

## **Ivor Richard: 1932 - 2018.**

We're gathered here to honour the memory and to give thanks for the life of The Right Honourable the Lord Richard of Ammanford Queen's Counsel; we're here to say farewell to our friend Ivor.

Let me echo words of his (and my) local poet Dylan Thomas as we begin at the beginning.

It was certainly spring; we might imagine it was a moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the houses as blind as moles. If you listened carefully you might have heard those houses sleeping in the streets in the slow deep and silent black, bandaged night. With your mind's eye, perhaps you'd have pictured, in the blinded bedrooms, the combs and petticoats over the chairs, the jugs and basin, the glasses of teeth, Thou Shalt Not on the wall, and the yellowing dickybird-watching pictures of the dead. It's easy to imagine that it was in just such a town that Ivor Seward Richard was born, a darling bud of May, round the corner of a world long gone.

The name of that little town is Betws. For most of its history you could only reach it (or leave it) by crossing the mountains that separated it from Neath or Swansea. The bridge built in 1892 that links it to Ammanford gave it access to the rest of creation. Indeed, there was once a signpost on that bridge that said, quite simply, "Betws a'r byd" which, being interpreted, means "this way Betws, that way the rest of the world." It was Betws *contra mundum*. This was the bridge that Jim Griffiths, one of the architects of the Welfare State and later Minister for the Colonies, crossed on his way to a life of service to Wales, the United Kingdom and our disintegrating empire. And this was the bridge that Ivor Richard crossed on his way to education in Llanelli, Cheltenham and Oxford and then to his legal, political, diplomatic and domestic life in London, Brussels and New York. By a curious symmetry, though generations apart, Jim Griffiths and Ivor Richard both learned to read and write, both sang their chapel hymns and spoke the language of the bards, in the very same primary school in that land-locked, lulled and dumbfounded town in eastern Carmarthenshire.

Once over that bridge, Ivor blazed so many trails – at the Bar, in both Houses of Parliament, deeply buried in the labyrinths of Brussels, and on the front line of world affairs as our Ambassador to the United Nations. From the beginning of his political life he supported moves to bring devolved government to

Wales. This put him at odds with Welsh Members of Parliament. From an early date, he was in favour of Britain's membership of the European Community. This put him at odds with sentiment in the Labour Party at that time. During his time at the United Nations, he chaired the Geneva Convention on the future of Zimbabwe surrounded by highly charged factions all vying for power. This put him at odds with just about all of them. As a British Commissioner in Brussels, his advocacy of progressive social and educational objectives put him at odds with the unturnable lady who happened to be at the helm just then. And his commitment to a radical reform of the House of Lords put him at odds with the early manifestations of New Labour. At odds with people again and again but not because he was an awkward so-and-so. Much more because he'd actually thought about the issues under discussion and wanted to take up positions consistent with his thinking. And who can doubt now how, broadly speaking, things might have been better in all these areas if people had trusted Ivor's instincts.

I lived in Haiti for a number of years. Haitians have a lively oral and visual culture. One of their proverbs came to mind as I was preparing these remarks: "You can only measure the true length of a snake when it's dead." It's only now, at his death, that we can begin to measure the enormous range of Ivor's interests and the courageous way he espoused progressive causes even when they were not the fashion of the day.

We must express our sorrow at the death of Ivor. His children and grandchildren are gathered here today, some of you having travelled vast distances. To David, Alison and Kirsty; to Alun and Marjanah; to Isobel, Gary and Ieuan; to William and Hannah; and, of course, to Janet, we offer our sympathy in your loss. Even though Ivor had been unwell for so long, the passing of someone who's been part of us for many long years, and in some cases our entire lives, will inevitably leave us with feelings of emptiness and sadness. His was not a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury while signifying nothing or next to nothing. He put his gifts at the disposal of others in a lifetime of public service – surely one of the highest vocations available to us. But it's as I read of his more "human" characteristics, - searching for a tank for a son's pet spider, playing rounders with the kids, completing his papers late at night in order to be at the school gate to meet a child at the end of the school day, taking part in a marble run, that I sense the man behind the public figure. As one friend put it, "he liked nothing better than an evening with friends, good food, a good bottle and sparkling chat." And music, theatre, opera too. And how I'd love to have heard him play the piano.

Sadness cannot have the last word, however; edging alongside it comes gratitude. How thankful can we all be for having enjoyed his collegueship, his loyalty, his friendship, his sense of fun? All of us will have our own memories and anecdotes and I too, who knew him only recently, have reason to be grateful. Ivor and his close friend Merlin Rees were among my warmest encouragers when I joined the House of Lords – we all agreed that it was the fact that Ivor had been a prop forward and knew the innermost secrets of the skulduggery of a rugby scrum that equipped him well for all the skirmishes and infighting that he'd witnessed. He rose above all that and became the architect of the Commission which bears his name, the Richard Commission, which gave structural form to the chaotic beginnings of Welsh devolutionary government and pretty much established its continuing shape and agenda. This may well be his finest achievement, his legacy. These days, I speak for Wales at the despatch box in the Lords; the day after tomorrow, we begin the Report Stage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and a stormy time we expect to have of it. Both on Europe and on Wales, Ivor made strenuous efforts to apply common sense to complicated problems, testimony to his clarity of mind as well as his passionate beliefs. Truly we stand on the shoulders of great men. A Betws boy will continue to whisper in the ear of the boy from Burry Port.

Sorrow and gratitude have their place then but so too do faith, hope and love. He grew up in a believing community and I know he still hankered after all that it stood for. But he recognized the failures in his life and regretted them too. He sometimes felt like a pilgrim in a barren land and there were occasions when he longed for the bread from heaven that would feed him evermore. He needn't have been too harsh on himself. The "Thou Shalt Not" on the wall stood starkly in judgement over all of us growing up in the Wales of that time. I'd want him to hear the more generous tones of the Rev'd Eli Jenkins from Dylan Thomas's Under Milkwood:

*Every morning when I wake,  
Dear Lord a little prayer I make,  
O please to keep Thy lovely eye  
On all poor creatures born to die.*

*We are not wholly bad or good  
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,  
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first  
To see our best side, not our worst.*

*And every evening at sun-down  
I ask a blessing on the town,  
For whether we last the night or no  
I'm sure is always touch-and-go.*

*O let us see another day!  
Bless us this night, I pray  
And to the sun we all will bow  
And say, good-bye – but just for now!*

By crossing the bridge from Betws you may begin a journey that sees you leave your native Wales but, as I can testify, your native Wales never quite leaves you. And the oppressive religion of the past can never stifle the generosity of a God whose love is boundless, "wide wide as the ocean, high as the heavens above" (as we used to sing in Sunday School). We must all approach the mystery of death in our own way, according to our own light, but we'd all do well to be humble in the face of this great unknown. It's still Easter, a season that, for many of us, holds out the claim that the horizons of human hope may have been redefined for ever. It's into a greater reality that we commit Ivor today and from that understanding that we offer our continuing thoughts and prayers to Janet and the family as they begin to put their lives back together again. We should all remember, once more with Dylan Thomas, that "though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion."

And so, dear Ivor, you have fought the good fight and run your life's race and shuffled off your mortal coil:

*The sword outwears its sheath  
And the soul wears out the breast,  
And the heart must pause to breathe,  
And love itself must rest.*

We say good-bye, - but just for now. May you rest in peace and may light perpetual shine upon you.