

## JOHN, THOMAS GEORGE (1880 - 1946), engineer and businessman

**Name:** Thomas George John  
**Date of birth:** 1880  
**Date of death:** 1946  
**Spouse:** Louie Jane John (née Rees)  
**Child:** Dulcie Maria John  
**Parent:** William Henry John  
**Parent:** Maria (née Rees)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** engineer and businessman  
**Area of activity:** Engineering, Construction, Naval Architecture and Surveying; Business and Industry  
**Author:** Lyn Owen

Thomas John was born on 18 November 1880 in Pembroke Dock, Pembrokeshire, the second of four children of William H. John, a shipwright, and his wife Maria (née Rees). He grew up in a Welsh-speaking household with two brothers and a sister. After a local education he became an apprentice at the naval dockyard where his father worked. He impressed his employers and won two scholarships to study at the Royal Naval College and the Royal College of Science. His engineering skill enabled him to progress quickly to gain experience at the naval dockyard at Devonport and at the Harland and Woolf shipyard in Belfast. By 1904 he was a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers, the Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Institute of Motor Engineers and an Associate of the Royal College of Science.

By 1907 John had moved to the Vickers shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness with responsibility for research and development, and in 1908 he became the shipyard manager. After some work on an experimental airship in 1909-11, he was primarily involved in the early development of submarines, and led production of type M1 with warship-sized guns and type M2 which could carry reconnaissance aircraft. This work led to early contacts with Winston Churchill. During his time at Barrow he married Louie Jane Rees, also from Pembroke Dock, and in 1907 their only child, a daughter, was born.

In January 1916 John moved from Vickers to take up a post as engineer at the Siddeley-Deasey Motor Car Company in the Midlands developing aero engines. He had a major role in the development of an aircraft engine later known as the Puma. In 1919 he used savings and assistance from his Pembrokeshire connections to set up his own business in Coventry producing motor and aero engines called T. G. John Ltd, which was renamed The Alvis Car and Engineering Company in 1921.

At Alvis John led the development of a range of small but very powerful and fast racing cars which won major UK and European races. The success was based on building up a strong team of other engineers alongside himself and initiating many engine refinements. Among the innovations he led were patented advances in supercharged engines, front wheel drive and independent suspension. In 1932 he introduced the Alvis Speed 20 racing car alongside a growing production of quality cars for the wider motoring market. In 1934 he opened a new factory at Coventry. As war approached John was encouraged by Churchill to make new developments including an engine called Leonides for aircraft, later adapted for use in helicopters. He also began a new line of production in armoured vehicles which later made Alvis a leader in that field.

The strains of war production, including a damaging bombing raid on the Coventry factory, took their toll on his health and from 1944 John was ordered to rest. He retired and moved to Putney Hill in London where died on 9 August 1946. He was cremated on 13 August.

### Author

Lyn Owen

### Sources

Census records

Roy Probert, '[T G John - A Life Examined](#)',

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