



His Honour Judge J D Seys-Llewellyn

MA

by JT Driver, FSA

With the death of His Honour Judge Seys-Llewellyn on 14 April 2003 – three weeks before his ninety-first birthday – the Society lost one of its oldest and most distinguished members.

John Desmond Seys-Llewellyn was born in Cardiff on 3 May 1912. From Cardiff High School he went up to Jesus College, Oxford, in 1931 to read French and German. Until the Second World War began he taught in a Grammar School in South Wales, but enlisted in the Royal Tank Regiment on the outbreak of hostilities. At the end of the war in Europe, he volunteered for duties in the Far East and was sent to India, where he served for two years.

Even before joining the army, John had decided to change career and to follow the law. In 1936 he joined the Inner Temple and studied for the Bar while in the army. He was ‘called’ in 1945. Only recently has it become known that, as a fairly new barrister, he had been involved in the Nuremberg trials.

John began to practise in Chester in 1947. For a short time he acted as Clerk to the Justices in Wrexham, but then decided to return to work as a barrister in Chester. After serving as Deputy Chairman of the Cheshire Quarter Sessions from 1968 to 1971, he became a County Court Judge (later a Circuit Judge) until his retirement in 1985.

Away from the law, John Seys-Llewellyn enjoyed a wide variety of interests, political and cultural. A life-long Liberal, he twice contested the City of Chester parliamentary constituency, once at a General Election, and once at a by-election. He was a keen traveller abroad, where he visited such places as Petra, the Holy Sepulchre, the site of the battle of Castillon and, further afield, the Inca sites of Cuzco and Machu Picchu, and the pottery warrior figures of the Qin dynasty discovered near Shaanxi in China. Archaeology and membership of this Society – as he once said – were two of his great loves. Indeed he served the Society long and well. He was keen that the Society should represent the architectural, archaeological and historical interests of Chester and North Wales. As Chairman from 1971 to 1976 he gave strong backing to all the activities of the Society, not least to the 125th Anniversary Dinner in 1974. Again, he was a regular supporter of the

summer excursions. Subsequent to his chairmanship, he was made a Vice-President, an office which gave him great pleasure.

John was proud of his Welsh roots, which was clearly reflected in his enthusiasm for Welsh rugby. Another of his interests was music. He was, in fact, for some time organist at Gresford Church. He was also Vice-President of the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. Behind what could sometimes seem to be a strict and formidable exterior lay a man of good humour, sound judgment, kindness, and one with a strong sense of fair play.

No appreciation would be complete without acknowledgment of his happy family life. He was badly shaken by the death of his first wife, Elaine, but found renewed contentment in his second marriage to Joan, who died in 2001. John was very proud of his three sons by his first marriage, two of whom are in business and the youngest who followed his father into law, and who has recently been made a Q.C. John's last years were made difficult by ill-health and increasing deafness, but he met both with courage and determination. He had always loved dogs, especially English setters; and it was his dog which provided companionship for him in the last months of his life.

Note

This obituary has been compiled in consultation with, and the approval of, the Seys-Llewellyn family. R. P. Seys-Llewellyn, Esq., provided the photograph which accompanies this obituary, which is reproduced with the permission of UPPA.