

## OWEN, JOHN (Owain Alaw; 1821 - 1883), musician

**Name:** John Owen  
**Pseudonym:** Owain Alaw  
**Date of birth:** 1821  
**Date of death:** 1883  
**Spouse:** Owen (née Williams)  
**Child:** William Henry Owen  
**Parent:** Owen  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** musician  
**Area of activity:** Music; Performing Arts  
**Author:** Robert David Griffith

Born 14 November 1821 in Crane Street, Chester, the son of a captain Owen. After receiving a good education he was apprenticed to Messrs. Powell and Edwards, Cutlers, Chester. He was taught music first of all by Edward Peters of Chester, and later, by C. Lucas of London.

When still quite young he became organist in the countess of Huntingdon chapel; he also became conductor of the 'Octagon Orchestral Society.' In 1842 he married a Miss Williams of Chester, and two years later relinquished his business and decided to give his whole time to music. He was appointed organist of S. Paul's church, Broughton, and afterwards of S. Bride's church; later he became organist and choirmaster of S. Mary's Welsh church, Chester.

He was vocalist (baritone), composer, organist, and accompanist. A hymntune by him called 'Calfari' appeared in *Haleliwia*, 1849; in the Rhuddlan eisteddfod of 1851, where he was given the name of Owain Alaw, he took the prize for an anthem, 'Deborah a Barac.' In the same year he tied with [John Ambrose Lloyd](#) at the Tremadoc eisteddfod for a cantata, 'Gweddi Habacuc.' Other eisteddfodic successes were - London, 1855, 'Can Mair'; Merthyr Tydfil, 'Y ddaeargryn'; 'Cymanfa Gwent a Morgannwg,' anthem 'Och, Annuwiol!'; Llanrwst 1859 anthem 'Arnat Ti y llefais.'

In 1860 John Owen published [Gems of Welsh Melody](#), a collection which proved very useful, and was widely used. He won the prize at a Caernarfon eisteddfod for his cantata, 'Tywysog Cymru,' whilst for the Chester national eisteddfod of 1866 he composed 'G y l Gwalia.' He published *Tonau yr Ysgol Sabothol; Welsh Harp*, airs arranged for four voices; *Ceinion Alawon Seisnig*. His greatest work, the oratorio 'Jeremiah,' was published in 1878. Among his most popular anthems were 'Pa fodd y glanha' and 'Gwyn fyd a ystyria wrth y tlawd.' Anthems, part-songs, and songs, by him appeared in the series called *Y Gyfres Gerddorol* (of which he was editor), and in *Y Drysorfa Gorawl, Ceinion Cerddoriaeth, Miwsig y Miloedd, y Cerddor Cymreig, Greal y Corau, Y Cerddor*, and *Cronicl y Cerddor*.

He was much in demand throughout Wales as accompanist and adjudicator. He died 30 January 1883, and was buried in the old cemetery, Chester.

His son, W[illiam] H[enry] Owen, studied at the Royal Academy, London, and was the organist of St. Bartholomew's church, Dublin. He lost his life in a railway accident near Abergele, 20 August 1868, when he was only 23 years old. See [WWP](#); *Llan*, 14 April 1939, 3.

## Author

Robert David Griffith, (1877 - 1958)

## Sources

*Y Cerddor*, July and August 1892

*Cronicl y Cerddor*, May and June 1883

*Y Geninen*, 1883

*Bye-Gones, relating to Wales and the Border Counties*, 1883

M. O. Jones, *Bywgraffiaeth Cerddorion Cymreig* (1890)

*Cymru (O.M.E.)*, xxvii

## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [John Owen](#)

## Images

NLW: [Owain Alaw](#), Llyfr Ffoto T Llechid Jones Album, 5v.

## Works

John Owen, *Gems of Welsh melody* (Ruthin 1860-64)

## Additional Links

VIAF: [63575337](#)

Wikidata: [Q15486265](#)

Published date: 1959

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC-RUU/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

