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JOHN ELLIS JONES

**Llanrwst, 10 October 1929–†Bangor, 28 January 2023*

by D. Graham J. Shipley[1], Ceri Davies[2], Angharad Ellis Jones[3] and Robin Osborne[4]

[1]University of Leicester
[2]Prifysgol Abertawe – Swansea University
[3]Ynys Môn – Anglesey
[4]University of Cambridge

This memoir of John Ellis Jones, best known for his contributions to the Classical archaeology of rural Attica, traces his early studies in North Wales, his first encounters with Greece in the early 1950s, his family life, and the teaching posts he held at the University of Leicester (1957–8) and at the University College of North Wales (now Bangor University) – the latter for 37 years until his formal retirement in 1995, after which he continued to support Classics in North Wales for many more years. His important contributions to the archaeology of Classical Greece, especially rural Attica, are outlined, together with an example of the distinctive artwork with which he embellished his copious publications. Also highlighted are his many contributions to the archaeology and history of North Wales. The memoir is accompanied by a complete bibliography of his publications, many in Welsh.

Ysgrif goffa yw hon i John Ellis Jones, sy'n fwyaf adnabyddus am ei gyfraniadau i archeoleg glasurol Attica wledig. Ynddi olrheinir ei astudiaethau cynnar yng Ngogledd Cymru, ei brofiadau cyntaf yng Ngwlad Groeg yn y 1950au cynnar, ei fywyd teuluol, a'r swyddi dysgu y bu ynddynt ym Mhrifysgol Nghaerlŷr (1957–8) ac yng Ngholeg Prifysgol Gogledd Cymru (Prifysgol Bangor, bellach) – yr olaf am 37 mlynedd hyd ei ymddeoliad yn 1995, ond gan barhau i gefnogi'r Clasuron yng Ngogledd Cymru am flynyddoedd lawer ar ôl hynny. Amlinellir ei gyfraniadau pwysig i archeoleg glasurol Gwlad Groeg, ynghyd ag enghraifft nodweddiadol o'r celfyddydwaith y byddai'n addurno ei gyhoeddiadau helaeth ag ef. Pwysleisir hefyd ei gyfraniadau i archeoleg a hanes Gogledd Cymru. Yn atodiad i'r ysgrif goffa ceir llyfryddiaeth gyflawn o'i gyhoeddiadau, llawer ohonynt yn Gymraeg.

θνήσκειν μὴ λέγε τοὺς ἀγαθούς
Callimachus, *Anth. Pal.* 7.451

With the departure of John Ellis Jones, the study in North Wales, at university level, of the cultures of the Greeks and Romans and their history, archaeology and literature has come to an end – at least for the present. John was a classical scholar and archaeologist of international renown, and an inspirational communicator of his subject in his home country, 'a figure of such immense charm', as a senior ancient historian wrote to one of us. All who met him will remember his powerful, modulated voice; his conversation punctuated frequently by an enthusiastic 'Oh yes?'; and the sense he gave of enjoying everything he did, which was quite contagious (Fig. 1).

Born and brought up in Llanrwst, Denbighshire, below the eastern outliers of Eryri/Snowdonia, John – often addressed by his middle name, Ellis – was the second of three sons born to Margaret Ann Jones, a farmer's daughter, and Evan Jones, deputy headmaster and teacher of botany at Llanrwst Grammar School, who died shortly after retiring when John was just 16. After benefiting from the tuition of the learned classicist H. Parry Jones, the school's headmaster until 1946, John enrolled the following year at University College of North Wales, Bangor (now Bangor University), some 15 miles from his birthplace as the crow flies. The College's Principal, Sir Emrys Evans, was the leader of a fine team of classical teachers. Graduating with Firsts in Latin (1950) and

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Fig. 1. John in the 1950s (by Renée). Courtesy Angharad Ellis Jones.

Greek (1951), John then gained a teaching qualification in the College's Department of Education (1952).

The following five years, up to the time when John secured his first university post, were highly formative for him. He was attracted to field archaeology and, under the direction of V.E. Nash-Williams, took part in excavations of Roman military sites in Wales, aided by his exceptional energy and his love of venturing to out-of-the-way places by bicycle or on foot. He continued to work on such sites into the 1960s and returned to this field in his last publications. He even began doctoral research at Cardiff, but found the subject of Roman fortresses and camps in Britain too wide to complete to his satisfaction.

A life-changing opportunity had arisen in 1952, when he won a scholarship to visit Greece. The country was just opening up to outsiders after the tragic Civil War of 1946–9, so that young visitors from the wider world were still a rarity. This visit established his enduring links with the British School at Athens, and it was during this trip that John met his lifelong friend and collaborator Hugh Sackett (1928–2020) (see A. Ellis Jones, C. Ellis Jones and R.C. Ellis Jones 2022; R.A. Sackett 2022). In Hugh's company, he familiarised himself with the main archaeological sites of the Greek mainland and islands, until he shifted his particular focus to involvement in projects in Attica. An extended visit in 1954–5, funded by a Kimberley Travelling Fellowship, enabled him to visit schools throughout Greece and study contemporary methods of education. He also travelled widely with Hugh to visit archaeological sites with a view to possible joint projects.

The first visit in 1952 had been life-changing in a more important way, too. Travelling out to Greece on the Orient Express, John met two young female teachers who boarded the train in Croatia after being thwarted in their attempts to hitchhike across Yugoslavia by the lack of cars. One was called Helen Dixon. The other had been born in Luxembourg but brought up across the border in Germany, at Iserlohn in Nordrhein-Westfalen. This was Ilse Renée (or Renate) Radau-Eckstein (1927–2016), with whom John maintained a relationship through the mid-1950s while she was teaching at independent schools: first Hatherop Castle School, Gloucestershire, and later Downham School (closed *c.* 1967), Essex.

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At the end of a year's National Service in the Royal Army Educational Corps (1956–7), during which John was largely based at Kettering in Northamptonshire (and for a time at Catterick in the North Riding of Yorkshire), he gained a temporary position at the newly chartered University of Leicester in 1957. Classics had been a strong subject within the University since its foundation as the University College of Leicester, Leicestershire, & Rutland in 1921 (renamed University College Leicester in 1929). The department was led by its first Professor, Philip Leon (1895–1974), who had taught there since 1923 and been promoted in 1955. At the same time as John, there arrived Duncan Cloud (1930–2020), who had himself done National Service as an educator in the Army and later became the last head of Classics at the University (Shipley and Millett 2020).

During the academic year 1957–8, John lived in a student residence in Oadby, then as now named Gilbert Murray Hall, where he was a warden. A banner drawn by him on paper for a party belongs to this happy period (Fig. 2), and shows John's acute observation of the people he was meeting in Greece, in some cases using figures adapted from Osbert Lancaster (cf. Lancaster 1947). Though he stayed at Leicester only one year, John kept up close ties with the University until well into retirement, and returned several times to give talks to the Classical Association branch and the students, as well as for social visits.

At the end of this year, John moved to a permanent post at Bangor, where he spent the rest of his career, rising to be Senior Lecturer (as many academics did, promotion to the rank of professor being much rarer than today). Perhaps now feeling financially secure, John married Renée in July 1958 at the registry office in Great Dunmow, Essex (a state-approved civil service being a German legal requirement for recognising a marriage at the time), and in August in church at her home town of Iserlohn. Their union was blessed with the births of Angharad, Rhodri and Catrin and was characterised by an incomparable verve and happiness. Renée participated in his archaeological expeditions, and they were married for 58 years. The family home in Sling, Tregarth, became a magical fusion of Welsh, German and Greek cultures; their welcome to a host of visitors was proverbial. The writer Angharad Price, who was taught German by Renée, beautifully captures the unique atmosphere of the Joneses' household at Fronheulog in her volume of essays entitled *Ymbapuroli* ('empaperment'; Price 2020).

John would serve 37 years at Bangor up to his retirement. His career there was not ended by the controversial decision, taken in 1988 in the wake of a government review, to close the Department of Classics (along with those at Aberdeen, Aberystwyth, Birkbeck, Hull, Lancaster, Leicester, Sheffield and Southampton) – purportedly justified by 'rationalisation' and the creation of 'centres of excellence' elsewhere. (Several of the unfortunate units have since, of course, thrived as centres of classical excellence under other names than 'Classics'.) Instead, John, now aged 58, chose to remain in post at Bangor while several of his colleagues transferred to Durham. By doing so, he enabled existing Classics students to complete their first degrees, master's and doctorates, and then taught classical studies, ancient history, Greek archaeology and classical drama in departments such as English and History.

Almost single-handedly, therefore, he ensured the survival of Classics at Bangor, as a knowledgeable and enthusiastic educator. It was painful for John to see Greek (to quote the poet D. Gwenallt Jones) 'being mortally wounded in the bastions of learning … the classics wasting away'. But becoming bitter was not in John's character, and he remained an indefatigable organiser of extra- and intramural events, all promoting various aspects of his subject. Until the 1980s, he ran day-schools in Latin for school pupils and their teachers at the University. For a decade or more, he produced annual performances of Greek and Roman dramas with Joan Haldane, and continued to arrange regular meetings of the Bangor branch of the Classical Association (CA), which he ran for half a century with the most active programme of all CA branches. Each speaker who had the pleasure of travelling to Bangor to talk to the students remembers with fondness and pride the posters, hand-drawn by John, that publicised their visits. These works of art, and much other material, now reside within the archives of Bangor University. In addition, John continued for many years to travel to other universities to give CA lectures.

He had also been curator of the local museum at Bangor for 15 years or so, playing a central role in organising an exhibition to celebrate the University's centenary in 1984, and designing the mace, among other things (**G** 5). He was involved in many local history societies and wrote articles on a wide range of historical and other subjects, the last published in 2023.

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Fig. 2. Composite image of the banner drawn by John for a party during his year in Leicester. Original photographs by Elen Simpson (Archives & Special Collections, Bangor University); composite by D. Graham J. Shipley.

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In early and even middle life, John was quite an athlete, playing soccer and cricket for his school and continuing to play rugby for the University's 2nd XV until he was 40. He also made amazingly long bike journeys, once riding well over 200 miles from Llanrwst to London to visit a friend. He even took up fencing shortly before retiring in his late sixties, and was soon representing Wales on the veterans' (over-45s') team. He continued competing until he was over 80, and went on doing bouts and umpiring until his late eighties. Those who attended his 80th birthday celebration in Bangor will recall the University's Fencing Club forming a guard of honour for him and Renée.

John published relatively prolifically by the standards of UK Classics at the time. His research interests coincided closely with those of his senior colleague at Bangor, R.E. Wycherley, the Professor of Greek, who worked with the American archaeologists at the Athenian Agora and had already published his influential *How the Greeks Built Cities* (Wycherley 1949).[1] John's own publications include two short books, *The Greeks* (1971: **A** 1) and *Ancient Greece* (1983: **A** 5), both of which succeed in making Greek antiquity accessible to a wider readership. *The Greeks* includes a lengthy and inspiring chapter on the excavations at *Vári* (of which more below), which brings to life – as no data report can – the experience of digging the same site year on year, as well as the gradual discovery of its character. *Ancient Greece* offers deeply considered characterisations (with some 60 memorable illustrations by David Salariya and Shirley Willis, and photographs by John and others) on the key sites of Mycenae, Athens, Olympia and Delos.

Despite having started as a linguistic scholar, John expanded his analytical skills to range from inscriptions and pottery to ancient metallurgy and the Greek house. Throughout the Bangor years, he conducted archaeological research in Attica – usually in summer vacations as well as during sabbaticals in 1966, 1973 and 1980 – when he would drive the family across Europe in a VW camper van. From the late 1950s onwards, John became widely known for his co-directorship of important excavations of rural dwellings – notably the Dema House (1958–60, published with admirable promptness in 1962: **B** 2) and the Vari House (1966, published 1973: **A** 2; **B** 3) – and later of silver-processing installations in the remote countryside south-east of Athens, especially at Agrileza near the ancient deme of Thorikos. It is believed he was the first excavator to involve a metallurgist in a Greek excavation from the beginning of the project.

The importance of this fieldwork, and of the publication of these excavations in those decades, cannot be overstated. Despite important work by French scholars on the demes of Attica and the Athenian silver mines in the late nineteenth century, anglophone scholars had traditionally treated Athens as if it was just a town, considering the countryside only in as far as it was the site for battles. Robert Hopper, at Sheffield, had, in the 1950s and 1960s, drawn attention to the importance of the Laurium silver mines and of relations between town and country for the history of archaic Athens in two influential articles in *BSA* (Hopper 1953; 1968), and had devoted his inaugural lecture as Professor at Sheffield to the Attic demes; but despite the tradition, particularly at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, of taking students on Saturday expeditions into Attica, archaeological work in the Attic countryside had been practically limited to sanctuary and cemetery sites. The work of John and his colleagues on the Dema and Vari houses, and then at Agrileza, changed all that. It led to a radical rethinking of our understanding of the Attic countryside and the Athenian economy, and played an important part in inspiring the archaeological revolution that was brought in with the intensive surface survey methods pioneered by archaeologists from the British School on Melos and by others from the American School in the southern Argolid.

Perhaps John's most enduring and oft-consulted publication is the co-authored article – often known simply as 'Jones, Sackett and Graham' – that occupies 98 pages of the *BSA* for 1973 (**B** 3) and was shortly afterwards reprinted in hardbound form (**A** 2). It details the epoch-making discoveries at Vari, on the southern slopes of Hymettos, that resulted from the excavation of a Classical courtyard farmhouse with multiple rooms and an outer enclosure. Pottery finds, and pioneering chromatographic analyses, proved that beekeeping had been practised on a substantial scale using ceramic beehives.

John's particular contribution to scholarly understanding of Athenian society and economy was twofold. The first was to bring to the attention of historians and archaeologists alike the importance

[1] See John's obituary of Wycherley at **J** 1. John also took charge of Wycherley's archive, now in Oxford.

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of the archaeological evidence for housing, both in the countryside and in the town. Crucial here was the paper on 'Town and country houses of Attica in Classical times' given at a conference in Ghent in 1973 and published as an extensive 73-page article, well illustrated with line drawings, in 1975 (**D** 2). The paper put the archaeological evidence for housing on the map and established the agenda of questions to ask. John's second contribution was to serious understanding of the process of silver mining. The ancient literary and epigraphic texts, on which Hopper's and earlier studies had been substantially based, offered no enlightenment as to how the silver was extracted from the ore. John's work at Agrileza and the successive publications from the late 1970s onwards (**B** 5, **C** 6–22, 24–7, **D** 4–9, **F** 6, 14–15, 17–19) were – with the work of the Greek mining engineer turned Professor of Chemical Engineering, Constantine Conophagos, who published in French – pioneering in the understanding of how 'washeries' worked.

He was also occupied with projects in Crete and the Peloponnese. His final publication in Greek archaeology, a volume on surface survey data gathered in 1969 from an area within Eleia (north-west Peloponnese) that was about to be flooded as a result of the construction of a dam, appeared as recently as 2016 (**A** 10, cf. **F** 23).

John was a skilled artist and embellished his publications with reconstruction drawings of houses and other structures, often set in a realistic countryside (Fig. 3). His meticulous reports, not to mention his capacity to inspire and mentor young archaeologists, attest to the importance of his contributions.

John also contributed to what we would now call Outreach not only through his many accessible publications but also through the broadcast media. On one occasion, he was interviewed for radio in Welsh by the cultured, and now highly distinguished, broadcaster Hywel Gwynfryn, MBE, about the Laurion and the Attic silver-processing industry.

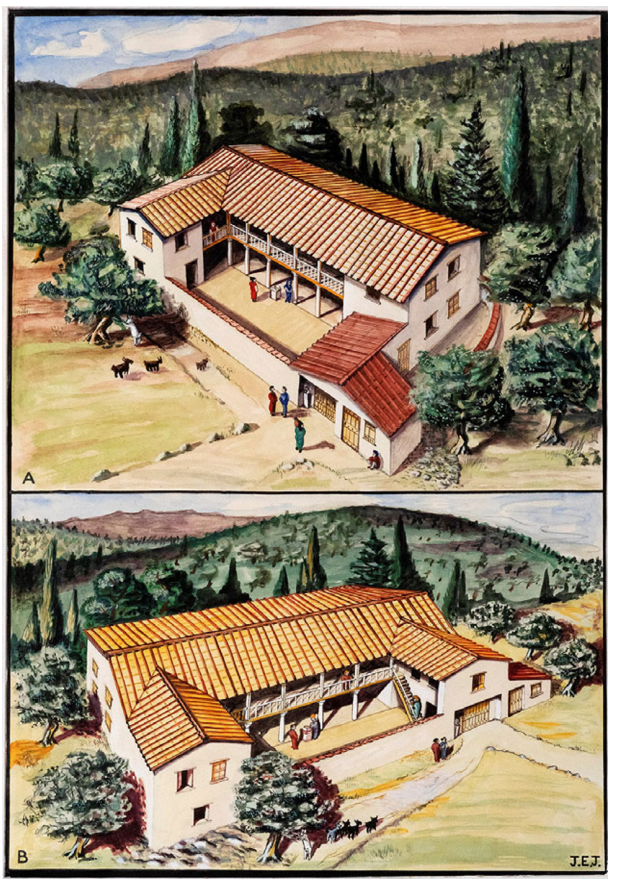


Fig. 3. The Vari House, by John. Courtesy Angharad Ellis Jones. (A) Aerial view from east. (B) Aerial view from south.

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Outside the University, John was active in local societies and wrote many papers on local history and archaeology, the majority of them in his native language; the last appeared in 2023 (**G** 31). His last public event was in 2019, when he chaired a meeting of the (Welsh-medium) Classical Section of the University of Wales Guild of Graduates, at the National Eisteddfod held – so appropriately! – in John's birthplace, Llanrwst. There was a large attendance, and John was in fine form. He had been a founder member of the Section in 1951 and its Treasurer from then until 1992, when he became its Chair. Much enjoyment was had during meetings at the National Eisteddfod, at Gregynog (the University of Wales's cultural, educational and artistic centre), and at one-day schools, held in Welsh, over all those years (**G** 18–19). In the name of the Section, he published a great deal in Welsh: principally a detailed introduction and extensive notes to accompany the Welsh translation of Tacitus' *Life of Agricola* by A.O. Morris, another former pupil of Llanrwst Grammar School (**D** 1).

John's achievements earned him Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London and election as Vice-President of the Classical Association, a rare honour for one who had not previously held high office in the organisation. It was a richly deserved recognition of his remarkable efforts in maintaining the vitality of the Bangor & North Wales Branch for half a century.

John died after a fall at the age of 93. He is survived by his daughters and son, as well as a grandson, Gruff Morgan. His funeral, in Welsh and English, took place in Capel Seion at his birthplace of Llanrwst on 20 February 2023.

We shall not see his like again. But, to cite a Welsh version (by the poet T. Gwynn Jones) of the words of Callimachus, 'na ddyweded undyn mai bedd yw diwedd y da': 'let no one say the grave is the end of the good' (Gwynn Jones and Rose 1927, 73).

WORKS BY JOHN ELLIS JONES

Abbreviations

Anglesey Transactions = *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club – Trafodion Cymdeithas Hynafiaethwyr a Naturiaethwyr Môn*

Caernarvonshire Transactions = *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Sir Gaernarfon – Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society*

Denbighshire Transactions = *Trafodion Cymdeithas Hanes Sir Ddinbych – Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*

Merioneth Journal = *Cylchgrawn Cymdeithas Hanes a Chofnodion Sir Feirionnydd – Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*

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Corrigendum to an earlier bibliography
The note in *BSA* 63 (1968) attributed to JEJ at Sekunda (ed.) 2010, 10, is by J.R. Ellis.

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* This memoir, *Cofion*, is accompanied by notes in English, Italian and German. Its publication was sponsored by the University of Bangor through the Bangor Fund, the Bangor University Alumni Fund, and the Classical Section, University of Wales Alumni Association. Rhodri writes: 'The essence of this book is that of a generation paying tribute to the previous one – giving thanks for their childhood and the legacy received. The subject of grief is also approached; Rhodri's method is to record his emotions using his camera.' The book was launched at an exhibition entitled *Cofio: Photography by Rhodri Jones* (7 September–15 November 2024) and held in Storiel, Bangor's Museum and Art Gallery, previously run by John. The exhibition contained many of his publications and images of his artwork (see www.storiel.cymru/whats-on/cofio-photography-by-rhodri-jones/).

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graham.shipley@leicester.ac.uk

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John Ellis Jones: *Llanrwst, 10 Οκτωβρίου 1929–†Bangor, 28 Ιανουαρίου 2023

Το παρόν άρθρο γραμμένο για να τιμήσει τη μνήμη του John Ellis Jones, γνωστού κατά κύριο λόγο χάρη στη συνεισφορά του στην Κλασική αρχαιολογία της αττικής υπαίθρου, ιχνηλατεί τις πρώτες σπουδές του στη Βόρεια Ουαλία, την πρώτη γνωριμία του με την Ελλάδα στις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1950, την οικογενειακή του ζωή και τις θέσεις διδασκαλίας που κατείχε στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Leicester (1957–8) και στο Πανεπιστημιακό Κολλέγιο της Βόρειας Ουαλίας (πλέον Bangor University), όπου εργάστηκε επί τριάντα επτά χρόνια, μέχρι την συνταξιοδότησή του το 1995. Ο John Ellis Jones συνέχισε να στηρίζει τις κλασσικές σπουδές στην Βόρεια Ουαλία για πάρα πολύ καιρό μετά την επίσημη αποχώρησή του από το πανεπιστήμιο. Το άρθρο καταδεικνύει τη σημαντική συμβολή του στην αρχαιολογία της Κλασικής Ελλάδας, ενώ ταυτόχρονα παρουσιάζει την ξεχωριστή καλλιτεχνική επιμέλεια με την οποία συνόδευε το πλήθος των δημοσιεύσεών του. Έμφαση δίνεται και στον μεγάλο αριθμό των κειμένων του για την αρχαιολογία και ιστορία της Βόρειας Ουαλίας. Το άρθρο συνοδεύεται από βιβλιογραφία, η οποία καλύπτει το πλήρες έργο του John Ellis Jones, με πολλές από τις δημοσιεύσεις του στα Ουαλικά.

Μετάφραση: Φλωρεντία Φραγκοπούλου

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