

JONES, JOHN VIRIAMU (1856 - 1901), first principal of the University College, Cardiff

Name: John Viriamu Jones
Date of birth: 1856
Date of death: 1901
Spouse: Katherine Jones (née Wills)
Parent: Thomas Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: first principal of the University College, Cardiff
Area of activity: Education; Science and Mathematics
Author: Edgar William Jones

Born 2 January 1856, at Pentre-poeth, Swansea, one of several distinguished sons of the then famous Congregational preacher [Thomas Jones](#) (1819 - 1882); his middle name - the Erromanga pronunciation of 'William' - reflects his father's admiration of the famous missionary, John Williams.

His university career was a brilliant one. He obtained his London B.Sc. degree (at 19) with the University Scholarship in Geology. In 1877 he was made Fellow of London University. In 1874 he gained the Brackenbury scholarship at Balliol College, Oxford (where he became very friendly with Benjamin Jowett), in mathematics and took not only first class honours in Mathematical Moderations and Finals, but also a first in Physics.

After some coaching in Oxford, Viriamu Jones, at the early age of 25 years, was in May 1881 appointed principal of Firth College, Sheffield. The college was in a somewhat moribund state, but in the two years of his principalship he revived and reorganized it, and made possible the future development of the college into the University of Sheffield.

In 1883 the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire was established at Cardiff, and in June of that year Viriamu Jones was appointed principal. With the help of a band of able scholars and teachers, he made the College a great centre of learning. He was greatly helped by his wife, Katherine Wills, daughter of judge Sir Alfred Wills. He collected some £70,000 for the college, and persuaded the Cardiff Corporation to make the college the generous grant of the site of the present buildings in Cathays Park.

Viriamu Jones early realized two great needs of Wales - a Welsh university and a system of secondary education - and for both ideals he worked indomitably. He had a large share in framing the charter of the university (of which he became the first vice-chancellor, 1895-6), and he was mainly responsible for the greater freedom of choice of subjects in its degree-schemes. He became first vice-chairman of the Central Welsh Board for Intermediate Education.

In the midst of these indefatigable activities, he devoted every moment of his leisure to scientific research, mainly in physical measurements such as the determination of the ohm. For this research work he was elected F.R.S. in 1894. He died 1 June 1901 [at Geneva] and was buried near his father in S. Thomas's cemetery, Swansea. His brother, [Sir David Brynmor Jones](#), is separately noticed.

Author

Edgar William Jones, (1868 - 1953)

Sources

Katherine Viriamu Jones, *Life of John Viriamu Jones* (London 1915)

E. B. Poulton, *Viriamu Jones and other Oxford Memories* (London 1911)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Viriamu Jones](#)

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