

JONES, WALTER IDRIS (1900-1971), Director General of Research Development for the National Coal Board (NCB)

Name: Walter Idris Jones
Date of birth: 1900
Date of death: 1971
Gender: Male
Occupation: Director General of Research Development for the National Coal Board (NCB)
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Science and Mathematics
Author: Mary Auronwy James

Idris Jones was born 18 January 1900, son of Frederick (rollerman at a local tin-works) and Elizabeth Jones, Old Castle Road, Llanelli, Carmarthenshire. Having gained a scholarship to the University College of Wales (UCW), Aberystwyth in 1918, he graduated BSc (Chemistry, 1st class honours) in 1921, and proceeded to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (1922-26), with Rhondda and Frank Smart Studentships, obtaining a PhD (Cantab.) in 1925 for research in organic chemistry.

In 1926 he was employed by Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), Billingham, where he researched on methanol and ammonia synthesis, gasification and hydrogenation of coal, etc. As Group Manager in the Oil Division he demonstrated his gift to develop new processes, such as the production of plastics and converting coal to synthetic oil. In 1933 he returned to Wales to be Research Manager for Powell Duffryn Ltd. One of his main contributions was to develop the fuel 'Phurnacite' and other by-products from small-coal, thus easing the problem of providing fuel-oil for ships during the war. In 1946 he was appointed Director General of Research Development (Coal Processing and Combustion) for the National Coal Board. One project resulted in the design of a tool that removed coal from a thin and winding seam, leaving the rock behind. Another developed a means of using tankers instead of open lorries to distribute coal to very heavy consumers. A third aimed at producing smokeless fuel. During summer 1955 he went to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a member of the NCB's specialised delegation to investigate mining conditions, research and technical education. He visited the three biggest Russian coalfields (in Siberia, near Moscow, and the Donbas), an underground gasification site and an all hydraulic mine.

He became president and chairman of many committees and institutions relating to the University of Wales, water resources, chemical engineering and fuel research. He attended international conferences in America, throughout Europe and Russia. He was invited to deliver public lectures on scientific subjects by various societies, universities and the BBC (radio and television) in English and Welsh. Many honours were conferred on him, including being a Fellow of the Chemical Soc., Royal Institute of Chemists and Royal Society of Arts. In 1954 he was appointed CBE; and received an Honorary DSc of the University of Wales in 1957, having published papers in scientific and technical journals over the years. He retired in 1963. Memorial Lectures in his honour were established by the Energy Institute and University College of Wales.

From 1963 to 1971 he was Vice-President of UCW, Aberystwyth. While at college he was captain of the rugby team at Aberystwyth (1919-22), a member of Cambridge University Rugby XV (1923-25). He played flanker for London-Welsh and Llanelli rugby clubs, and also for the Barbarians. He played for Wales against England, France, Ireland and Scotland (1924-25); he was captain on one occasion. He was a prominent active member of Welsh societies in London. Lord Elwyn-jones was his brother. Idris Jones was unmarried and died 5 July 1971 at 9b The Cathedral Green, Llandaff, Cardiff.

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

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The Biographical Index of W. W. Price, Aberdŵr

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Idris Jones](#)

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