

PARRY, Sir DAVID HUGHES (1893-1973), lawyer, jurist, university administrator

Name: David Hughes Parry
Date of birth: 1893
Date of death: 1973
Spouse: Haf Parry (née Edwards)
Parent: Anne Parry (née Hughes)
Parent: John Hughes Parry
Gender: Male
Occupation: lawyer, jurist, university administrator
Area of activity: Education; Law
Author: Richard Gwynedd Parry

He was born on 3 January 1893, the second child and eldest son of John Hughes Parry, farmer, and his wife Anne (née Hughes), at Uwchlaw'r-ffynnon, Llanaelhaearn, Caernarfonshire. His mother was a granddaughter of [Robert Hughes](#), Uwchlaw'r-ffynnon. He was educated at the elementary school in Llanaelhaearn and later at Pwllheli Grammar School. In 1910, he enrolled at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he studied economics and law, achieving a first class degree in economics in 1914. The following year, with the outbreak of the Great War, he enlisted as private in the Royal Welch Fusiliers (he was later commissioned as a lieutenant). He served with the regiment in the trenches of the Western Front where he sustained abdominal injuries that plagued him for the rest of his life.

At the end of the War, he undertook further legal studies at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he was tutored by the eminent jurist, Sir Percy Winfield, and graduated with a first class law degree in 1920. In 1922, he was called to the Bar of the Inner Temple, having been awarded the Certificate of Honour and being placed top of his year in the professional examinations. Instead of pursuing the practitioner's calling, he set his sights on academia, and took up a lecturing post at the law department in Aberystwyth in 1920. Working under the direction of his old tutor and head of the law department, [Professor Thomas A. Levi](#), he remained there until 1924. In 1923, he married Haf, the only daughter of [Sir Owen Morgan Edwards](#) and his wife, Ellen.

In 1924, a defining moment came in his career when he took up a lectureship in law at the London School of Economics and Political Science. With the guidance and encouragement of Sir William Beveridge, the director, and Sir Edward Jenks, the head of the law department, his career flourished. His principal interests were the laws of property and inheritance, and his publications included *Wolstenholme and Cherry's Conveyancing Statutes* (1927), which he co-wrote with Sir Benjamin Cherry, and *Williams on Executors* (1930). He was elevated to the Chair in English Law at the University of London in 1930.

Although David Hughes Parry was engaged in legal authorship during the early part of his career (his monograph, *The Law of Succession*, was published in 1937) it was in the direction of university governance and administration that his future path was to lie. As head of the Law Department at the LSE, he was also, *de facto*, the leader of the University of London's three Law Schools (the others being at University College and King's College). In 1939, he was appointed Chairman of the Academic Council of the University of London. Thereafter, he would serve on a vast range of committees within the university and externally. His aptitude for academic administration climaxed with his appointment for a term as vice-chancellor of the University of London in 1945. Later, in 1962, he was appointed Chairman of the Court of the University.

His most enduring contribution to legal scholarship came through his role as founding director of the University of London's Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, which was established in 1947 to promote legal scholarship and, in particular, to develop comparative and international legal research. Hughes Parry exercised political influence within the corridors of power of the University of London to turn a long-held aspiration to establish a centre of excellence in advanced legal research into reality. It was no coincidence that the founding of this important institute coincided with Hughes Parry's term as vice-chancellor of the University of London. Perhaps the vision was not his originally - [Lord Atkin](#) and others had presented a compelling case for such an institute in the inter-war years. But it was Hughes Parry that converted that vision into a practical achievement. For more than a decade, he led the Institute and laid the foundations for its future prosperity.

Hughes Parry's standing within his profession led to recognition at the highest level. He was knighted in 1951, elected Bencher of the Inner Temple in 1952, appointed honorary Queen's Counsel in 1955 and elected honorary fellow of Peterhouse Cambridge in 1956. He also received a raft of honorary doctorates from universities throughout the world, including from Wales (1947), Western Ontario (1948), McGill (1949), Birmingham (1952), Cambridge (1953), and London (1963).

Hughes Parry became the embodiment of the don as a public servant. In the 1950s, he would serve as vice-chairman of the Universities Grants Committee, a member of the Law Reform Committee, and, in 1959, he chaired a committee of enquiry

on the university system in New Zealand. The ensuing Report, known as the Parry Report, would lead to the wholesale reform of the University system and the disbanding of the federal University of New Zealand.

For all his prodigious and wide-reaching labours in the fields of legal scholarship and university governance, just as significant was his dominating presence in the public life of Wales. In a life which had very few professional setbacks, one was to prove spectacularly wounding. He had made it his personal goal to become principal of his alma mater, the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, but unsuccessfully applied for the post both in 1927 and 1934. He never forgave those whom had denied him his inheritance. He was to be partly compensated for these disappointments by being appointed President of the College in 1954. His term, however, was marked by the [Goronwy Rees](#) spying controversy of 1956-57. [Rees](#), then principal of Aberystwyth, was implicated in the Burgess/Maclean spying ring after he published a series of salacious articles in the *People* newspaper in early 1956. Leading figures within the college initiated a campaign to have [Rees](#) removed from his post, a campaign which turned into a bitter and personal conflict between [Rees](#) as principal and Hughes Parry as president. But [Rees](#) was no match for the veteran lawyer who also understood the mechanics of university committees better than anyone, and Hughes Parry achieved his objective with [Rees](#)'s removal from office in 1957. Hughes Parry also ensured that the institution would be given stable leadership by appointing [\[Sir\] Thomas Parry](#) as the new principal in 1958.

Of the many prominent roles which Hughes Parry played in the life of Wales, which included that of President of the Court of the National Eisteddfod, perhaps the most personally significant was that of Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in 1964-65. A faithful and active member of the Calvinistic Methodists throughout his life, to be the second layman to have ever held the office at that point in time was a remarkable testament to his esteem within the denomination.

But perhaps Hughes Parry's name will forever occupy a place in the history of Wales thanks to his role as chairman of a government committee which, during the years 1963 to 1965, conducted an enquiry and made recommendations on the legal status of the Welsh language. Hughes Parry was the chief architect of the report published in 1965 which led to the Welsh Language Act of 1967, a statute which established for the first time in legislation the principle of equality between English and Welsh.

Hughes Parry was a jurist who carved for himself a unique place within the legal pantheon. Although his legal legacy is more pragmatic than intellectual, he was a facilitator and enabler of important initiatives. He was also an establishment figure who believed in institutions and their capacity to provide leadership, example and focus for national life. Above all, Hughes Parry felt a particular obligation towards Wales, her language, culture and institutions. In a sense, he had taken upon himself the mantle of [O. M. Edwards](#) as one of Wales's guardians, showing an almost paternalistic responsibility for her welfare.

A tall, lean and physically striking figure, his trademark mane of thick, backcombed white hair remained a distinctive feature to the very end of his life. He was a proud and determined man, incapable of suffering those whom he regarded as fools, and made little attempt to disguise his indignation towards those who dared to contradict him. In committee, he would openly challenge those whom he felt were his intellectual inferiors, especially if they displayed what he regarded as being misplaced confidence in their own judgement. Yet he was also a loyal ally, and gave unsparingly of his time and energy to those individuals, organisations and causes that were dearest to him.

He died at his home, Neuadd Wen, Llanuwchllyn on 8 January 1973, and was cremated at the Wrexham crematorium; his wife, Haf, had predeceased him in 1965. There were no children of the marriage.

Author

Richard Gwynedd Parry

Sources

David Hughes Parry's papers are at the National Library of Wales

David Hughes Parry, *O Bentref Llanaelhaearn i Ddinas Llundain* (Caernarfon 1972)

R. Gwynedd Parry, *David Hughes Parry: A Jurist in Society* (2010)

Sir Douglas Logan's portrayal of him in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
The Times 10 January 1973

Information from Rev Professor John Tudno Williams and his family

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [David Hughes Parry](#)

Additional Links

VIAF: [77583](#)

Wikidata: [Q5235233](#)

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