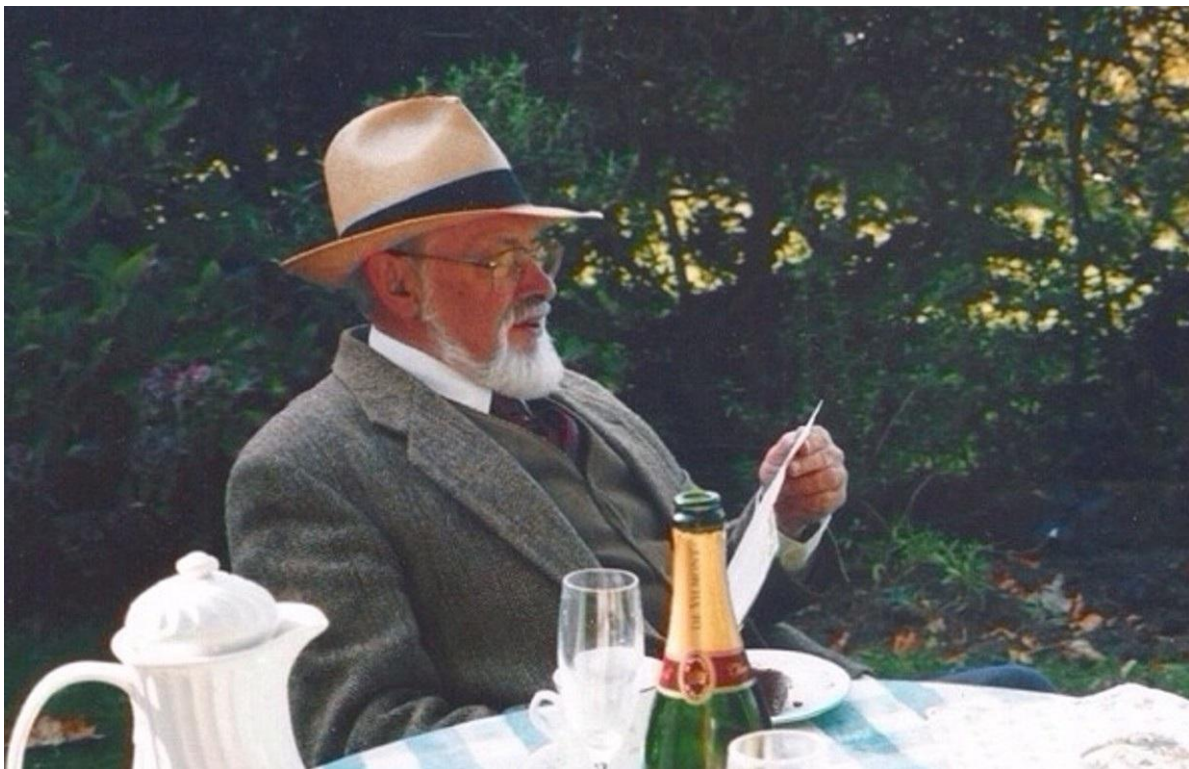


John Ellis Jones, FSA (1929–2023)

**by D. Graham J. Shipley, with
Angharad Ellis Jones, Ceri Davies,
Frances Lynch, and Robin Osborne**



John on his 73rd birthday. Photo courtesy of Angharad Ellis Jones.

Between the 1970s and the 1990s, a summer visitor to the Finlay Common Room at the British School at Athens stood a fair chance of meeting Mr John Ellis Jones, known both as John and by his second forename, Ellis.¹ Most summers saw him running a season of excavation or study at the rural site of *Agriléza* in the territory of the Classical deme of Thorikos in south-eastern Attica. Here, silver-bearing lead ore extracted from

¹ His children bear the surname Ellis Jones. His names, unfamiliar in Poland, confused the binders of his *Festschrift* (Sekunda 2010), whose first print run bore ‘John Ellis Jonas’ on the front cover and ‘John Ellias Jonas’ on the spine, to John’s great amusement.

the nearby hills was processed with fire and water, supplying the city-state in its heyday with these invaluable metals.² Building on work by C. E. Conophagos, this project—the best-known and most widely discussed undertaking in John’s career—brought new prominence to this dimension of Attic archaeology and the Athenian economy. It was innovative in that the research team included metallurgical expertise from the outset.

Fortunately for our discipline, the Attic mining economy had a most inspiring and articulate spokesman in John, whose naturally enthusiastic personality was complemented by an outstanding knowledge of Greek and Latin. He had taken the opportunity to develop this at Llanrwst Grammar School, Denbighshire, and from 1947 at the nearby University College of North Wales, Bangor, Caernarfonshire, where he graduated in Latin in 1950 and in Greek the next year, gaining a teaching qualification the year after that.

As a postgraduate, John was initially drawn to the Roman archaeology of Wales—an interest he never lost, producing papers until his eighties in both English and in his native Welsh. It was thanks to a travel scholarship that, in 1952, he had first visited Greece. On the outward train journey through Yugoslavia, he met his future wife, the teacher Renée Radau-Eckstein (1927–2016). Once arrived in Greece, he formed archaeological interests and friendships—notably with Hugh Sackett—that were the foundation of his future academic career.

Already in 1957, with three similarly deuteronymous colleagues—L. H. (Hugh) Sackett³ (who always called him ‘Ellis’); C. W. J. (Willie) Eliot (a Canadian at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens);⁴ and soon A. J. (John) Graham⁵—he had begun work in the Attic countryside with the survey, still cited often today, of the 4th-century defensive fortification wall near *Áno Liósia* west of Athens, known by its

² He describes the process concisely in the entry on ‘Metallurgy, Greek’ at *OCD*³ 965–6 (reprinted at *OCD*⁴ 938–9, though with his initials omitted). For the impact of his research on Attica, see Shipley *et al.* 2025, 557–8.

³ For memoirs of L. H. Sackett, see chapters in Driessen and Knappett 2022, especially Sackett 2022.

⁴ For Eliot, see e.g. St Mary’s University n.d. [1999], the citation for his honorary D.Litt., at this [link](#) (last accessed 19 Apr. 2026).

⁵ On John Graham, see the Database of Classical Scholars at this [link](#) (last accessed 14 July 2026).

modern name *To Déma* ('The Link').⁶ A few years later, Jones, Sackett, and Graham excavated a 5th- and 4th-century BC farmhouse adjoining the *Déma*, discovered by the survey. The project elucidated its plan, chronology, and water supply and made important comparisons with excavated houses at Olynthos, Pella, Delos, and Priene.

Within a few years, their expertise led them to excavate an even more interesting Classical farmhouse, this time in southern Attica at *Vári*. It was notable not only for its courtyard architecture and traces of outer animal enclosures, but in particular for the evidence it yielded of honey production on a substantial scale. Chemical analyses, as well as modern parallels from the island of Paros, proved that large ceramic vessels found in abundance on the site had contained honey, being stored horizontally and having deep terracotta rings attached in front to facilitate the first harvest of honey (Figure 1, overleaf).⁷ Such was the impact of this project, so high the requests for offprints, that the 98-page 'Vari House' paper in the *Annual of the British School at Athens* was soon reprinted as a hardback volume.

In both these projects, John seems to have taken the lead in writing up the results for publication, additionally endowing the articles with his evocative coloured reconstruction drawings of the ancient buildings and their natural surroundings.⁸ By the norms of the time in Britain, he published frequently:⁹ not only on rural Attica (in English, Welsh, French, and German) and on Roman sites in North Wales (in Welsh and English), but also more widely on Greek history, notably in his first two books, both intended as inspirations to younger readers: *The Greeks* (1971) and *Ancient Greece* (1983). The former contains an engrossing and detailed account of the *Vári* excavations which, unusually for those days, conveys vividly the experience of repeatedly investigating one site over a period of years, its nature being revealed step by step. The latter includes brief, yet engaging and deeply thought-out, introductions to key Greek sites, and was generously illustrated by David Salariya and Shirley Willis,

⁶ Illustrated recently, with text in Greek and recent photos, on the website of the Ephorate of Antiquities of West Attica ([link](#)).

⁷ See esp. the excursus by M. I. Geroulanos at pp. 443–8 of the excavation report.

⁸ His vivid reconstruction of the Dema House is reproduced at Shipley *et al.* 2025, 558 fig. 3 (mislabelled, by an oversight, as a drawing of the Vari House).

⁹ For a full bibliography, see Shipley *et al.* 2025, 559–64.

also containing John's own photographs. Visual communication and the use of the archaeological imagination were central to his published work.

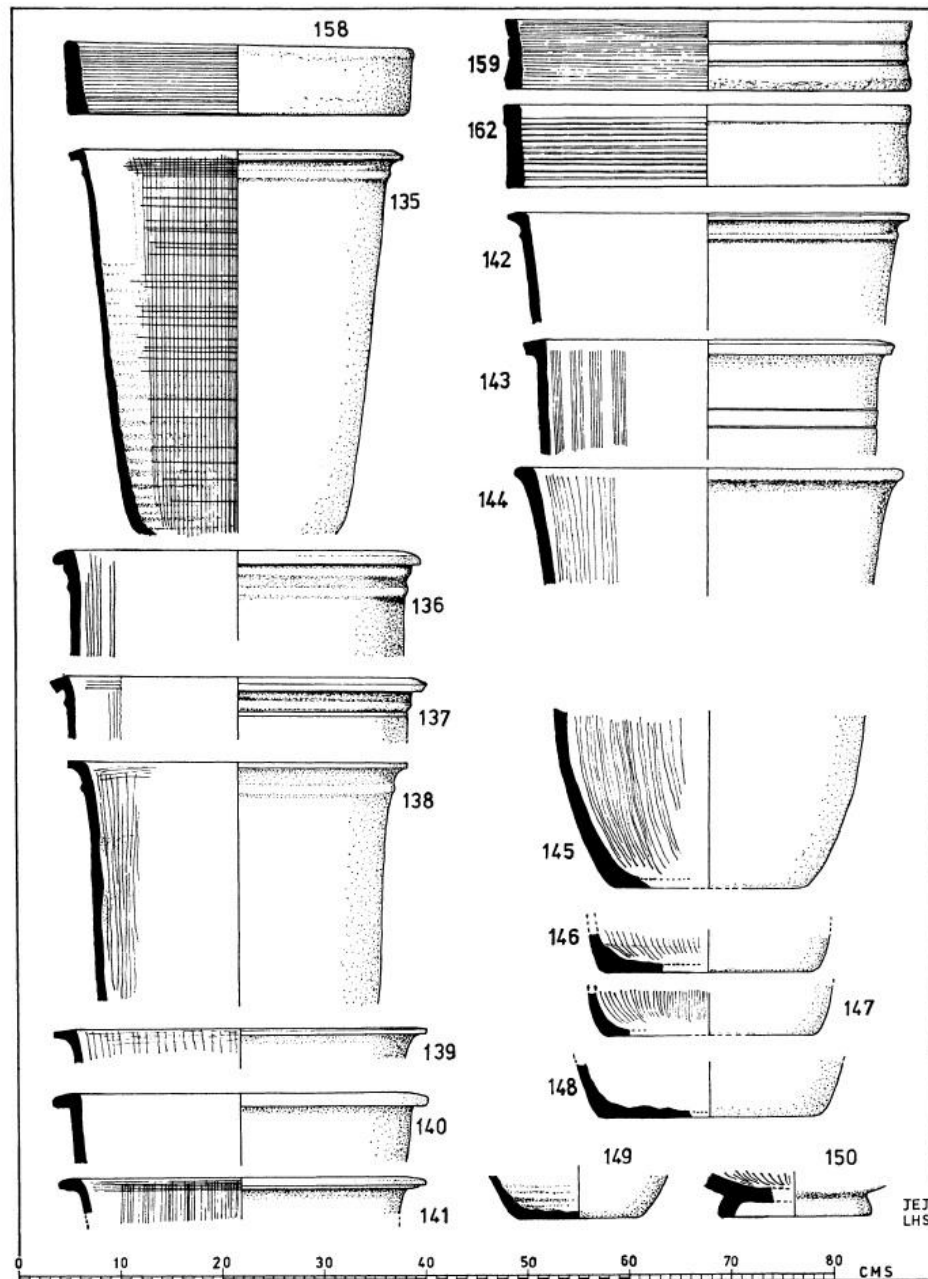


FIG. 13. PROFILES OF COARSE KALATHOI AND TERRACOTTA RINGS (Scale 1 : 6)

Figure 1: Profiles of coarse kalathoi and terracotta rings, drawn by John Ellis Jones and L. Hugh Sackett. *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 68 (1973), 392 fig. 1.
 Reproduced by permission of the British School at Athens.

During his first academic position, a year's appointment (1957–8) at the newly chartered University of Leicester, John formed a lifelong friendship with Duncan Cloud; he returned to Leicester often over the decades.¹⁰ In 1958 he married Renée and took up a permanent post in his *alma mater* at Bangor. They raised their three children in the family home at Sling, Tregarth, which would become renowned for its hospitality.

In rejoining the Bangor Classics department, about whose history John would later write extensively,¹¹ John was reunited with his former tutors. Among them, Ronald Edgar Wycherley (1909–86) was notable for his leading role in the American excavations of the Athenian Agora. He had already produced, in 1935, a volume of the Loeb edition of Pausanias and an influential and oft-reprinted volume on Greek town planning, *How the Greeks Built Cities* (1st edition 1949), and would go on to co-write the magisterial summative volume on the Agora project.¹² Wycherley's areas of interest and his established reputation surely set John on the path towards combining historical research and archaeological fieldwork in a new vision of Ancient History beyond texts.

Another former tutor of his whose influence John acknowledged was Martin Lowther Clarke, a specialist in Roman poetry, rhetoric, and the history of Classical education. At one time his colleagues included Tony Fitton Brown, who after 14 years at Bangor moved to Cambridge in 1963 and then in 1969 to the chair of Classics at John's former employer, the University of Leicester. John R. T. Pollard, who taught at Bangor from 1949 to 1981, appears to have shared John's interests in the natural world; one of his most important publications was *Birds in Greek Life and Myth*.¹³

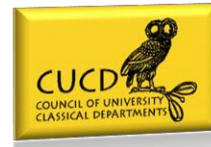
John's memoir of Bangor briefly describes his own career there and the demanding range of teaching duties he fulfilled. He was, as he notes proudly but also somewhat wistfully (referring to himself in the third person),

¹⁰ For Duncan Cloud, see Shipley and Millett 2020.

¹¹ See various works in the select list of publications below, especially Jones 2023, citing (p. 121) a much longer manuscript of 63 pages, now in the archives at Bangor.

¹² Thompson and Wycherley 1972.

¹³ Pollard 1977.



the first ex-student of U.C.N.W. to be appointed to the classical staff since Emrys Evans had been appointed in 1919 (and indeed Sir Emrys Evans was Chairman of the appointing Committee in summer 1958, his own last session as Principal). He was also the last ex-student and last Welshman to be appointed to a classical post at Bangor. He took over the ancient history courses, including ‘Roman Britain’ and contributed to language and literature courses also (beginners’ Greek, Latin prose and unseen translation work and ‘set books’).¹⁴

Despite the quality of its staff, the Classics Department fell victim to the Barron Report of 1987 along with eight other departments (including Graham’s at Leicester, which however, like several others, went on to thrive as a seat of classical learning and teaching under another name).¹⁵ John, by then aged 58, chose to remain in post rather than transfer elsewhere, and continued teaching classical topics for other departments until he retired as Senior Lecturer in 1995. He continued to publish regularly. His last book, published in 2016, was a co-authored publication of data from a field survey carried out in the late 1960s in the Peloponnesian region of Elis (Eleia)—it might have been named for him—in advance of the flooding of a reservoir.¹⁶

During these years, but also for many years afterwards, he ran the Bangor & North Wales branch of the Classical Association, the most active of all CA branches, bringing in a steady stream of visiting speakers to talk to students and interested local followers of the Classics. Each lecture was advertised with a poster hand-drawn by John (for an example, see Figure 2 overleaf).¹⁷ These and much other material are now in the archives of Bangor University. For his heroic efforts in keeping the Bangor branch going, John was rewarded with election as a Vice-President of the CA in 1995.

¹⁴ Jones 2023, 126.

¹⁵ School of Archaeological Studies (1990–2001), including an Ancient History Division; renamed School of Archaeology & Ancient History (2001–25); now partnered with Museum Studies at Leicester in the School of Heritage & Culture (2025–).

¹⁶ Jones and Kouka 2016.

¹⁷ Another is reproduced at Deacy 2010, 56 (facing the first page of her text).



Y Gymdeithasfa Glasurol
 cangen Bangor a Gogledd Cymru
 Classical Association
 BANGOR AND NORTH WALES BRANCH

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**ILLUSTRATED
 LECTURE BY**

Dr GRAHAM SHIPLEY

OF LEICESTER UNIVERSITY

**'SPARTA
 AND
 LAKONIA'**

**LLUN 24
 HYDREF, 1994.**

MON. 24 OCT. '94

**ALL
 WELCOME**

**NEW ARTS
 U.C.N.W.**

3 P.M. LR 2

Figure 2: Poster drawn by John, advertising Graham's lecture at Bangor in 1994.

What we now call Outreach, both outward- and inward-bound, was one of John's strongest suits. Besides publicizing his research in several languages including Welsh, until the 1980s he ran day-schools in Latin at the University for school pupils and their

teachers. For a decade or more, he produced annual performances of Greek and Roman dramas with Joan Haldane. He himself travelled often to give CA lectures around Britain, continuing long after he retired. He was an inspiring lecturer, though in his enthusiasm he sometimes overran the allotted time. On one occasion at Leicester, this was compounded when, some 20 minutes into an early afternoon seminar scheduled to last two hours, Graham managed to spill the entire contents of one of John's two cassettes holding the better part of 80 slides. Not a whit discouraged, and maintaining his renowned good humour, John sent the students out for a coffee break and cheerfully set about rebuilding the cassette in its proper sequence. The session resumed after no more than 20 minutes' delay—and ended over an hour late. Nevertheless, everyone was enchanted and enlightened by John's talk.

As well as his contributions to Classics in Wales through the CA branch, John was a committee member and office-holder in the Classical Section of the University of Wales's alumni association continuously from its foundation in 1951. The Section was the usual scene of his many contributions as speaker and chair, both in Gregynog Hall, Montgomeryshire (the University of Wales's conference and study centre), and at the National Eisteddfod. He chaired the last meeting he attended at the National Eisteddfod (at which Ceri also lectured), held in his home town of Llanrwst in 2019, with his usual warmth and gusto.

Frances, a prehistorian and long-term colleague of John's at Bangor, recalls an occasion that testifies to John's lasting interest in the Roman remains of his native land as well as his delight in meeting new people and conveying his enthusiasm to them:

One slightly surreal experience which I had in his company—and that of his son Rhodri—then about 12 I think—was searching, on New Year's Day, for a group of Italian archaeologists who had been encouraged to come to Tomen y Mur by an expatriate doctor's wife from Blaenau Ffestiniog, living then near Turin (I think). She had told them that no one cared for the site and it must be excavated; they could pick up labourers in Ffestiniog and start work immediately, she had said. How John had found this out, I don't know, but he

and I and Rhodri set out to find them and tell them that their information was wrong and they would be arrested for damaging a Guardianship Site.

We went to the monument but there was no one there. But John's enthusiasm for Roman sites, and for explaining them, meant that Rhodri was sent to pace all the earthworks to get the measurements and appreciate the layout, so as not to waste our visit.

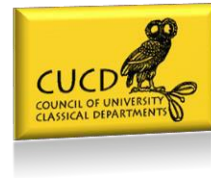
We then went into Ffestiniog and we did find the Italians—in a campsite! John then explained that they couldn't excavate the site. He gave them a very full exposition of the context of Tomen y Mur in the Roman empire as a whole, and advised them to abandon the excavation plan but instead to take a tour of Roman sites in northern England and visit Ribchester near Preston instead.

This day was an example of many aspects of John's personality and activity, notably his energy and enthusiasm, his passionate desire to explain and teach—and his powers of persuasion.

To such occasions, John brought the same infectious enthusiasm as he did to his amateur sporting career, which saw him continuing to play rugby up to the age of 40 and competing in veterans' fencing tournaments into his eighties. A regular chapel-goer until his last years, he continued to research the religious history and buildings of North Wales as well as wider Welsh history and archaeology. He gave long service to his university and its alumni, to local societies and their journals, and to the Bangor museum, of which he was for many years the honorary Curator. He advocated Welsh devolution, but his interests were less political and more directed towards culture, especially of North Wales.

In 2007, his 80th birthday was marked by a party in Bangor attended by scores of colleagues from around Britain and beyond, at which he was presented with his *Festschrift* which had been compiled and edited by Professor Nicholas Sekunda (Gdańsk). After his death, his achievements and career were commemorated with an exhibition, *Cofion* ('Memories'), at Storiol Museum in autumn 2024, with a companion volume including photographs by John's son, photographer Rhodri (Ellis) Jones.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ellis Jones *et al.* 2024. See also <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/giving/news/cofion-life-of-john-ellis-jones> (last accessed 8 June 2026).



John's last public event was in August 2019 when the annual, week-long National Eisteddfod was held at his birthplace, Llanrwst, for the first time since 1989 and only the third time ever—its first visit had been in 1951, when John was a new graduate. His contribution to the life of North Wales, and especially to Classical studies in Wales, merits recognition no less than his achievements in the history and archaeology of Greece.

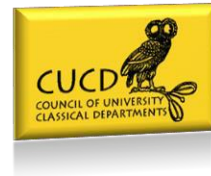
John Ellis Jones (J. E. Jones), FSA, born Llanrwst 10 October 1929, died Bangor 28 January 2023. He is survived by his children, Angharad, Rhodri, and Catrin, and a grandson, Gruff.

Selected publications (in date order)

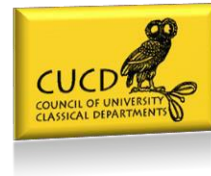
John published over 140 known works, of which the following (roughly one-third) have been chosen for their inherent significance or to build a representative overview. The opportunity has been taken to make a few minor corrections to the data published in the memoir in the *Annual of the British School at Athens*.¹⁹ For an item not previously noticed, see n. 2 above.

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¹⁹ Shipley *et al.* 2025. For completeness' sake, we note Angharad's memoir in the *Guardian* of 23 Apr. 2024 (<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2023/apr/23/john-ellis-jones-obituary>) and Graham's brief tribute on the University of Leicester website (<https://le.ac.uk/about/history/obituaries/2023/john-ellis-jones>), both last accessed 8 June 2026.

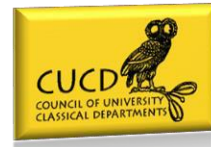


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