



MASTER OF
THE ROLLS

**SPEECH AT THE SWEARING-IN OF THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND AND WALES,
THE RT. HON. THE LORD THOMAS OF CWMGIEDD**

MASTER OF THE ROLLS, THE RT. HON. THE LORD DYSON

1 OCTOBER 2013

This is a great day for Wales. It is also a great day for England. After a brilliant academic record, which included first class degrees in each year at Cambridge, John Thomas came to the Bar in 1970. He joined one of the top commercial chambers and took silk at the age of 36. It was evident at an early stage that he was no ordinary commercial practitioner. Between 1971 and 1986, he attended the Islington Legal Advice Centre on a weekly basis. His clients there were not Greek shipping owners. They were ordinary people who needed advice with their problems. They were tenants, consumers, those who had suffered personal injury or had been sacked and many others besides.

He was appointed to the High Court when still under 50. Within 7 years, he was in the Court of Appeal and had been appointed Senior Presiding Judge. In 2008, he was appointed Vice-president of the Queen's Bench Division and Deputy Head of Criminal Justice. In 2011, he became President of the Queen's Bench Division. And now, he has landed the very top job that the judicial system of England and Wales has to offer.

These bare facts do not begin to give the flavour of all that he has achieved in his career, for example, the outstanding judgments that he has produced in areas far from the commercial law in which he practised at the Bar with such distinction. He has made particularly important contributions in the field of criminal and public law. Nor do they begin to capture the reforming spirit that he has displayed to such effect in all the positions that he has held. And his notable achievements in European institutions also deserve a mention. These are all the more remarkable because we are seen by many across the Channel as the bad boys of Europe who would be happier if we had nothing to do with it.

His prodigious energy is well known. Recently, in a discussion about output and efficiency, he told me that we should not forget that we are all getting older. This was not intended to be a banal self-evident truth. He was implying that he was slowing down. I have to say that I have seen no evidence of this whatsoever.

Many of you will have witnessed his industry and energy at first hand. I can reveal a story, although it is based on hearsay. I believe that it is reliable. If it is not, I hope that the new LCJ will not be tempted to initiate an inquiry into the source of the leak. When he was SPJ, he and his secretary were staying in a hotel. John was working, as is his custom. He wanted to have a

bath, but he did not want to stop working. So his secretary took notes in the bedroom as John talked to him whilst he was in the bath with the door ajar. In this way, no time was wasted and efficiency was maintained.

I said at the outset that this is a great day for Wales. For John, his Welsh roots are of enormous importance. He grew up in a coal mining community in South Wales and he still spends a considerable amount of time there. He chops down trees with a Gladstonian zeal and walks the hills with gusto. He has honorary degrees from Welsh universities, has given lectures in Wales and has introduced reforms to the justice system of Wales.

He is not the first Welsh Lord Chief Justice. So far as I am aware, there have been no fewer than 4 before him. The first was Sir John Glynne who was Chief Justice of the Upper Bench during the Protectorate in the 17th century. He had a lively political career and was described as a “great political survivor”. The second was Baron Jeffreys of Bloody Assizes fame. He was Chief Justice of the King’s Bench from 1683-85 and then became Lord Chancellor. He died in the Tower of London. Next came Baron Kenyon who was described by Boswell as a “real lawyer” who would be “a good fuller’s mill to thicken and consolidate the law, which was very necessary after the loose texture which Lord Mansfield had given it”. Finally came Baron Trevelyan (Lawrence J) who took office in 1921, perhaps the least eye-catching of the four.

The experiences of John’s predecessors will not, however, be of much assistance to him. But at least he knows that, even if he displeases or irritates the Government beyond its endurance, he will not end up in the Tower and he certainly will not be appointed Lord Chancellor. He will need all the skills that he possesses in such abundance to perform his hugely important role with fearless independence, but also with tact, diplomacy and pragmatism.

John, on behalf of the entire judiciary, I wish you well in this great office.

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