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OWEN JONES OF NORTHOP

By GEORGE LLOYD

The name of Owen Jones should be placed on the roll of the worthy men of Flintshire. The writer here endeavours to give some account of a business man of noble aim who should be honoured in the annals of the County for having benefited numerous deserving persons in the cause of education, relief of the poor and the apprenticing of boys to a trade throughout the last three hundred years.

We have no information regarding his birth except the traditional story that he was a foundling discovered in the tower of Northop Church, warmly clad and in a blanket attached to a bell rope, presumably the curfew bell. His discovery must have caused the incumbent and church wardens great consternation at that time as they would become the responsible persons for the bringing up of the child at the expense of the parish.

It appears that the child was placed under the care of humble and good foster parents of the name of Jones who would be paid by the parish overseers for adoption. No doubt he was baptized in the church with the name of Owen Jones but no record can be found in the Registers which date from 1590/91 and it is thus presumed that his baptism took place before that date.

In his early days he was given the nickname of "Owen Rhaff" (Welsh for rope) in allusion to the story handed down, that as a child, he was found attached to the bell rope. We have no knowledge of his foster parents who must have long predeceased him, but in his will he refers to two sisters, Mary Jones and Jonett Waters (widow) and a brother Richard Jones. These persons are presumably the children of his foster parents with whom he was brought up. His early education in the village must have been of a limited character, for the old Free School was not opened until 1609, and it appears that he was apprenticed to a butcher. There is no evidence that he was ever married, but it might be that he outlived a wife and had no family.

He no doubt had royalist sympathies during the Civil War for he was a devout churchman. His executors were also royalists and even in his will of 1658, two years before the ending of the Commonwealth, he left bequests to the Church.

His name does not appear amongst the citizens of Chester in 1643 giving contributions to the Mayor for the defence of the city, neither does his name appear in the interrogatories of 1645 relating to the number in the family of householders and billeted soldiers together with the amounts of corn, meal, etc. in each household. We can only assume from the absence of his name in these documents that he had already gone to live in Soughton.

It appears that as a young man he found employment in Chester as a butcher and through diligence he eventually became a successful business man in good standing in the city. He was an earnest churchman, for in 1627 it is recorded that he was appointed a parochial officer of St. Peter's Church at The Cross, as one who played a conspicuous

Nid yw'r hawliau gennym i
arddangos y deunydd hwn.

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OWEN JONES.

From an engraving in the possession of the Chester City Guilds.

part in the parish and city in general. He was also an active member in the Church of Holy Trinity in Watergate Street. A part of Watergate Street at that time was known as Butchers Row and it is reasonable to assume that he lived in this district as he was clearly associated with these two nearby Churches.

One of his many virtues seems to have been thrift, for in course of time he became the owner of several small estates and mortgages on property in Flintshire, Denbighshire and Cheshire. Another of his virtues was his kindly feeling towards his fellow men and sympathy for the poor and needy.

In his Will dated 14th February, 1658 he left to the incumbent and churchwardens of the parish of Northop the rents of approximately 105 acres of land and buildings in Northop and Soughton "for ever". He also left other small properties in Denbighshire and Cheshire to the city guilds of Chester.

He was buried on the south side of the graveyard of Northop Church on 6th April, 1659. As there is no record of his birth or baptism, which presumably occurred before the existing Church Registers of 1590/91, we can only assume that he was at least over sixty-nine years of age at his decease.

In the office of the Chester City Guilds there is a large engraving of him with a heraldic badge consisting of a shield with azure field, a chevron argent between three spear heads erect, gules within the azure field. A small framed copy of this is in the vestry of Northop Church. How he came to possess this particular badge is a moot point. I understand from Alderman P. H. Lawson of Chester that there is a portrait of him in oils with the heraldic badge, now in the Mayoress's parlour at the Town Hall, brought there in 1869 after being in the Pentice Chamber of the Exchange.

On his tombstone in Northop Churchyard is the following epitaph :—

Here lyeth the Body
of OWEN JONES
who was inter'd the 6th of April
Anno Domini 1659.
A worthy Benefactor to the
Church and Poor of Northop Parish,
having left Thirty Six Pounds
per annum for ever for that use.
This Tomb was erected
in the year 1751
at the charge of the said Parish
in Gratitude and Commemoration
of this Charitable Person
Worthy to be remembered and
imitated by Succeeding generations.

I quote the following paragraph from a letter I received from Mr. J. Formstone, hon. secretary of the Chester City Guilds and dated 19th January, 1955 :—

"Some years ago, at an Annual Dinner of the Chester City Guilds, which derived great benefits from the Owen Jones legacy, the late Mr. Frank Simpson, F.S.A., brought into the Toast the following—

"To the pious memory of Owen Jones !

They knew little of the early life of the man they honoured, except that he was born in humble circumstances in the Parish of Northop. He could not find his name entered in the 17th century books of the Butchers' Company, nor could he find evidence of his carrying on business in Chester and his name did not appear on the Freeman's Roll, a fact which led him to wonder if he supplied the butchers of Chester with meat and cattle as a wholesaler. It was quite evident that he had a close connection with the local butchers, because in his Will he distinctly mentioned certain butchers in Watergate Street to whom he left certain bequests."

His Will is an interesting document of seven pages and contains three short codicils. It is dated 14th February, 1658 and was proved at the Prerogative Court in London, 25th June, 1659. For executors, he appears to have chosen men of substance and position. They were Robert Davies, Esq., of the ancient family of Gwysaney in Flintshire, Alderman John Johnson, Ironmonger, Sheriff of Chester in 1643, who was present at the Siege of Chester and an associate of the first Randle Holme, and Archibald Sparke B.D., Vicar of Northop in 1639, deprived during the Commonwealth, but re-instated at the Restoration in 1660 and made Prebendary of Llanefydd in 1662. The writer obtained a photostat copy of the Will from Somerset House which he has now presented to the Flintshire Record Office at Hawarden, together with a copy in typescript. In it he makes fifty-four monetary bequests amounting to £558 ranging from £100 down to 5/-.

Extracts of interest from the Will are as follows :—

"IN THE NAME OF GOD AMEN, the fourteenth day of February in the year of our LORD GOD, One thousand six hundred, fifty and eight, I, Owen Jones of Soughton, in the Parish of Northop in the County of Flint, being of sound and perfect memory (the Lord be praised) but finding the many proofs of mortality in myself by reason of my infirmity and weakness doe make and ordain my last Will and Testament in manner and form following ; first, I commend my Soul into the hands of my Maker, hoping assuredly through the only merits of Jesus Christ my most gracious Saviour and Redeemer to be made partaker of everlasting life and happiness never to have an end. And I commend my body to Christian burial and interment in the earth whence it came in certain hopes of a joyful Resurrection . . .

- Item : I give and bequeath towards the reparation of the Parish Church of Northop and particularly the amending and enlarging of the porch and paving well with flagstones of the breadth of two yards between the said porch and the Western gate of the church-yard, five pounds and five pounds more for the buying of a pulpit cloth which shall be everyway suitable unto the cushion formerly by me bestowed for ornament of the pulpit . . .
- Item : I do give and bequeath unto John Roberts, the Cripple, near Master Evans, his Mill, Twenty shillings.
- Item : I give and bequeath unto Thomas Oliver, now in Northop, the lame poor man, Ten shillings.
- Item : I do give and bequeath unto Richard the Cobler of Soughton, Ten shillings and to John Williams, the Cripple, being the son of William Pritchard, Ten shillings and to the lame man, the son of Jane Harry of Soughton, five shillings.
- Item : I do likewise bequeath unto Richard Hiscock Baker of the City of Chester the sum of Forty shillings as a remembrance of former Courtezies by him to me shewed . . .
- Item : I do likewise give and bequeath unto the children of Archibald Sparke, Clerk Minister of Northop, the sum of One hundred pounds to be distributed amongst them at the discretion of their parents or Overseers . . .

- Item : I do likewise give and bequeath unto Mistress Catherine Humphries, the daughter of Master Edward Humphries of Plas Belin, gentlemen, Ten Pounds. I do likewise bequeath unto my loving friend Master Edward Humphries of Plas Belin aforesaid Ten Pounds . . .
- Item : I give and bequeath to the poor of the Parish of Gresford, Three pounds and also unto the poor of the Parish of Duddleston, Three pounds . . .
- Item : I give unto John Gock of Poulton the sum of Three pounds and to John Holliwell, the son of Richard Holliwell, for former courtesies to me by his father and grandfather, the sum of Forty shillings . . .
- Item : I give and bequeath unto Thomas ap Humphrey of Minera, Fifty shillings and to Thomas Owen of the same, Fifty shillings . . .
- Item : Robert Shone of the city of Chester, Chandler, is for me bound unto William King of the same city, Butcher, in the sum of one hundred pounds and the use of the same to be paid upon the feast of Michael the Archangel next and likewise Thomas Patton of Colehill, farmer, is bound in a bond of one hundred pounds to be paid unto Ellis Evans of Northop Hall, Esquire, without any use at all for the same at the feast of Saint Peter the Apostle.
- Item : I give and bequeath unto William Sealby, Butcher, of the city of Chester Three pounds.
- Item : I do likewise bequeath unto Richard Fisher, my godson, and son to Richard Fisher of Chester, Butcher, Five pounds.
- Item : I do likewise give and bequeath unto Robert Ffernall, Butcher of Chester Five pounds . . ."

The following Item relates to the Northop Parish Legacy and generally known as the Owen Jones Charity.

"Item : I do devise give and bequeath all my messuages, lands, and tenements situate in the townships of NORTHOP and SOUGHTON, in the county of FLINT, which I lately purchased for me and my heirs and assigns, for ever, of and from ELLIS EVANS of Northop Hall, Esq., and EDWARD EVANS of KELSTRYN, gent., for and to the use of seven boys of the said Parish of Northop, lawfully begotten of such parents as are truly honest and religious, being natives of the parish of Northop, or whose parents have at least for the space of seven years done faithful and true services in the said parish ; and my Will is that every of the seven boys shall receive £4 yearly apiece to maintain them in the school from the age of eight until the full age of thirteen ; and the same sum of £4 yearly to every of them, to be ordered at the discretion of the minister and churchwardens for time being, from age to age, for the space of two years more, for and towards the binding of those seven boys to some honest trade and calling ; and then other seven, so qualified as is above specified, to be chosen by the minister and churchwardens, aiming at no interest for favour or affection, but only the glory of GOD and service of His Church, and those to enjoy the like benefit as those former seven did ; and then after their placing in honest and gainful trades, seven others of like qualifications, to be chosen by the minister and churchwardens then being, still observing the will and purpose of the bequeather and the donor ; and so successively from time to time, from seven years to seven years, for evermore. And my will is, that the said boys shall constantly every Lord's Day attend preaching and catechising, one of them asking, and the others answering the questions of the Catechism set out by authority by turns. But if the minister and churchwardens shall neglect their duty to God and man in the disposing and well ordering of the gift, my will is, that the parishioners of Northop having by their carelessness and unthankfulness rendered themselves so unworthy, shall no longer enjoy the benefit it bequeathes. And moreover if any of the seven boys so chosen shal,

afterwards grievously misbehave themselves; or if their parents or overseers, only looking to the gain and profit, be remiss in sending them to school for their learning and fitting for trades, then that boy or those boys to be cashiered, and others well qualified to be taken unto their room.

Item: I do give, devise, and bequeath out of the same lands before mentioned and purchased from the said persons, unto the most necessitous and decayed householders, and other honest and poor people of the parish of Northop, the sum of £8 yearly, to be divided two several terms of the year, according to the receipts of the rents from the tenants of the said lands, by the discretion of the minister and churchwardens of Northop for the time being, without any favour or partiality of persons. And the minister is to have for his care 30 shillings yearly; and the schoolmaster of the free school of Northop 10 shillings yearly for his better inspection of the boys formerly mentioned; and the remainder of the rents of the said lands to be divided among the churchwardens for their care and pains from year to year. But if the minister of Northop and churchwardens shall fraudulently and faithlessly abuse their trust, in relation either to those aforesaid boys or poor, then my will is that the whole and full benefit of the fore-mentioned lands shall fall forever, to the benefit and use of the most necessitous and decayed householders, and other impotent poor people of the parishes of TRINITY and ST. PETER, in the City of CHESTER."

Extracts from the publication "Endowed Charities"

(County of Flint) H.M.S.O. 1899

"The oldest entry of the receipts of these charity lands shows a rental of £35.15.0. This was in the year 1746. The amount appears to have gone on gradually increasing until 1812, when having reached as large an amount as £131.9.7, and there being as much as £500 accumulations out at interest, an application was made to the Court in Chancery for a new scheme for the proper distribution of the augmented funds. This took place in 1816 and the settlement was as follows: 'That five boys be added to the seven then educating, under the same directions as are contained in the said Testator's said Will; and that the sum of £8 per annum be allowed for each boy from the age of eight to thirteen years while they are at school; and the like sum of £8 yearly to two of such boys, for the space of two years afterwards, for binding them to some honest trade or calling; that towards the loss of time, care, and trouble of the churchwardens, in superintending the estate, receiving and paying the money, they be allowed the yearly sum of £3.10.0; that to the bequest made to the minister for his care and trouble, there being added the annual sum of £3, making in the whole £4.10.0 per annum; to the bequest made to the schoolmaster for the educating of the boys, there be added the annual sum of £9.10.0 making in the whole £10.0.0. That after deducting the charge of what repairs may be occasionally necessary for buildings on the estate, also for gates and stiles for the land, drainage or other incidental necessary expenses attending the management of the estate; the remainder of the overplus rents and profits be proportioned into weekly or monthly allowances, according to the discretion of the vicar and churchwardens, to such necessitous and decayed householders or other poor parishioners as are past their labour, and do not receive parochial relief; and that, after deducting costs of this suit from the money that shall have arisen from rents and profits, the interest of the remainder of such money be applied to the last-mentioned purposes under the above scheme. The vicar and churchwardens have power to grant leases of the lands for any term not exceeding five years upon the best rent that can be obtained for the same; and also of the mines and minerals, for any term not exceeding 21 years, at such farm or royalty as will be more beneficial to the charity'."

In 1834 the total acreage was given as 104 acres, 2 roods, 33 perches and the total income accruing therefrom was £138.1.6. In 1835 the Account of the vicar and churchwardens was as follows :—

| | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| Paid the Vicar | ... | ... | ... | ... | £4. 10. 0 |
| Paid the Schoolmaster | ... | ... | ... | ... | 10. 0. 0 |
| Paid the Wardens | ... | ... | ... | ... | 3. 10. 0 |
| Paid the Charity Boys | ... | ... | ... | ... | 21. 0. 0 |
| Paid the Poor | ... | ... | ... | ... | 35. 15. 7 |
| Paid premiums before three charity boys | ... | ... | ... | ... | 36. 0. 0 |
| Paid allowances at St. Thomas's & Easter | ... | ... | ... | ... | 2. 0. 0 |
| Paid notices to quit and serving 5s. 6d. | | | | } | |
| Paid postage of letter 5d. | ... | ... | ... | | 5. 11 |
| Paid repairs, painting, etc. | ... | ... | ... | ... | 5. 7. 0 |
| Paid loss in rents | ... | ... | ... | ... | 24. 8. 0 |
| | | | | | £142. 16. 6 |

To the income of £138.1.6. was added £4 from three other small charities for the poor.

The following is a list of the tenants together with the acreage, rent per acre and rent per annum of the Charity Lands in 1895 :—

| Tenant | Total Acreage | | | Rental per acre | Rent per annum |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|----|----------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | A. | R. | P. | | |
| John Williams, homestead included | ... | 15 | 1 21 | £1 11 3 | £24 0 0 |
| Thomas Williams, homestead included | ... | 10 | 3 34 7/8 | 1 13 7 | 18 8 6 |
| Ditto | ... | 2 | 3 14 2/5 | 1 10 0 | 4 5 2 |
| Evan Jones | ... | 4 | 0 22 | 1 8 0 | 5 15 6 |
| William Astbury | ... | 8 | 2 37 1/2 | 1 8 7 1/2 | 12 10 0 |
| Titus Williams | ... | 9 | 3 27 2/3 | 1 10 11 1/4 | 15 7 0 |
| William Davies | ... | 5 | 3 15 2/3 | 1 7 10 1/2 | 8 3 0 |
| Richard Morris | ... | 5 | 0 30 1/2 | 1 10 10 | 8 0 0 |
| Jonathan Davies | ... | 3 | 2 6 | 1 8 3 | 5 0 0 |
| John Bellis | ... | 3 | 3 38 1/2 | 1 6 3 1/2 | 5 5 0 |
| Alfred Hulme | ... | 1 | 3 27 1/3 | 1 13 6 | 3 4 4 |
| Edward Foulkes | ... | 18 | 0 13 3/5 | 1 4 5 1/2 | 22 2 0 |
| Edwin Foulkes | ... | 3 | 2 21 1/8 | 1 13 0 | 6 0 0 |
| Ishmael Jones | ... | 3 | 0 12 4/5 | 1 12 0 | 4 18 8 |
| Hugh Owen | ... | 3 | 1 31 1/3 | 1 10 0 | 5 3 4 |
| Thomas Pierce | ... | 4 | 2 26 2/5 | 2 0 0 | 9 6 6 |
| Thomas Parry | ... | 0 | 0 20 | 1 0 0 | 0 2 6 |
| Totals : | | | | 105 2 11/5 | £157 11 6 |

The above acreage slightly exceeds that given in 1835 and is probably due to difference in measurement and the addition of two small plots purchased in 1847.

The accounts for 1895 show that the sum of £76.4.0 was divided among the poor in the following districts in different proportions :—Northop, Soughton, Connah's Quay and Rhosesmor.

The Trustees in 1895 also held £500 in Consols, representing accumulations of income in past years which includes £100 received for the surrender of a mining lease under one of the small parcels of land in 1852.

The total income in 1895 was approximately £171 and the expenditure was given as follows :—

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|----|----|
| To the Poor | ... | ... | ... | £76 | 4 | 0 |
| To 12 scholars who received £6 each | ... | ... | ... | 72 | 0 | 0 |
| To the Churchwardens | ... | ... | ... | 3 | 10 | 0 |
| To the Vicar | ... | ... | ... | 4 | 10 | 0 |
| To the Schoolmaster | ... | ... | ... | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Tithe Rent Charge | ... | ... | ... | 14 | 12 | 11 |
| | | | | <hr/> | | |
| | | | | £180 | 16 | 11 |
| | | | | <hr/> | | |

With regard to apprenticeship premiums in the last decade of the 19th century there appears at times to be a dearth of candidates, the premiums being limited to boys educated under the Owen Jones Charity. It is interesting to note below the names of premium holders in 1899 :—

ROBERT DAVIES, son of a labourer, apprenticed to an ironfounder, at Buckley.

EDWIN JOHN JONES, orphan, apprenticed to a draper, at Mold.

WILLIAM SMITH, fatherless, apprenticed to a grocer, at Hawarden.

JOHN GRIFFITHS JONES, son of a joiner, apprenticed to a joiner, at Mold.

FREDERICK JONES, fatherless, apprenticed to a foundry, at Sandycroft.

THOMAS DAVIES, son of a labourer, apprenticed to a saddler, at Mold.

The income in recent years is in the vicinity of £180 and Northop Charity is still administered by the Vicar and Churchwardens subject to the provisions of the Charity Commissioners. A portion of the income is claimed by the L.E.A. under the Education Act of 1902.

Extracts from the paper "The City Guilds of Chester" by Frank Simpson, 1911, published in the Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society, Vol. XVIII :

"As regards the Chester Bequest to the City Companies in his Will dated February 14th 1658, he left the profits and rents of certain lands in Minera, Gresford and Eccleston. He also bequeathed £5 yearly to the Mayor and Sheriffs of Chester, who were the Trustees, to purchase rings for them as a memorial of their year of office. This latter gift ceased on the passing of the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835.

"In 1743 the income from this Estate was then only £16.7.4 which gradually increased to £40. However, owing to the discovery of the mineral 'lead' in the Minera Estate in 1756, a lease was granted by the Trustees to a lead mining company. In 1782, at a meeting of the City Guilds, it appears that the value of the principal sum had then amounted to £10,260.6.0 with interest from this capital amounting to £396.6.0.

"In 1864 under the orders of the Commissioners, some small parcels of mountain land in the Minera district (Bwlch-Gwyn) were sold to a Mining Company. The proceeds of the sale, com-

bined with the Royalties, realised the sum of £22,092.5.11. Of this money £10,092.5.11 were invested in Government Consolidated Stock. Another £10,000 was invested in a Chester Corporation Loan, and £2,000 paid for a freehold shop adjacent to the North West side of the East Gate. In 1884 this freehold shop was demolished and a block of buildings was erected on the site which today houses the Midland Bank and above, the Grosvenor Club." In the centre of the Midland Bank facade, about twelve feet above the pavement, is a circular stone plaque on which is a bust of Owen Jones in low relief, now somewhat weathered. Underneath it is "Rebuilt by the Charity Commissioners Anno Domini 1884".

It is today a Charity of considerable importance and of great educational value to the City of Chester.

Although he left the greater acreage to the Northop Charity, it was through unseen circumstances (the discovery of the mineral lead in the 18th century) that the Chester Bequest became so valuable and today, the revenue per annum is now in the vicinity of £1,750, administered by the Chester Municipal Charities towards assisting in the education of deserving boys and girls, relief of the poor and grants to charitable establishments.

I am grateful to the following for help in compiling this paper :

J. Formstone, Esq., Hon. Secretary of the Chester City Guilds (1955); R. W. Bankes, Esq., C.B.E., Soughton Hall; M. Bevan-Evans, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.; Alderman P. H. Lawson, J.P., F.R.I.B.A., Chester; and E. D. Jones, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., of Aberystwyth.