

## JONES, THOMAS PARRY ('TOM') (1935 - 2013), inventor, entrepreneur and philanthropist

**Name:** Thomas Parry Jones  
**Date of birth:** 1935  
**Date of death:** 2013  
**Spouse:** Jean Jones (née Halliwell)  
**Spouse:** Rajkumari Jones (née Williamson)  
**Child:** Diane Jones  
**Child:** Gareth Jones  
**Child:** Sara Jones  
**Parent:** Owen Thomas Jones  
**Parent:** Grace Jones (née Parry)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** inventor, entrepreneur and philanthropist  
**Area of activity:** Science and Mathematics; Business and Industry; Philanthropy  
**Author:** Gruffydd Aled Williams

Tom Parry Jones was born on 27 March 1935 at Dwyran, Anglesey, and was brought up at Carreglefn in the same county, the eldest of three children of Owen Thomas Jones (1916-1999, a farmer, and Grace Parry (1917-2018), his wife. He attended Carreglefn Primary School and the Sir Thomas Jones School, Amlwch. After leaving school he worked at an ICI factory in Northwich, Cheshire, subsequently entering the University College of North Wales, Bangor in 1954, where he graduated in Chemistry in 1958. After graduation he embarked on doctoral research at the University of Alberta, Canada, gaining a PhD in Chromium Chemistry in 1961. After a period as Senior Research Fellow at the Royal Military College of Science and Technology at Shrivenham, Oxfordshire, in 1963 he was appointed Lecturer in Inorganic Chemistry at the Welsh College of Advanced Technology (afterwards the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST)) in Cardiff.

The 1967 Road Safety Act introduced a legally enforceable maximum alcohol level for UK drivers leading to roadside breathalyser tests. With his colleague, William ('Bill') Ducie, an engineer, Jones developed a chemical breathalyser based on the colour change of potassium dichromate crystals. In 1967 they set up a company - Lion Laboratories Ltd. - in a terraced house in Splott, Cardiff. Their device, the 'Alcolyser' - reputedly trialled by drinkers in a Cardiff pub - was marketed overseas as Britain sourced its breathalysers from Germany. In 1972 Lion started research which led in 1974 to the development of a hand-held breathalyser called the 'Alcolmeter' based on fuel cell technology, the first breathalyser with an electrochemical sensor; it provided reliable data and gained international acceptance. Jones left his post at UWIST in 1976 to concentrate on his business, maintaining links with the university by funding research and offering training places for students. He was awarded the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement in 1980. In 1981 Lion Laboratories moved to purpose-built premises in Barry. In 1983 the use of breath-alcohol analysis was accepted as evidence in court and the Lion 'Intoximeter 3000', an infra-red device, was the first instrument approved by the Home Office for this purpose. Jones was awarded the OBE for his work in 1986. In 1990 he sold his company to an American company, MPD, Inc., and moved back to his roots in Anglesey, while retaining a directorship and a consultancy role until 1995. His breathalysers were decisive in massively reducing drink-drive accidents worldwide. In Wales this is reflected in North Wales Police's 'Tom Parry Jones Annual Award for Innovation' awarded within the force for the best innovative idea for improving policing.

Having returned to Anglesey, Jones - a flying enthusiast - pioneered charter flights between north and south Wales, setting up Welsh Dragon Aviation Ltd. in 1991 to fly passengers from Mona Airport in Anglesey to Cardiff in a Cessna 340 aircraft. In 1993 he set up PPM Ltd in Caernarfon to manufacture gas monitors, thus diversifying the fuel cell technology used for the breathalyser. The company was sold to its management team in 1999.

Tom Parry Jones combined his scientific and business career with much humanitarian and philanthropic work. He was a founding member of the Rumney branch of the United Nations Association and served on UNA's Welsh Executive Committee. He served as Chairman (1975-81), Treasurer (1989-91), and President (1991-95) of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and was a Trustee of the UK Freedom From Hunger Campaign. In 1992, combining his love of flying with the work of UNICEF, he participated with a friend, John Powell, in the first Round the World air race for small aircraft. With the red dragon emblazoned on their plane they raised £20,000 for humanitarian projects in Mali and Bangladesh. In 1995, aged 60, with the Director of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs, Bill Davies, he undertook a charity walk from Cardiff to Abergele, venue of the National Eisteddfod.

Jones was eager to benefit young people, taking a keen interest in the work of the International Youth Service. He sponsored work placements with his company in Cardiff for sixth formers from Amlwch. He served for almost 20 years as a Trustee of the Engineering Education Scheme for Wales (EESW) which encouraged sixth formers into scientific and engineering careers; he is commemorated in EESW's annual 'Dr Tom Parry Jones Student of the Year Award'. Elected a Fellow of Bangor University in 2005, he served on its Council and committees. He endowed a fund at the university to encourage young people to develop careers and entrepreneurship in science and technology; the fund has supported annual Bangor Science Festivals, a Tom Parry Jones Memorial Lecture and other prestigious events.

Cosmopolitan in outlook, Tom Parry Jones was also very proud of his Welsh heritage. He had an abiding desire to develop Wales's economy through enterprise and education. From 1993 to 2000 he was the Chairman of the Snowdonia Business Innovation Centre. For his services to Wales he was inducted into the Gorsedd at the National Eisteddfod in 1997.

In 1958 he married Jean Halliwell, by whom he had three children, Diane, Gareth and Sara; the marriage was dissolved in 1986. In 1997 he married Rajkumari Williamson.

Tom Parry Jones died on 11 January 2013 at Llandudno General Hospital after a long struggle with Parkinson's disease. A funeral service was held at Capel Mawr, Menai Bridge, Anglesey on 18 January followed by cremation at Bangor Crematorium on the following day. There is a Tom Parry Jones Memorial Garden in the Llangefni Town Cemetery where his remains were buried and where he is commemorated as the inventor of the breathalyser. A plaque honouring him was unveiled by his wife, Raj, at the Llangefni police station in November 2013. A Blue Plaque marks the site of his first factory in Cardiff, where he developed the electronic breathalyser.

### Author

Gruffydd Aled Williams

### Sources

Personal and professional information from Mrs Raj Jones (widow) and personal information from Mrs Iona Williams (sister)

Obituaries in

*The Times*, 15 January 2013

*The Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 2013

Cardiff University website: [Dr Tom Parry Jones, 1935-2013](#) (accessed December 2020)

Welsh Centre for International Affairs website: [Obituary: Dr Tom Parry Jones OBE \(1935-2013\)](#) (accessed December 2020)

Wikipedia: [Tom Parry Jones](#) (accessed December 2020)

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