

JONES, THOMAS (1910-1972), Welsh scholar

Name: Thomas Jones
Date of birth: 1910
Date of death: 1972
Spouse: Mary Jones (née Sivell)
Parent: Elizabeth Jones
Parent: William Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: Welsh scholar
Area of activity: Scholarship and Languages
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

Thomas Jones was born in Allt-wen, Pontardawe, Glamorganshire, the eldest of William and Elizabeth Jones's seven children: the father, who had emigrated from rural Carmarthenshire, worked in the local tinsplate works. Educated in Ystalyfera grammar school, Thomas Jones entered the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1928 as the holder of a State Scholarship and graduated with first-class honours in Latin in 1931 and with first-class honours in Welsh in 1932. He was appointed Assistant Lecturer in the department of Welsh at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth in 1933 and he spent some time in 1935 and 1936 in Ireland and in 1937-38 at L'École des Hautes Études in Paris with Edmond Faral, M.-L. Sjøestedt-Jonval and Joseph Vendreyes. He served with the RAMC, mainly in Madagascar, during World War 2 but serious illness led to his being invalided out in 1941 and he returned to Aberystwyth where he was successively Lecturer (1941), Senior Lecturer (1946), and Professor and Head of the department of Welsh from 1952 to 1970 when, following several bouts of illness, he retired from his chair and was appointed to a personal chair. Though he was an energetic and extremely productive researcher, Thomas Jones was a notable and inspiring teacher as well as being an astute and active administrator, serving as dean of faculty, vice-principal, secretary and later chairman of the language and literature section of the University Board of Celtic Studies; he was also a member of the University of Wales Press Board, the Council and Court of the University and of the National Library of Wales. He was on the editorial board of the University of Wales Dictionary of the Welsh language and he edited the language and literature section of the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* from 1964 to 1972.

Thomas Jones's primary areas of research lay in Middle Welsh prose - the native tales ('mabinogion') and translations from Latin and Old French. His initial piece of research, a study of three early translations of pseudo-historical texts, which gained him the degree of M.A. with distinction in 1935, laid the foundations for his editions and translations of the various versions of the *Chronicle of the Princes* (*Brut y Tywysogion*) in four volumes in 1941, 1952, 1955 (which led to the award of D.Litt) and 1971 (*Brenhinedd y Saeson*, 'The Kings of the Saxons'). His meticulous editing of the texts and his analysis of the chronology and sources of the lost Latin originals have provided historians with a basic document of medieval Welsh history and this will remain his most outstanding contribution to Welsh scholarship. The Latin literature of medieval Wales was given a prominent place in the honours Welsh school at Aberystwyth and Thomas Jones's translations into Welsh of [Gerald of Wales](#)'s two books on Wales together with his discussion of aspects of the texts did much to reintroduce [Gerald](#) to a contemporary Welsh audience. His other major contribution was his studies of the so-called 'mabinogion' tales in a number of articles and reviews but most especially in the English translation which he and his colleague Gwyn Jones wrote and which was first published in 1948. Underlying this translation, and partly hidden, is a great deal of Thomas Jones's editing of the Welsh texts. His study of the tales led to further publications on medieval folklore and Arthurian literature. Thomas Jones had many other scholarly interests, among them Old Welsh verse, the 'Stanzas of the Graves', [O.M. Edwards](#), '[Brutus](#)', the 19th century satirist, and he also translated some stories from Irish. He was taken seriously ill in 1965 and heart problems obliged him to take early retirement in 1970. Nevertheless, he continued his work in spite of increasing debility and in 1971-72 he was able to complete his edition of the first part of 'Ystoryaeu Seint Greal', the Welsh translation of *La quête del Saint Graal*, which was published in 1992.

Thomas Jones married Mary (Mair) Sivell in 1947 and they had two daughters. He died 17 August 1972 at Llandoverly Hospital and was buried in Aberystwyth cemetery 22 August.

There is bibliography of his publications in *Studia Celtica*, X/XI (1975/76), 5-14 (with a portrait).

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

Obituary notices in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* 8 September 1972

Archaeologia Cambrensis, CXXI (1972), 111-2

Studia Celtica, XIX (1975/76), 1-4

Lochlann, 6 (1974), 186-8

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