

TITLE

Beatrice Honor Davy Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

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VERSIONS

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Davy, Beatrice Honour (1885-1966), barrister and later solicitor, was born at 29 Southernhay, Exeter, Devon, on 13 December 1885, the daughter of Henry Davy FRCP (1855-1922), consulting physician at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, and his first wife Beatrice Mary *nee* Tucker (1866-1905), daughter of Walter James Tucker, solicitor and town clerk of Chard, Somerset. She was educated at Grassendale, a boarding school for girls in Southbourne, Bournemouth. When not at school she spent her childhood and early adulthood in Exeter at the family home of Southernhay House, Exeter, where she lived with her father after her mother's death. She spent the Great War assisting Georgiana Buller, administrator of the Central Military Hospital in Exeter, in coordinating and supplying war hospitals in Devon. Her father, who was consulting physician to Southern Command, was knighted (KBE) in 1919 for his war work. Her only brother, Francis, was killed during the Great War.

After the war Davy studied for the LL.B law degree at King's College, London and, after the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, applied to be admitted as a student member at Middle Temple in 1920. She graduated

LL.B in 1921 and was among the ten women who, in November 1922, were the first to be called to the Bar at Middle Temple. On 17 February 1923 Davy was the first woman to appear at the Devon Assizes, *Weber v Weber & Payne*, where she successfully appeared for an abandoned husband in an undefended divorce case, in which the client was awarded a decree nisi and costs. On 2 November 1926 she joined Inner Temple, 'ad eundem' (at the same level), on the payment of a fee and the agreement of the bench table. She contributed a chapter on 'The Bar' to J. A. R. Cairns, *Careers for Girls* (1928), in which she described the process of becoming a barrister, and the costs involved, commenting that 'For a woman who must earn her own living the Bar is the very last profession in the world' (p. 53).

Davy herself abandoned the bar, qualified as a solicitor in 1931, and went into partnership with Edith Berthen. Madge Easton Anderson was articled to the 'Firm of Messrs Berthen and Davy of London' and after qualification in 1937 joined the partnership which became 'Messrs Berthen, Davy and Anderson'. The firm survived until 1951, although Berthen had retired by 1940. They practised out of many offices in London: Manchester Square (1935), Welbeck Street (1938),

Finsbury Square (1941), Tanfield Court (1942), Harley Street (1943), Red Lion Square (1950) and 4 Halsey House (1951).

In 1939 Davy gave evidence on behalf of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her child (NCUM) to the House of Lords Select Committee considering the Bastardy (Blood Test) Bill which proposed to introduce a compulsory blood test as a method of establishing paternity. It was argued that without this legislation the test would only be available to consenting and rich parties. Davy argued that the science was not sufficiently advanced to be of use in law courts, and expressed fear that the magistrates would decide paternity on blood test evidence alone. The bill never became law.

Davy remained in practice until 1951. She had been an early member of the London Soroptimist Club, founded in 1923 by leading professional and business women, and of which her partner in legal practice Edith Berthen was also a member. She never married and died of cerebral thrombosis, cerebral arteriosclerosis, and arthritis of hips, at her home, Rosemullion, Woodmancote, West Sussex on 18 April 1966, and was cremated at Woodvale crematorium, Brighton. She

left £9868 to her friend, distinguished dermatologist, Dr Elizabeth Hunt (1876-1977), author of *Diseases Affecting the Vulva*, who had directed any copyright issues in her book to Davy, describing her as '...my friend... whose confidence and encouragement the book is due.'

Material Used

b. cert

d. cert

census returns 1901, 1911

Likenesses

Any known pictures of her?

Probate

£9,656: probate, 28 Nov. 1966, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*