

## MORRIS-JONES (formerly JONES), Sir JOHN (MORRIS) (1864 - 1929), scholar, poet, and critic

**Name:** John (Morris) Morris-jones

**Date of birth:** 1864

**Date of death:** 1929

**Spouse:** Mary Morris-Jones (née Hughes)

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** scholar, poet, and critic

**Area of activity:** Eisteddfod; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Scholarship and Languages


**Author:** Thomas Parry

Born 17 October 1864 at Trefor, Llandrygarn, Anglesey. In 1868 his family moved to Llanfair-pwll, where he received his elementary education, proceeding in 1876 to Friars School, Bangor. When the headmaster, [Daniel Lewis Lloyd](#) was appointed to Christ College, Brecon, in 1879, Morris-Jones accompanied him. He matriculated from Jesus College, Oxford, as a scholar, in 1883, and graduated with honours in mathematics in 1887. As a student he had read Welsh books and manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and had attended the lectures of [John Rhys](#); he was also one of the original members of 'Cymdeithas Dafydd ab Gwilym,' which was established on 6 May 1886. Having held a scholarship to read Celtic, he was appointed, in January 1889, lecturer in Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, and the post was elevated to a chair in 1895. He married, in 1897, Mary Hughes of Siglan, Llanfair-pwll, and had four daughters. He was knighted in 1918. In the following year the University of Glasgow conferred upon him the degree of LL.D. honoris causa, and he was given the degree of D.Litt. honoris causa of the National University of Ireland in 1927. He died 16 April 1929.

Poetry by him first appeared in *Cymru Fydd* and in *Cymru (O.M.E.)*; it was in the latter (August 1892) that he published his awdl 'Cymru Fu: Cymru Fydd.' A collection of his poetical works, entitled *Caniadau*, and containing poetry in the strict metres, lyrics, and translations, was published in 1907. The translations of thirty-eight poems by Heine had considerable influence, because these, together with Morris-Jones's own compositions in a similar vein established the lyric as the prime mode of expression of Welsh poets for many years. Much the most distinguished translation, however, and the one of most permanent value, is that of the stanzas of Omar Khayyâm. The purity of diction and the felicity of phrase throughout the volume were a rare achievement at the time and gave Welsh poets an example of what the author expected of them. The language and style of poetry were Morris-Jones's chief interest and these formed the gist of all his adjudications at national eisteddfodau from 1896 till his death. One aspect of this interest was his exhaustive study of traditional Welsh prosody. In an article in the *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, 1903, he showed for the first time how the cynganeddion should be correctly classified according to stress and symmetry. The final results of his study of the traditional metres were embodied in his book *Cerdd Dafod*, 1925, the second part of which will long remain the authoritative work on the subject. His interest in prosody also led him to write on [Tudur Aled](#) (*The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1908-9) and [Edmund Prys](#) (*Gen.*, 1923), and to suspect the authenticity of the claims made for the Gorsedd of the Bards, which he discussed in five articles in *Cymru (O.M.E.)*, 1896, drawing the conclusion - the only possible conclusion from the

facts then known to him - that the Gorsedd and its rites were the fabrication of the bards of Glamorgan in the 17th century. He has recounted later search into the mystery, and the ultimate tracing of the Gorsedd's origin to the imagination of [Iolo Morganwg](#), in the preface which he wrote to [G. J. Williams](#)'s *Iolo Morganwg a Chywyddau'r Ychwanegiad*, 1926.

Morris-Jones embarked early on his campaign to standardize Welsh orthography. This subject had been discussed by Cymdeithas Dafydd ab Gwilym, under [Rhys](#)'s chairmanship, in 1888. In 1893 the Society for the Utilization of the Welsh Language published *Welsh Orthography*, a report written by Morris-Jones as secretary of a special committee. Later, as chairman of the language and literature committee of the University of Wales Board of Celtic Studies, he was responsible for drafting *Orgraff yr Iaith Gymraeg* ('*The Orthography of the Welsh Language*'), 1928.

His first production in the field of scholarship was an edition, in collaboration with [Rhys](#), of the Jesus College manuscripts known as 'Llyvyr Agkyr Llanddewivrefi' (1346), which appeared in 1894. In 1896 he published a diplomatic edition of [Ellis Wynne](#)'s *Gweledigaethu y Bardd Cwsc*, with an introduction on the author's life and the literary background of the book. His major work of scholarship, *A Welsh Grammar, Historical and Comparative* , published in 1913, was the result of many years' close study of the language. Some of the author's etymological theories have been assailed, and later philological investigation has necessarily proved false many of the etymologies proposed by him. But the section on descriptive grammar, which forms the bulk of the work, still stands in all its essentials, and testifies to Morris-Jones's exceptional powers of discovering and enunciating the laws of grammar. An unfinished draft on syntax was published posthumously in 1931 under the title *Welsh Syntax*. His scholarship is further exemplified in *Taliesin* (= *Cymm.* xxviii), which was begun as a review of [J. Gwenogvryn Evans](#)'s edition of *The Book of Taliesin*, but developed into a valuable dissertation, with translations and notes, on some of the historical poems to Urien and his son Owain. Morris-Jones contributed extensively to various periodicals, and took part in somewhat acrimonious arguments about Welsh orthography and related topics.' He also edited *Y Beirniad*, a quarterly published under the auspices of the Welsh Societies of the University Colleges, from 1911 till 1919.

## Author

Sir Thomas Parry, (1904 - 1985)

## Sources

['The Cymmrodiorion Medal: Sir John Morris-Jones, M.A., LL.D., Professor of Welsh at the University College of North Wales, Bangor'](#), *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1919-20

J. Lloyd Jones, ['The Late Sir John Morris-Jones, M.A., LL.D., D.Litt., An appreciation'](#) *Y Cymmrodor*, 1929

Ifor Williams, 'Jones, Sir John Morris- (1864–1929)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 1922-30

## Further Reading

Allan James, *John Morris-Jones* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru 2011)

Huw Walters, *John Morris-Jones, 1864-1929: Llyfryddiaeth Anodiadol* (Aberystwyth 1987)

Wikipedia Article: [John Morris-Jones](#)

## Images

John Wickens, [John Morris Jones](#)

Christopher Williams, [Sir John Morris Jones \(1864-1929\)](#)

## Works

Goronwy Owen, J. Morris-Jones, *Gwaith Goronwy Owen* (Liverpool 1896)

Goronwy Owen, John Morris-Jones (ed.), [Llythyrau Goronwy Owen](#) (Liverpool 1895)

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [Letters from John Morris-Jones to Sir John Rhys](#)

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