

## JONES, JOHN (born c. 1578-1583, died 1658?), notable calligrapher and transcriber of manuscripts, of Gellilyfdy (Loveday), Ysgeifiog, Flintshire

**Name:** John Jones

**Date of birth:** c. 1578-1583

**Date of death:** 1658?

**Spouse:** Jones (née Griffith)

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** calligrapher and transcriber of manuscripts

**Home:** Gellilyfdy Loveday

**Area of activity:** Art and Architecture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages

**Author:** William Llewelyn Davies

John Jones leaves his readers in no doubt as to his ancestry, for many of the surviving manuscripts contain such an entry as this: ' Siôn ap Wiliam ap Siôn ap Wiliam ap Siôn ap Dafydd ab Ithel Vychan ap Kynrig ap Rotbert ap Ierwerth ap Rryrid ap Ierwerth ap Madog ab Ednowain Bendew ... ' (Pen. MS. 224), with, often, such an ending to the pedigree as ' Yr hwnn Siôn ap Wiliam a elwir yn ol y Seisnigawl arfer John Jones ' (this Siôn ap Wiliam, by English custom, is called John Jones). His grandfather had owned manuscripts; [Wiliam Ll n](#) and [Wiliam Cynwal](#) wrote elegies on this grandfather's death. The transcriber's father and two of his uncles had also owned manuscripts. John Jones was educated somewhere in Shrewsbury, possibly for a law career. In 1609 he would appear to have been engaged in the Court of the Marches at Ludlow; [Robert Williams](#) (*Enwogion Cymru: a Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Welshmen*) states that he was then an attorney. Two years later he is found in London, in prison, this being (probably) the first of many periods which he was destined to spend in prison. In 1612, however, he is at Cardiff, transcribing 'the Book of Llandaff.' In 1617 he is back in prison, this time definitely named - the Fleet; he appears to have been incarcerated also at Flint, Chester, and (possibly) Ludlow. In 1619 he arranged for a conveyance of his lands in order to pay the debts of his father and those incurred by himself. In 1625-6 he was fined £200 in the Court of Star Chamber. For the remainder of his life his story is one of lawsuits, financial difficulties, terms of imprisonment (mainly in the Fleet Prison), and appeals to Endymion Porter, Prince Rupert, and others; for details, gathered from sources in the National Library of Wales, the British Museum, the Public Record Office, etc., see the thesis (in N.L.W.) by Samuel Jones (1926) named at the foot of this article. He was out of prison and at Gellilyfdy in 1654, but was back in the Fleet in November of that year.

Many of John Jones's transcripts of Welsh and other manuscripts were made by him whilst he was in prison. His first transcript (now Pen. MS. 361) was made in 1598, whilst he was at Shrewsbury. Thereafter he was very assiduous; over a hundred manuscript volumes in his hand, and most of them in the particular type of orthography which he adopted (for details of his orthography see the thesis mentioned above) have survived, mainly in the Hengwrt-Peniarth collection. It was his association with [Robert Vaughan](#) of Hengwrt, the famous collector of manuscripts, and himself a notable copyist, which accounts for such a large number of John Jones's transcripts being preserved in the Hengwrt-Peniarth group; there are examples also in the Mostyn, Llanstephan, and Additional MSS. in the National Library, at Cardiff, and in the British Museum. Some idea of the different types of texts - verse, prose, vocabularies in various languages, etc. - which he copied (or compiled) can be obtained from a study of [Dr. J. Gwenogvryn Evans](#)'s catalogues compiled for the Hist. MSS. Comm. What is important about John Jones's copying is that he was a calligrapher and not a mere transcriber: his initial capital letters, tail-pieces, etc., although not uniformly good, show that he aimed at something more than a faithful transcript of the original text - he wished that copy to be an artistic copy with the addition of embellishments by himself. All his work is in black upon white. Sometimes the initials are in open-work with the interstices filled in solid black, and, whereas many of his initial capitals are capable of reproduction, others can no longer be reproduced or represented because the ink which he used in some of his manuscripts had too high a sulphur content, the result being that the paper has been consumed by the ink. He probably took many of his models, particularly for his initial capitals and head-and-tail-pieces, from 16th century Italian works on penmanship (some, however, are undoubtedly of his own designing); in this connection it is interesting to compare his ' Collection of Alphabets ' (Pen. MS. 307) with published Italian works on penmanship (particularly *Libro di M. Giovan. Battista*, 1545) which survive in the Hengwrt-Peniarth collection in the National Library. But whether these Italian works belonged to John Jones or to [Robert Vaughan](#) cannot be determined with any certainty, although one of them was certainly used by Jones. There are also traces of the influence of German penmen and, as might be expected, there was a Celtic influence.

Tradition speaks of an arrangement made between John Jones and [Robert Vaughan](#) whereby the survivor was to inherit the collection of the other: this belief is, however, difficult to accept, because [Robert Vaughan](#), who had sons, would hardly have made such an arrangement. It has been suggested that John Jones ' transcripts came to [Vaughan](#) in repayment for loans made by the latter to the transcriber.

The exact date of John Jones's death has not been ascertained, but it is possible that he was alive in 1658. (Drafts of letters from [Robert Vaughan](#) to ' Mrs. Jones of Kelliloveday ' and to her father, Peter Griffith, Caerwys, are in Pen. MS. 270.)

## Author

Sir William Llewelyn Davies, (1887 - 1952)

## Sources

University of Wales thesis (in N.L.W.) by Samuel Jones already cited  
notes compiled by (or for) the late Sir John Ballinger (also in N.L.W.)  
reproductions of some initial capitals in *John Jones Manuscripts at Cardiff City Library* in the Cardiff City Library, with commentary by T. H. Thomas (Arlunydd Penygarn) in (Cardiff) *The Public Library Journal quarterly journal of the Cardiff and Penarth Free Public Libraries and the Cardiff Museum* (1897-1904), December 1902 and March 1903

## Further Reading

Nesta Lloyd, [A history of Welsh scholarship in the first half of the seventeenth century, with special reference to the writings of John Jones, Gellilyfdy](#), D.Phil (Wales), 1970

Nesta Lloyd, [John Jones, Gellilyfdy](#), *Flintshire Historical Society publications*, Vol. 24, 1969, pp. 5-18

P. Smith and M. Bevan-Evans, [A few reflections on Gellilyfdy and the renaissance in north-eastern Wales](#), *Flintshire Historical Society publications*, Vol. 24, 1969, pp. 19-43

Wikipedia Article: [John Jones of Gellilyfdy](#)

## Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q6242070](#)

Wikidata: <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q29492689>

Published date: 1959

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC-RUU/1.0/>

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

