

## JONES, JAMES IFANO (1865 - 1955); librarian and bibliographer

**Name:** James Ifano Jones  
**Date of birth:** 1865  
**Date of death:** 1955  
**Spouse:** Jessie Mary Jones (née Charles)  
**Spouse:** Nellie Jones (née George)  
**Parent:** Jane Jones  
**Parent:** Thomas Jones  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** librarian and bibliographer  
**Area of activity:** History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** Walter Thomas Morgan

Born Oxford Str. Aberdare, Glamorganshire, 15 May 1865, according to [WWP](#), but there is no record of his birth under this date in the Registry of Births and Deaths in Pontypridd; there is, however, a James Jones, son of Jane Jones of Harriet Street, born 14 May, and a clerical error is possible. His father, Thomas Jones, was a miner and his mother came from Cwmtwrch. She was a sister of the [Rev. J. Dyfnallt Owen](#)'s grandmother. He was educated at the Park Board School, Trecynon, popularly known as ' Ysgol y Comin ', which he left at the age of 11 to attend for one year a private school kept by Owen Rees in Seymour Street, Aberdare. He started work at the age of 12 as an apprentice in the printing works of the newspaper *Tarian y Gweithiwr*. In 1884 he joined as a compositor and proof reader the printing house of [Jenkin Howell](#). Meanwhile, he seized every opportunity for self-improvement. The great formative influence of his early years was the Sunday school at Gadlys Baptist chapel and the cultural activities associated with it. He became the secretary of the Aberdare and District Baptist Sunday School Union, he was keenly interested in music and acted as the chapel organist; he was an enthusiast for the drama and gained local fame as an actor and reciter. He was also politically active and became the secretary of the Aberdare Labour and Radical Association when it was formed in 1894. But it was his experience in the printing trade which gave him his detailed knowledge of the Welsh language which fitted him for the distinguished career on which he embarked when in November 1896 he went to work in the Cardiff Free Library, as it was then called, as a temporary assistant Welsh cataloguer. Over the following two years he cooperated with [John Ballinger](#), the Chief Librarian, in the production of a *Catalogue of Printed Literature in the Welsh Department* (1898) which has proved an indispensable tool for all who work in the field of Welsh studies and bibliography. His part in this work established his reputation as a bibliographer and he was appointed Assistant in Charge of the Reference Department in 1901. His knowledge of Wales and all things Welsh was remarkable and his helpfulness to scholars widely acknowledged. He took under his special care the Library's Welsh collections and became known officially as the ' Cardiff Welsh Librarian ', though he was never officially accorded that title. Over the years his literary output was enormous. His bibliographical work included the bibliographical section of the *Bible in Wales*, which he published jointly with [John Ballinger](#) in 1906; *Bibliography of Wales*, a series of book lists which appeared periodically from 1899 to 1912; and his *A History of Printing and Printers in Wales and Monmouthshire to 1923*, published in 1925, for which the University of Wales awarded him an honorary M.A. degree. His historical works included his lengthy study of ' Dan Isaac Davies and the Bilingual Movement ', which appeared in J. Vyrnwy Morgan, ed., *Welsh Political and Educational Leaders in the Victorian era*, 1908; *The Early History of Nonconformity in Cardiff*, 1912; and ' Sir Mathew Cradock and some of his contemporaries ' in *Archæologia Cambrensis*, 1919. He also wrote a biography *W.T. Samuel, ei fywyd a'i lafur*, in 1920. He entered the field of literary criticism when he wrote in the January and July 1902 numbers of *Y Geninen* an article entitled ' Llenyddiaeth hanner ola'r Ddeunawfed Ganrif '. From 1905 to 1929 he was the editor of the poetry and criticism column, ' Y Golofn Gymreig ', in the *South Wales Weekly News*. But he was also a creative writer. In 1905 his prize play in the Bangor national eisteddfod of 1902 was published, entitled *Rhys ap Tewdwr Mawr* (a tragedy in three acts). He also published a number of poems, tunes, articles, reviews, and special bibliographies in Welsh and English periodicals. He was a keen eisteddfodwr, a member of the Gorsedd of Bards and an enthusiastic supporter of its supposed antiquity. From 1901 he frequently acted as an adjudicator in the National Eisteddfod. He was himself a prizewinner for poetry and plays in 1902, 1904 and 1929. He was also in much demand as a popular lecturer to societies throughout Wales.

Ifano Jones retired from his post in the Cardiff Library at the end of 1925. It should be mentioned, however, that he had long laboured under a sense of grievance because he believed that his status in the Library had not been sufficiently recognised and that full credit had not been given for his achievements. According to his 'nephew', [Dyfnallt](#), the biggest disappointment of his life was in not being invited to become the first Librarian of the National Library, when [John Ballinger](#) was appointed. The industry and versatility of this non-collegiate man, the outstanding Welsh bibliographer of his age, was truly remarkable. He was twice married: (1) to Nellie George, daughter of Thomas George, ' fineworker ', 20 January 1901 at Neath registry office. She died in 1911; (2) to Jessie Mary, second daughter of Thomas and Mary Charles, Havod House, Blaenavon, who died 9 June 1953. He died in his home in Penarth, 7 March 1955.

## Author

Walter Thomas Morgan, (1912 - 1990)

## Sources

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