

## JONES, OWEN (Owain Myfyr; 1741 - 1814), a skinner in London and one of the most prominent figures in the literary life of Wales at the end of the 18th cent, and the beginning of the next

**Name:** Owen Jones

**Pseudonym:** Owain Myfyr

**Date of birth:** 1741

**Date of death:** 1814

**Child:** Owen Jones

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** a skinner in London and one of the most prominent figures in the literary life of Wales at the end of the 18th cent, and the beginning of the next

**Area of activity:** Business and Industry; Literature and Writing; Printing and Publishing

**Author:** Griffith John Williams

Born 3 September 1741 at Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, Denbighshire. As a young man he went to London as an apprentice to a skinner. He worked for Messrs. Kidney and Nutt in Ducksfoot Lane, and when he was about 40 years of age acquired their business for himself. His address from about 1782 onwards was 148 Upper Thames Street. He became a wealthy man, for, however much time he devoted to the work of encouraging the literary life of Wales, he did not neglect his business. He was over 60 years of age when he married; he became the father of six children. He died 26 September 1814 and was buried in Allhallows churchyard.

After he went to London as a young man, Owen Jones came into touch with **Richard Morris** and other Welshmen of the metropolis. It was association with these men which aroused his interest in the history of the literature of Wales and in the literary life of the period. At this time he called himself 'Owain ap Huw.' With his friend, **Robin Ddu o Fôn** (Robert Hughes, 1744 - 1785), he is found in 1768 copying from the manuscripts of the **Morris brothers** the work of **Dafydd ap Gwilym**, together with all kinds of other material which they saw in the old manuscripts. This was one of his main interests throughout his career. We do not know when he joined the Society of Cymmrodorion, but the list of members of the Society issued in 1778 shows that he was the assistant secretary at that time.

Before that, however, he and **Robin Ddu** had formed another society, 'Cymdeithas y Gwyneddigion.' The first meeting was held in December 1770, and the president in 1771 was Owain Myfyr. He served as president several times after that, and also as secretary and treasurer. After the death of the first Cymmrodorion Society in 1787, the Gwyneddigion Society began its career as the chief patron of Welsh learning, and it was Owain Myfyr who was the guiding force for over twenty years. The literature-loving Welshmen of London used to meet in the Bull's Head tavern (the 'Crindy' as they used to call it) and it was there that all the arrangements were made. In 1789 the Society began to offer prizes for *awdlau* in the small meetings held by minor bards in North Wales, and that was the beginning of the 'eisteddfod' as we know it.

In the same year a start was made on a project of which Welsh scholars had been dreaming throughout the 18th century - the publication of the contents of the old manuscripts. In 1789 the work of **Dafydd ap Gwilym** was published, with Owain Myfyr as one of the editors. Then, in 1798, a grandiose scheme was launched - to publish the whole contents of the manuscripts, and, in 1801, there appeared two large volumes under the title of *The Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, where the works of the 'Cynfeirdd' (the early bards) and the 'Gogynfeirdd' (the bards of the period of the independent Welsh princes) and the 'Bruts' were included. Work on the project could not proceed for a while on account of business losses suffered by Owain Myfyr, but in 1807 a third volume was published. It had been intended to include the Mabinogion and the Romances, and Owain Myfyr paid copyists for transcribing a fairly complete collection of the works of the *cywyddwyr*. In addition he intended to issue new editions of the chief classics of the 16th and 17th cents. An end to this activity comes about the year 1807; Owain Myfyr could only make the plans, and after **William Owen Pughe** had succeeded to property in Denbighshire, he had no one left to undertake the hard work. Moreover, he was becoming old, with young children dependent upon him. We should always remember that the activity of this period (1789-1807) would not have been possible but for his generosity. He spent thousands of pounds, and the letters of the time show what financial support he gave to all kinds of movements and also to the poets and other writers of Wales. He must be ranked among the chief benefactors of Welsh scholarship. His manuscripts and papers are in the British Museum.

Owen Jones (1809 - 1874) was his son, and **Hugh Maurice** a nephew.

### Author

**Emeritus Professor Griffith John Williams**, (1892 - 1963)

### Sources

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Y Llenor: cylchgrawn chwarterol dan nawdd cymdeithasau Cymraeg y colegau cenedlaethol, i, 252-61

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## Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Owen Jones](#)

## Works

*The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801-1807), Volume 1

*The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801-1807), Volume 2

*The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801-1807), Volume 3

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