

ELLIS, THOMAS PETER (1873 - 1936), judge (I.C.S.) and authority on Punjab customary law and medieval Welsh law

Name: Thomas Peter Ellis
Date of birth: 1873
Date of death: 1936
Spouse: Hilda Ellis (née Broadway)
Spouse: Rosetta Ellis (née McAlister)
Parent: Mary Ellis (née Lewis)
Parent: Peter Ellis
Gender: Male
Occupation: judge (I.C.S.) and authority on Punjab customary law and medieval Welsh law
Area of activity: Law; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Stephen Joseph Williams

Born at Wrexham, 4 June 1873, son of Peter Ellis and Mary (Lewis). His father died when he was very young, and he spent his early youth with his mother and her family on a farm near Glyndyfrdwy. He was educated at Oswestry high school and at Lincoln College, Oxford, where he became an admirer of (Sir) Owen M. Edwards. He went to India and soon earned distinction: he came to be considered one of the ablest judicial officers of the Indian Civil Service during the first two decades of the 20th century. In India he married Rosetta McAlister, but she died in 1912, leaving him a son and a daughter. In 1915 he married Hilda Broadway.

As district and sessions judge in the Punjab, Ellis acquired a unique knowledge of the customary law of that country. He was a member of the legislative council for the Punjab, and during the first world war he became legal remembrancer (attorney-general) to the Punjab Government and president of the Defence of India tribunal, Lahore. The 'armed rebellion' of April 1919 brought him his most arduous tasks as adviser on martial law and as drafter of the various ordinances and instructions for the guidance of the judicial and military officers. His work in this critical situation earned him great praise for discretion and sound judgement. Ellis, together with other judicial officers, regarded the subsequent granting of an amnesty to so many prisoners convicted of grave offences as a slur on the proceedings of the martial law commissions, and for this reason, it is understood, he refused the offer of appointment as judge of the high court, Lahore. In 1921 he returned finally to Wales.

He settled down in Llysmynach, Dolgelley, and devoted the remaining fifteen years of his life to his Welsh interests, which he had by no means forgotten during his work in India. He assiduously continued his researches and skilfully applied his experience of the 'tribal system' in operation in the Punjab to the interpretation of tribal life in Wales in medieval times. Some time after his return to Wales he became a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and during the latter part of his life he gave much time to the study of the history of Catholicism in Wales. He died at the Royal Southern Hospital, Liverpool, on 7 July 1936.

Ellis's publications in India include *The Ivory Industry in the Punjab*; *The Law of Pre-emption in the Punjab*; *A Judge's Note-book*; *Notes on Punjab Custom*; he also edited *Rattigan's Punjab Customary Law* (8th ed.). His chief publications dealing with Wales are: *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, 1926; *The Mabinogion - a New Translation* (with John Lloyd), 1929; *The Story of Two Parishes (Dolgelley and Llanelltyd)*, 1928; *The First Extent of Bromfield and Yale*; *The Tragedy of Cymmer*; *The Catholic Church in Wales under the Roman Empire*; *The Catholic Martyrs of Wales, 1535-1680*; *The Welsh Benedictines of the Terror*; *Dreams and Memories* (published posthumously), together with many essays and articles in periodicals, etc., especially in *The Welsh Outlook*. There is also in the National Library of Wales a copy of an unpublished 'History of the Church in Wales' in two volumes.

Author

Professor Stephen Joseph Williams, (1896 - 1992)

Sources

Information supplied by his widow and daughter

Who's who in Wales, 1937

The Times, 14 July 1936

Merioneth County Times, 11 July 1936

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