

## WATKINS, Sir PERCY EMERSON (1871 - 1946) civil servant

**Name:** Percy Emerson Watkins

**Date of birth:** 1871

**Date of death:** 1946

**Spouse:** Lil Watkins (née Lewis)

**Spouse:** Mary Jane Watkins (née Jones)

**Parent:** Mary Watkins (née Mills)

**Parent:** Evan Watkins

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** civil servant

**Area of activity:** Education; Public and Social Service, Civil Administration

**Author:** Wynn Powell Wheldon

Born 3 December 1871 at Llanfyllin, Montgomeryshire, son of Evan and Mary Watkins. One of ten children, he was educated at the local elementary school, and for five terms at the High School, Oswestry, under **Owen Owen**. He then returned home to assist his father, but in 1896 was appointed first Clerk of the Central Welsh board. In 1904 he was appointed chief clerk to the Education Department of the West Riding of Yorkshire. In 1911 he returned to Wales to be Registrar at the University College, Cardiff, where he remained until 1913, when he became Assistant Secretary to the Welsh Insurance Commission at Cardiff.

In 1925 he succeeded (**Sir**) **Alfred T. Davies** as Permanent Secretary of the Welsh Department of the Board of Education where he immediately established the good relationships which were very necessary if the Welsh Department at the Board, still immature, was to function effectively. Similarly in Wales he smoothed out the friction which had become acute between the Welsh Department in London and the Central Welsh Board in Wales.

An important event during his tenure of office was the issue, in 1931, of a report on *Educational Problems of the Welsh Coalfield*; this led to great developments in adult education in south Wales. Watkins was ever a steadfast friend to all forms of adult education and was one of the moving influences in the establishment of Coleg Harlech in 1927. In 1927 a Departmental committee of the Board issued a report on *Welsh in Education and Life*. Watkins at once took measures to make the recommendations of this report well known and effective. He initiated surveys on the language situation in the schools, and encouraged the Board's inspectors to investigate the problem of Welsh and English teaching in the schools. As a result, two official memoranda were issued embodying suggestions to teachers on the teaching of Welsh and English in the elementary schools; these constituted the first firm attempt to provide teachers in Wales with principle which they might apply to the solution of this all-important matter. Watkins resigned his position at the Board in 1933 to direct, in south Wales, the work of the Council of Social Services. This involved great financial loss to him. With the same human sympathy, integrity and absence of self-seeking which always characterised him, he devoted the last ten years of his life to this work.

He married (1) (1898) Mary Jane Jones of Llanfyllin, and had one son. In 1930 he was knighted and received the honorary degree of LL.D. from the University of Wales. Lady Watkins died in 1939, and in 1941 he married (2) Lil Bush (née Lewis). He died 5 May 1946. In addition to various articles and memoranda he published his autobiography in 1944 under the title *A Welshman Remembers*.

### Author

**Sir Wynn Powell Wheldon**, (1878 - 1961)

### Sources

Percy E. Watkins, *A Welshman Remembers. An autobiography, etc.* (Cardiff 1944)(1944)

personal knowledge

### Additional Links

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