

JONES, EVAN DAVID (1903-1987), librarian and archivist

Name: Evan David Jones
Date of birth: 1903
Date of death: 1987
Spouse: Eleanor Ann Jones (née Lewis)
Child: Glyn Lewis Jones
Parent: Jane Jones
Parent: Evan Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: librarian and archivist
Area of activity: History and Culture
Author: Daniel Huws

E. D. Jones was born in Llangeitho, Ceredigion, on 6 December 1903, the eldest of the seven children of Evan Jones, farmer of Y Wenallt, and his wife Jane. He was educated at Tregaron County School and at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he graduated with honours in Welsh in 1926 and in History in 1927. Awarded the Sir John Williams research scholarship, 1928-29, he began to edit the work of [Lewis Glyn Cothi](#) but he was soon recruited by the National Library of Wales, having first, forewarned by a well-wisher, successfully bargained for his salary. He brought to the library palaeographical and diplomatic skills which owed something to the summer courses given at UCW by Hubert Hall. The post to which E. D. (that is how he was commonly known) was appointed was designated 'Assistant Archivist'. He came to refer with pride to the fact that he was the first person ever appointed by the library to a post whose title recognised the profession of the archivist. This pride went with a long advocacy of the need for professionalism in archives and libraries. He was a strong supporter of the Society of Archivists, and later of the Library Association, he had a major role in the establishment of the College of Librarianship Wales, rejoiced in its success and was chairman of its board 1968-74. He taught on the UCW, Aberystwyth, archive administration diploma course during the fitful existence of that course in the 1950s.

The National Library of Wales to which E. D. Jones came in 1929 was a young institution. His first few years were served under [Sir John Ballinger](#), the first librarian; he was appointed deputy Keeper of Manuscripts and Records in 1936 and Keeper in 1938. The Department of Manuscripts and Records already housed the chief collections of Welsh manuscripts; records figured more modestly. The main development of the 1930s and of the period of E. D. Jones's keepership was on the side of the archives. These years saw the arrival of the records of many of the great Welsh landed estates, the diocesan and capitular records of the Church in Wales and the pre-1858 Welsh probate records, to be followed in 1962 by the main group of records of the Welsh Courts of Great Sessions, transferred from the PRO: here lies the main depth of the Library's pre-twentieth-century archival holdings. E. D. was a man of firm views given to plain speaking, but by all accounts he ran a notably friendly and relaxed department. His small staff coped nobly with listing the massive influx of archives. If there was a fault, it might be seen in the belatedness of his recognition of the value of indexes; material to his attitude to indexes - such, at least, was the popular belief - was the fact that he himself scarcely needed them, so formidable were his powers of memory.

E. D. Jones succeeded [Thomas Parry](#) as National Librarian in 1958, a post which he held until his retirement in 1969. It was in this period that the library and its staff came under the aegis of the Welsh Office. He saw the completion of the last phase of the library's first bookstack and the drawing-up of the plans for the second, completed in two stages during 1969-1972 and 1978-1982.

Although archives constituted his chief professional concern, E. D. pursued a deep interest in the literary manuscripts among which he had begun his research. No one in his generation knew the Welsh manuscripts and their scribes as he did. He published two volumes of the work of [Lewis Glyn Cothi](#), but only one volume, *Gwaith Lewis Glyn Cothi* (1953) of a planned complete edition. His contributions to journals, ranging widely, from editions of medieval documents to nonconformist history, from heraldry to bibliography, run into hundreds; many of them are very substantial contributions to scholarship. They are listed in the bibliography by Huw Walters (1992). Yet his death brought with it a regret that he had not published more; such was the erudition and the authority. One rather different publication which combined his historical interest with that of a keen practising photographer was the volumes of old photographs, *Victorian and Edwardian Wales* (1972). Besides the *National Library of Wales Journal* from 1958-1969 he edited from 1953 until his death the *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*.

Those who first met E. D. when he was Librarian could get the impression of a severe man. On his promotion he had assumed a rather more austere persona, one which he discarded upon his retirement. He then became to the young what

he had always been to his friends, an easy and entertaining companion, wide in his interests, scornful of ostentation. There was a passionate concern for Welsh nationalism (he was an early member of the Welsh Nationalist Party) and for the Independent (Congregationalist) religious principles which he had embraced as a young man. Following his marriage to Eleanor Ann Lewis, daughter of a master mariner of Aberystwyth, in 1933, leaving the Methodism in which he was brought up he became a member of Seion Baker Street Congregational Chapel where he served as deacon and secretary from 1938 until his death.

Much of E. D. Jones's energy in later years was given without stint to a variety of societies and organisations, great and small. The variety is represented by a few of the offices he held: president of the Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1962-3, president of the Welsh Harp Society, 1965-80, president of the Welsh Bibliographical Society, 1968-85, president of the Union of Welsh Independents, 1974-5. But in his retirement he dedicated himself above all to his editorship of the supplements of *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, the first published in 1970, the second published after his death in 1997. To this task, apart from an unsurpassed knowledge of the printed and archival sources, unflinching memory and scrupulous accuracy, he brought one additional qualification: an insatiable curiosity about people. It is perhaps sad that the pages of the supplements to *DWB* will scarcely betray the fact that E. D. Jones carried in his head a store of biographical information as rich and curious as that of [John Aubrey](#), and one from which he would draw with a similar relish. For many, the abiding memory will be the quizzical twinkle in the eye with which, to the very end, he would greet his friends, eager to hear what was new, eager to impart.

E. D. Jones was elected F.S.A. in 1959, made C.B.E. in 1965, LL.D. of the University of Wales in 1972 and F.L.A. in 1973. He died at his home, Penllerneuadd in North Road, Aberystwyth, on 7 March 1987. The day before his sudden death he had walked into town to shop. Walking was one of his pleasures - he still had a spring in his walk - and, for one of his gregarious and inquisitive nature, to go shopping in the town in which he had spent most of his life was no dull chore. That same day he carried home from the binder's a heavy parcel of books - too heavy, his wife thought; to the end E. D. remained a great reader and a lover of books. He left a widow and a son, Glyn Lewis Jones, like his father, a librarian.

Author

Daniel Huws

Sources

Huw Walters, *Evan David Jones 1903-1987, Llyfryddiaeth* (Aberystwyth 1992)

Daniel Huws, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 8 (1986-87), 306-8

Glanmor Williams, *Welsh History Review*, 14 (1988), 121-24

The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard, 13 March 1987

Y Cymro, 18 March 1987

Who was who?

Further Reading

Huw Walters, 'Llyfryddiaeth Dr E. D. Jones (1903-87)', *Journal of the Merioneth History & Record Society*, 12 (1997), pp.390-415

Wikipedia Article: [E. D. Jones](#)

Additional Links

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