

The member only area of the MLFHS website also contains **The John Owen Diary**. This journal contains extensive notes relating to Owen's own family history. The diary is available in both transcribed form and as images of the original document.

Useful Information

GMLives

<http://www.gmlives.org.uk>

Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society

<http://www.mlfhs.org.uk>

Owens Manuscripts on flickr

[https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/sets/72157626881](https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/sets/72157626881383599/)

383599/Manchester General Cemetery

<http://mgctp.moonfruit.com/notable-burials1/4548986750>



Archives +

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John Owen and the Owen Manuscripts

A unique collection, the Owen Manuscripts are an invaluable resource particularly to those researching ancestors in the Manchester area during the 19th and earlier centuries.

John Owen was a 19th century antiquary who spent a large part of his life gathering historical and genealogical material. He travelled extensively around Manchester, Stockport, Southeast Lancashire, and East Cheshire areas. His travels also extended into the Peak District, Shropshire, North Wales, Yorkshire and the Isle of Man.

The son of James Owen (a weaver) and his wife Mary Holt, John Owen was born on the 26th May 1815 in Bolton le Moors. After his father's early death and when John was only two years old he left Bolton and was brought by packet boat to live in Manchester. John took an early interest in local antiquities and began by making copies of the gravestones and memorial inscriptions at Manchester Cathedral. Owen was closely associated with the Salford born writer Richard Wright Proctor, who dedicated his book "Memorials of Manchester Streets" to him.

In 1837, John Owen married Mary Ann Francis the daughter of a shopkeeper at St Mary the Virgin, Eccles, with whom he went on to have five children. After the death of his first wife in 1876, he remarried a widow called Mary Garside in Stockport in 1877. Owen had an inauspicious early career, but by 1861 he was recorded in the census as a corn dealer, an occupation he settled into and remained in until his retirement. By 1901, now an 85 year old widower, Owen was residing at the Stockport Union Workhouse where he died 18 January 1902. He was buried on the 23rd January 1902 at Manchester General Cemetery in Harpurhey.

John Owen was a prolific transcriber and indexer whose subject matter ranged widely from the description of churches to the

transcribing of the registers they contained; from the compilation of memoranda concerning local families to the recording of local folklore and events worthy of note.

He recorded his research and drawings, made over a period of 50-60 years, in large “notebooks”, though the term fails to convey the size of these, each of which might contain several hundred pages. In total there are 89 volumes in the collection.

The material covers:

- monumental inscriptions
- parish registers
- genealogical memoranda
- architecture and archaeology
- miscellaneous historical notes

Owen was also a talented illustrator and draughtsman, and his notebooks include numerous drawings of houses, churches and gravestones

Included in his notebooks is his collection of monumental inscriptions from both inside and outside the Collegiate church. There are about 2,000 in all, some exact copies. Most of these are now gone, either removed or made inaccessible by church renovation.

Much of the information in the Owen records is unique and based on Owen's personal observations and conversations with persons having intimate knowledge of the subjects discussed. His records of monumental inscriptions are particularly valuable since many of the stones he recorded, and even some of the graveyards, have been lost in the years since he visited them. As an example of this, the loss of Manchester's famous "Dissenters' Meeting House", Cross Street Chapel, which was opened in 1694 and destroyed by enemy bombing in December 1940. The memorials have long ago been removed. However, Owen's transcriptions survive.



Tonge Fould, Bolton built in 1657 as drawn by John Owen

If Owen had a failing, it is that he did not transcribe all of his sources in their entirety. Many items are described as “extracts” selected according to criteria which he does not always record. A partial record is, however, better than no record at all.

How can using this information help with my research?

Despite the wealth of material in Owen records, they have been somewhat neglected by family historians. The original manuscripts are held by Manchester Archives+ at Manchester Central Library (Identifier: GB127.MS) but general access is usually only available to the microfilmed copies (Microfilms: MF566-581b). These are located in the Local Studies area. Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society has scanned and transcribed details of all of the monumental inscriptions (but no other information) in the member only area of their web site.

Using the Owens Manuscripts is a great way to confirm family relationships and corroborate the often limited information that you may find in early parish records. Sometimes it is the only place where this information still exists. The John Owen drawings and descriptions of buildings are invaluable to local historians.