

JONES, JOHN JAMES (1892 - 1957), teacher, librarian, scholar and linguist

Name: John James Jones

Date of birth: 1892

Date of death: 1957

Spouse: Elizabeth Mary Jones (née Davies)

Parent: Elizabeth Jones (née Williams)

Parent: Thomas Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: teacher, librarian, scholar and linguist

Area of activity: Education; History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages

Author: John Keith Evans

Born on 12 March 1892 in New Quay, Cardiganshire, the son of a saddler, Thomas Jones and Elizabeth, daughter of John Williams, Pendre, Llwyndafydd. He was educated at the Council School, New Quay and Aberaeron intermediate school (1906-10); he was a student teacher before entering the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (1911-14). He graduated B.A. (Wales) with honours in Latin, and was awarded an M.A. degree for a thesis on The native Italian element in early Roman religion. He taught for nine years in English grammar schools - Stockton-on-Tees (1914-15); Whitchurch, Salop (1915-18); Ryleys School, Chester (1918-20); and Sir Thomas Rich's School, Gloucester (1920-23). Latin was removed from the curriculum at the school in Gloucester and he lost his post in consequence. Owing to a slight defect of his hearing, he left the teaching profession and returned to do further research in the Classics department at Aberystwyth. In 1926, he was appointed Assistant Keeper in the Department of Printed Books, National Library of Wales, promoted Deputy Keeper in 1928 and he was Head of the Department from 1950 until his death. He was recognized as a skilful bibliographer, a skill which he surely derived from his scholarship and discipline in the Classics. He married Elizabeth Mary, daughter of Isaac Davies, of New Quay, but there were no children.

He had a special aptitude for learning languages, and his thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek provided him with a firm foundation for learning other languages, such as French, Spanish and Italian. He had a good knowledge of German, Russian and Polish, and could read most of the other Slavic, Scandinavian, Hungarian, and, of course, Celtic languages. He was interested in the Eastern languages, such as Persian and Arabic, and he took up the study of Sanscrit and Pali to acquire first-hand knowledge of the religious literature of India. It was his mastery of Sanscrit that enabled him to translate the *Mah vastu*, the scriptures of the oldest of the Buddhist sects, into English, and which was published in three volumes under the auspices of the Pali Text Society in 1949-56. According to Miss I.B. Horner, the Society's secretary, this first translation into any language is an outstanding contribution to Buddhist studies; he succeeded in overcoming and explaining the difficulties of the text, and translated it into a beautiful, flowing English style.

He contributed articles to Welsh periodicals on Celtic studies, religion and bibliography. He published Welsh translations of Breton and Russian short stories in *Yr Efrdydd*, 1935 and *Yr Haul* 1945, and Persian sayings in *Yr Efrdydd*, 1934. He published articles in *Yr Haul* (1942-4) on unascribed Latin hymns in the *Emyniadur* (the Welsh Anglican hymnal, 1897), contributed to the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, and wrote the introduction to the section on Welsh proverbs in *Racial proverbs ...* edited by S.G. Champion (Routledge, 1938).

His relaxations were chess and an occasional novel. He enjoyed watching football and cricket and was an enthusiastic bowls player. His hardness of hearing made conversation difficult for him and he developed interests such as these, which did not depend on conversational ability. He was a true gentleman, friendly, unassuming and respected by all who knew him. His wife died on 29 July, 1955, at the age of 64, and the third volume of the *Mah vastu* is dedicated to her as a tribute to her patience and inspiration in the course of his work on the translation. He died suddenly on the 20th February, 1957, a few months before he was due to retire, and he was buried in the cemetery of Maenygroes Congregational chapel, near New Quay.

Author

John Keith Evans

Sources

Annual Report of the National Library of Wales

letters in the MSS. dept. of the NLW

*The National Library of Wales Journal*X, 1957, 119-20

The Times, 26 February 1957,

personal knowledge and information from members of staff of N.L.W.

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q20821164](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q20821164)

Published date: 2001

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

