

JONES, OWEN GLYNNE (1867 - 1899), mountaineer and schoolteacher

Name: Owen Glynne Jones
Date of birth: 1867
Date of death: 1899
Parent: Eliza Jones (née Griffiths)
Parent: David Jones
Gender: Male
Occupation: mountaineer and schoolteacher
Area of activity: Education; Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Ioan Bowen Rees

Born 2 November 1867 in 110, Clarendon St., Paddington, fourth of the six sons of David Jones, stonemason, and his wife Eliza (née Griffiths), both of Barmouth, Meirionnydd. His mother died in 1882 (his father in 1890) and Owen and his only sister Nellie (Margaret Ellen) made their home with a cousin and her husband, Alderman John Evans, 11 Brogyntyn, Barmouth, where Welsh was the language of the hearth. Owen probably went to school in Barmouth as well as London before winning scholarships to Finsbury Technical College and to the Imperial Institute (Imperial College) where he took his B.Sc. with first-class honours in 1890. After a period lecturing at the Institute, he was appointed science master of City of London School in 1892, the first to hold the post. He had applied for the chair of physics at U.C.W., Aberystwyth in 1891 and according to Sir Owen Saunders, F.R.S., his sister's son and professor of mechanical engineering at Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, 1946-67, Jones's research work was of great promise and significance.

In May 1888, knowing no more about organised climbing than he had absorbed from books on the Alps, Jones ascended the east ridge of the Cyfrwy on Cadair Idris alone. In Snowdonia, rock-climbing had hardly begun in earnest but in the English Lakes W.P. Haskett Smith and others had been climbing for about 3 years. Jones visited Wasdale in 1890 and came to the notice of some of the pioneers. As a result of his exceptional strength, his 'almost supernatural' climbing ability and his scientific outlook he soon excelled not only in leading new climbs but in developing the technique of rock-climbing. In 1894 he contributed a section on Cadair Idris and the Aran mountain to volume two of Haskett Smith's, *Climbing in the British Isles*; he then began to prepare his own more substantial and influential work, with its combination of instruction and adventure. In April 1896, he called unannounced on the photographer brothers George and Ashley Abraham of Keswick, and persuaded them to come to the rocks to photograph his climbs. Jones's classic, *Rock-climbing in the English Lake District* (1897), was thus the fruit of a partnership with them, as was the Abrahams' book, *Rock-climbing in North Wales* (1906). The brothers had known that Jones was preparing another volume; some of his notes came into their possession after his death and they proceeded to 'put into effect our late friend's wish'. By this time George Abraham had married Jones's London - Welsh cousin, Winifred Davies, daughter of David Davies and a niece of 'Mynorydd' (William Davies); as well as being a good climber trained by Jones, she had been to the universities of Wales (Bangor), London and Cambridge. It was she who ghosted George Abraham's numerous books on the basis of her husband's rough notes. But it was Jones's book that began the practice of grading climbs and popularising rock-climbing as such.

From 1891 onwards Jones visited the Alps annually. He made some important first winter ascents but never seems to have found a regular partner of the highest class, amateur or guide. He fell from the Ferpècle Ridge of the Dent Blanche on 28 August 1899 when the leading guide collapsed upon him, and four of his party of five were killed. His grave is in Evolène and there are memorials in City of London School, in the English Church in Zermatt, and at the door of 11 Brogyntyn, Barmouth.

Jones served on the first committee of the Climbers' Club, founded in 1898, and was elected to the Alpine Club. He never seems to have been completely accepted by the select inner circle of English climbers, however, who considered him 'brusque and off-hand'. But Jones climbed often with his sister, his cousins, his fellow teachers, his fellow lodger in London, **William Jones Williams** and with the Abrahams (of Nonconformist background like himself) and their testimony is quite the contrary, while in Merioneth too he is remembered as a kind and cheerful man. As a teacher he was dedicated and inspiring. As a climber, he believed that all should climb and that all would be the better for it. By now a less patrician climbing world recognises him as the leading pioneer of the art of rock-climbing in the British Isles, from the point of view both of technique and attitude. He had intended climbing the highest mountains of the world; shortly before his death, he had invited G.W. Young to join him 'for Everest'. But his love of Cadair Idris was proverbial and he chided the English for mis-pronouncing Welsh names.

Kern Knotts Crack on Great Gable (1897) and Terrace Wall Variant on Tryfan (1899) are amongst his many notable first ascents; the most popular climb created by him is, however, the ordinary route on the Milestone Buttress of Tryfan, which reaches the A5 road near Llyn Ogwen.

Author

Dr Ioan Bowen Rees, (1929 - 1999)

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Owen Glynne Jones](#)

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