

## VAUGHAN, Sir JOHN (1603 - 1674), judge

**Name:** John Vaughan  
**Date of birth:** 1603  
**Date of death:** 1674  
**Spouse:** Jane Vaughan (née Stedman)  
**Child:** Anne Vaughan  
**Child:** Lucy Vaughan (née Vaughan)  
**Child:** Edward Vaughan  
**Parent:** Lettice Vaughan (née Stedman)  
**Parent:** Edward Vaughan  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** judge  
**Area of activity:** History and Culture; Law  
**Author:** John Gwynn Williams

Born 14 September 1603 at Trawsgoed, Cardiganshire. He was the eldest son of **Edward Vaughan** and Lettice (Stedman) (see article on **Vaughan** family of Trawsgoed). He was educated at Worcester school (1613-18), Christ Church, Oxford (1618-21), and the Inner Temple (he entered in 1621, was called to the Bar in 1630, and became a Bencher in 1664). It was in the Star Chamber that he first made his name. He was elected to Parliament for Cardigan borough in April 1640 and in December 1640, and perhaps as early as February 1627/8. There is little reliable information about him from 1642 to 1660. Clarendon offered him a judgeship in 1660, but he declined it. He was again elected to Parliament in April 1661, this time for Cardigan county. He became one of the principal leaders of the 'country party' and amongst the most eloquent in the House. He was prominent in the attacks on Clarendon in 1667. In May 1668 he was suddenly promoted chief justice of the court of Common Pleas, and knighted. He won lasting fame for his important decision in Bushell's Case, that juries were not to be fined for returning a verdict against the direction of the judge. Some of his friends were men of great distinction - John Selden, who dedicated to him his *Vindiciae Maris Clausi*; Thomas Hobbes, who visited him thrice weekly at one period; Sir Matthew Hale, his Acton neighbour; and Edward Stillingfleet, who preached his funeral sermon. He died on 10 December 1674, and was probably buried in the Temple Church, London.

He gave some support to the king's forces during the Civil War (see **J. R. Phillips**, *Civil War*, ii, 154-7), but he virtually retired from public life until the Restoration. It is said that he helped the Parliamentarians to capture Aberystwyth castle in 1646 (*Cambrian Register*, i, 166). That cannot be proved. He was listed among the 'delinquents' on 29 June 1648. His own testimony in 1660 was that he was fined and his house 'totally plundered to his greate losse' (*S. P. Dom.*, *Charles II*, 29/8, 126; see also *Cambrian Quarterly Magazine*, i, 61). In 1660, he was appointed steward of Mefenydd and four other Crown lordships in Cardiganshire. The **earl of Carbery** made him one of his deputy-lieutenants for the county. Some Welsh matters came to his attention in Parliament. When a dispute arose concerning an election in Caernarvon town, he was put on the committee to examine the problem, because he knew 'the ancient true Celtique or Brititish tongue' (*Jnl. of Sir Simonds d'Ewes*, ed. Notestein, 455). In 1662, he was one of three nominated to discuss the suitability of translating the new *Prayer Book* into Welsh (*Commons Jnl.*, viii, 409). Welsh history and antiquities interested him. As one of the executors of Selden's will, he had access to that scholar's priceless library. He retained (see under **Theophilus Field**) the manuscript of the 'Book of Llandaff' and lent it to **Robert Vaughan**, Hengwrt, to transcribe (see **E. D. Jones** in *N.L.W. Jnl.*, iv, 123). In one of his most noteworthy opinions, he held that the West-minister courts could not issue final process into Wales (*Reports*, 395). His authority was sufficient to safeguard the Welsh courts for a period. He based his argument on the position of Wales in the Middle Ages and, in his belief, the situation was unchanged in this respect by the Acts of Union of Henry VIII. As late as 1745, his arguments were effectively used in the case of *Lampley v. Thomas*, when it was ruled that writs of 'latitat' could not issue into Wales (*English Reports*, 1 Wilson, 193). In *R. v. Athos*, judge Fortescue suggested that '... he being a native of Wales, might be prejudiced in favour of his country' (*English Reports*, 8 Modern, 145).

The **Crosswood estate** grew substantially under his administration. At the beginning of his career he bought lands worth £4,300 in Cardigan, and lands in Montgomeryshire at the end of his life. The estate was transferred intact to his only son, Edward. His wife, Jane (Stedman), survived him. They had also two daughters, Anne and Lucy. There are two oil portraits of the chief justice in Wales, one at Gwysaney and the other on loan to the N.L.W.

### Author

Professor John Gwynn Williams

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Vaughan](#)

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