Principal of Whitley College, though he did publish *British Baptists: a Short History* (1962), a booklet, *An Unusual Mr Smyth: Baptist Beginnings* (1964), with Victorian Baptist Fund: centenary history of the Victorian Baptist Fund following in 1988. His final publication, *The Theatre of the Word: traditions, ministry, future of The Collins Street Baptist Church, Melbourne*, appeared in 1993, when he was honorary assistant minister at Collins Street.

Mervyn Himbury died on 31 October 2008. His funeral service was held in the chapel of Whitley College on 7 November 2008.

Author

D. Hugh Matthews, (1936 - 2020)

Sources

Personal knowledge

A monochrome photograph appears in D. Hugh Matthews, *From Abergavenny to Cardiff History of the South Wales Baptist College (1806-2006)* (Swansea 2007)

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