

JONES, OWEN THOMAS (1878 - 1967), Woodwardian Professor of Geology in the University of Cambridge

Name: Owen Thomas Jones
Date of birth: 1878
Date of death: 1967
Spouse: Ethel May Jones (née Reynolds)
Parent: Margaret Thomas
Parent: David Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: Woodwardian Professor of Geology in the University of Cambridge
Area of activity: Education; Nature and Agriculture; Science and Mathematics
Author: Emrys George Bowen

Born 16 April 1878, at Plasnewydd Farm, Beulah, Cardiganshire, near Newcastle Emlyn, the only son of David Jones and Margaret Thomas. He attended the British School in Tre-wen near Newcastle Emlyn and later entered Pencader grammar school. Up to this time O.T. Jones spoke Welsh only, and throughout his life continued to speak and write in Welsh with the greatest fluency. Already at his grammar school he was an outstanding pupil obtaining a first class in the College of Preceptors Certificate in 1894 and passing the Matriculation examination of the University of Wales with the same class in 1895. The following year he entered the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth with the Keeling Entrance Scholarship in Natural Science. His degree courses at Aberystwyth included mathematics, chemistry, botany and zoology and he obtained a first-class honours in Physics in 1900. He next entered Trinity College, Cambridge with an Open Exhibition and began taking a specialized interest in geology and mineralogy. He obtained a first class in the Natural Science Tripos Part I in 1902 and was awarded the Wiltshire prize in geology and mineralogy. The next year he gained a first class in Part II of the Tripos and became Harkness Prizeman in geology in 1904. Immediately after graduation, and realizing the importance of field work in geological studies, he worked with H.M. Geological Survey surveying the western extension of the south Wales coalfield in western Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. In addition to his official duties he was engaged in considerable research studies on his own. These again were directed to Wales and in 1909 there appeared an important paper on the geological structure of the Plynlimon area in Mid-Wales. This work still remains the standard work on the Lower Palaeozoic rocks of Mid-Wales, and in many ways the standard work on the classification of these rocks world-over. O.T. Jones was now a geologist of the first rank and was awarded the D.Sc. degree of the University of Wales in the same year. In 1909 also he was appointed to a lectureship in geology in his old college which he held for one session before becoming Professor of Geology there in 1910. In this year also he obtained the much coveted Sedgwick Essay Prize in Geology. He was a superb teacher and director of research and many generations of geologists are greatly indebted to him. The period following the cessation of hostilities in 1918 saw great changes in the British universities. Professional salaries remained at a low level and there were as yet no research grants so that men of O.T. Jones' standing had to find all the money necessary for their own private research from their own pockets. This was particularly serious in geology where extensive field work was involved. Dazzling offers of higher remuneration were made to him from universities near to Wales like Liverpool and Manchester, but his love for, and interest in the rural life of Wales was a deterrent. Finally he succumbed to the blandishments of the University of Manchester where he was appointed Professor of Geology in 1919 and remained until 1930 when he became Woodwardian Professor of Geology in the University of Cambridge.

During the fifty years between 1910 and 1960 O.T. Jones published numerous professional papers and books amounting often to more than one a year and covering virtually the whole range of geological studies from those relating to the geology of Wales to an examination of the great continental shelves of the British Isles and their geophysical problems. Studies of the geology of parts of North America were also involved while his work migrated from strict stratigraphy to include palaeontology and igneous intrusions. As always the geology of Wales and especially that of the Lower Palaeozoic rocks of Wales found its place in his later writings. It is interesting that while at Cambridge his interests had been shifting very much towards mineralogy and this facet of geology reached fruition in his work with the publication by H.M. Stationery Office in 1922 of the standard work on the lead and zinc mines in northern Cardiganshire and western Montgomeryshire. In this work, greatly used by modern researchers, every lode and every mine both large and small are studied in detail.

O.T. Jones was a Fellow and later President of both the Geological and Mineralogical Societies. In his capacity as foreign secretary of the Geological Society he was also in close contact with geological societies overseas, especially those of Belgium and the United States. He was now clearly the internationally known doyen of British geologists. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and obtained its famous Royal Medal in 1956. In addition he had been awarded the Lyell Medal in 1926 and the Wollaston Medal of the Geological Society in 1945, while the University of Wales awarded him the honorary degree of LL.D. in 1958. In 1910 he married Ethel May, daughter of William Henry Reynolds of Haverfordwest, and they had two sons and a daughter. One son died in an aircraft accident in 1945. O.T. Jones died 5 May 1967.

Author

Professor Emrys George Bowen, (1900 - 1983)

Sources

Ellis, *The University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1872-1972* (1972)

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, 13 (1967)

his papers are in N.L.W.

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: Owen Thomas Jones

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [O. T. Jones Manuscripts](#)

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