

## JONES, JOHN HENRY (1909 - 1985), educationist and translator

**Name:** John Henry Jones  
**Date of birth:** 1909  
**Date of death:** 1985  
**Spouse:** Marian Henry Jones (née Phillips)  
**Child:** Eirlys Barker (née Jones)  
**Child:** Philip Henry Jones  
**Parent:** Jane Jones (née Griffith)  
**Parent:** John Henry Jones  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** educationist and translator  
**Area of activity:** Education; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Ceri Davies

John Henry Jones was born on 28 July 1909 in Llangefni, Anglesey, the only child of a father with whom he shared the same names, John Henry Jones (1863-1923), drapery manager, and his wife Jane Jones (née Griffith, 1868-1955), a skilled seamstress and milliner. After his father's death, he and his mother experienced considerable hardship, but thanks to her devotion and to the support of the Methodist chapel in Llangefni (he later became a Methodist local preacher), and through his own studious application and the education he received at Penrallt National School and Llangefni County School, John Henry Jones developed into an exceptionally promising pupil, especially in Greek and Latin, and won the highest entrance scholarship to the University College of North Wales, Bangor, in 1927.

The same academic brilliance continued in Bangor: winner of the Powis Prize (twice); 1st Class Honours in Latin (1930) and in Greek (1931); teaching certificate in the 1st Class and the degree of M.A., for a thesis on 'The Influence of Greece on Roman Satira' (1933). He was awarded a University of Wales Fellowship and entered University College, London, where he conducted research into the - largely fragmentary - work of the prolific polymath Varro (116-27 B.C.) and completed a Ph.D. (London) thesis, 'A Critical Study of the Life and Work of Marcus Terentius Varro' (1936). After a short period as a master at Friars School, Bangor, in 1937 he was appointed lecturer in Classics at University College, Swansea. There he met Marian Phillips (1916-2013), originally from Brynamman, a lecturer in the college's History Department and an authority on nineteenth-century European history. They were married in Bethesda (B) Chapel, Swansea, 6 September 1941. Their children are Philip Henry Jones (b. 1945), formerly lecturer in librarianship at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and Dr Eirlys Barker (b. 1948), who studied and taught history in Virginia, USA.

In 1937, in spite of the dark clouds casting their shadows over European civilisation and the economic constraints in Britain itself, there was every prospect that a successful academic career awaited John Henry Jones. He eagerly engaged with his work in Swansea (the success of his ab initio classes in Greek was long remembered) and he began publishing the results of his scholarly research. He was interested in the work of [John Owen](#) (c.1564-c.1628), the Latin epigrammatist who belonged to the family of [Plas Du](#), Eifionydd, and published a number of pioneering articles on him, in Welsh and English, between 1938 and 1941. In 1941, however, his career in Swansea was interrupted by the demands of the Second World War and he was summoned, like many other academics, to join (under the aegis of the Foreign Office) the select band, in Bedford and then in Bletchley Park, that attempted to penetrate the enemy's communications. In many respects the intellectual challenges of his duties - mastering German and many of the languages of Eastern Europe and breaking the enemy's secret codes - appealed to the meticulous classicist, and he was kept in the work until 1944. During those years of exile he wrote a number of poems in Welsh, many of them tender expressions of his longing for his wife and for Wales (some were republished in *Cardi o Fôn*, 1991). He also turned to translating from European poetry into Welsh, especially some of the works of Rilke, the German poet from Prague: *Cyfieithiadau o Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)* was published by Gomer Press in 1945.

The early 1940s were also years of deep reflection on the direction which his career should take after the war. Perhaps the memory of the benefits which he received in the schools of Llangefni - in Penrallt, in spite of that school's Anglicanism (in his mature years he had little time for sectarian education), and in the County School - kindled in John Henry Jones a wish to do more for the future of education in Wales than simply return to his lectureship in Swansea. In 1943 he applied for the post of Director of Education for Cardiganshire, and was appointed. A year later he was released from his duties under the Foreign Office, and in October 1944 began his new work, with his office and home in Aberystwyth. He remained in post until his retirement, aged 63, in 1972.

The first major task facing John Henry Jones in Cardiganshire was implementing the far-reaching requirements of the 1944 Education Act, leading to the disappearance of 'elementary' education for all children aged 11 and above and their removal

from a primary to a secondary school, either 'grammar' or 'modern'. The reorganisation was completed in a timely and effective manner, with the development of 'bilateral' schools in the thinly populated parts of the county. The Director's care was as great, perhaps greater, for the primary schools, and for preserving the Welsh-speaking nature of most of them, a situation endangered by the 1960s by the combined effects of rural depopulation and the substantial increase in the number of non-Welsh-speakers who settled in the county. (In presenting a bilingual policy for education in the county, he - prophetically - expressed his concern that 'a stronghold like Cardiganshire could easily become a frontline of the language battle'). He knew all the county's teachers and headteachers, regularly visited their schools to encourage and assist them (at times he would himself fill a gap in the classroom, when a teacher was absent at short notice), and his integrity and nimbleness of mind were a byword among the staff both of his office and of the schools. His constant stimulus was the priceless value of good education, his goal the provision of such education - in a challenging but relevant way - throughout Cardiganshire. He once confessed, with some jest, that he was 'an élitist of the worst grade', in the sense that he wished to see every single child receiving the best provision for his or her needs. That meant encouraging and supporting anyone who could aim, as he had done, for academic distinction in a university setting. It also meant, just as importantly, that all who wished to stay and work in their home area should be thoroughly and effectively prepared for realising their goals: testimony to his vision was the Farmers' Education Centre established in Felinfach, Vale of Aeron, and also the Further Education College, the College of Librarianship Wales and the Welsh Agricultural College which he (with others) was instrumental in bringing together on the Llanbadarn Fawr campus.

Within a few years of taking up his post in Cardiganshire, John Henry Jones was struck down by grievous illness, which left its mark on him for the rest of his life, and was obliged to spend many months, in 1951-52, in sanatoria in Sully and Talgarth. In Talgarth, for all his weakness, he turned back to classical literature and translated Agamemnon, the first tragedy in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, into Welsh: the play was broadcast on the radio by the BBC's Welsh Home Service in March 1953, and published in 1991 (ed. R. Telfryn Pritchard: CAA, the Centre for Educational Studies, Aberystwyth). There followed, until the end of his life, a rich crop of poems in Welsh translation, from Greek (classical and modern) and Latin, from English, German and Hungarian. Among the finest are his versions of German hymns, especially 'Diolchwn oll i Dduw' (*Caneuon Ffydd*, no. 135), Martin Rinkart's thanksgiving hymn, 'Nun danket alle Gott'. A year before his death his translations from Rainer Maria Rilke were republished, with the addition of the ten *Duino Elegies* (University of Wales Press, 1984).

As well as serving on a host of committees under the Cardiganshire county authority, John Henry Jones was a member of many other bodies, such as the Council of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the committee (chaired by [Professor Charles Gittins](#)) that prepared the important report on primary education in Wales (1967). He was a deacon in Bethel (B) Chapel, Aberystwyth and leader of an adult class in its Sunday School. For ten years (1962-72) he was chairman of the Classical Section of the University of Wales Guild of Graduates and made an invaluable contribution as consultant editor of *Geiriadur Lladin-Cymraeg* (University of Wales Press, 1979), a Latin-Welsh dictionary published in the section's name. For all the precariousness of his health, revisiting the interests of his youth sustained him in a real way, and in retirement he wrote a substantial number of classically related articles and reviews for Welsh periodicals.

John Henry Jones was one of the ablest of Welsh-speaking Wales's intellectuals in the twentieth century. Scholars and persons of learning were among some of his closest friends, and his conversation in their company was witty and informed. The obligation to devote much of his time to county councillors and their deliberations may occasionally have led him to wonder whether or not he made the right choice in exchanging the lecture-room for the life of an administrator. Without any doubt, his leadership gave education in Cardiganshire a distinctive direction for decades after the Second World War.

John Henry Jones died in Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth, on 17 October 1985, aged 76. A funeral service was held in Bethel Chapel on 21 October, followed by cremation at Morryston Crematorium. Six years later, in 1991, Cymdeithas Lyfrau Ceredigion, a book society in whose establishment he had played a key role, published a volume of his poems and translations, together with a memoir by [Professor Dafydd Jenkins](#). The volume was aptly entitled '*Cardi o Fôn*' ('A Cardi from Anglesey'), the playful name he had chosen on being admitted to membership of the Gorsedd of Bards in 1982.

## Author

Ceri Davies

## Sources

John Henry Jones papers, National Library of Wales (Archives and Manuscripts A1992/19)

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*Barn*, No. 275, December 1985

*Seren Cymru*, No. 3452, 27 December 1985

Gareth Alban Davies (ed.), *Cardi o Fôn* (Aberystwyth 1991)

John Phillips, *Agor Cloriau: Atgofion Addysgwr* (Talybont 2018)

Information provided by Philip Henry Jones and Eirlys Barker


Personal acquaintance

## Additional Links

NLW Archives: [John Henry Jones Papers](#)

Wikidata: [Q56179593](#)

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