

# What's in a name? Three Hugh Owens

This article explores the links between three people called Hugh Owen: Colonel Hugh Owen (1784-1860), who joined the British Army, served in Portugal, including at the Battle of Talavera in 1809, then married and settled down in Porto, where he supported the Liberal side during the Civil War; his son, also Hugh (1825-91), who worked for D. Pedro from the age of seven, but about whom relatively little is known, except that he became a Baron; and Hugh Owen (1808-1897), a pioneer photographer from Bristol, who exhibited photographs of Portugal in London in 1855. The confusion and connection between the son and the photographer become clear as the article progresses.

*By Andrew Shepherd<sup>1</sup>*

## The Colonel

Colonel Hugh Owen was born in Denbigh, Wales in May 1784, the son of Robert Owen and Margaret Evan Jones. His ancestors were one of the most distinguished families in Wales: the Owens of Merioneth and Denbigh. He died in Britain, in December 1860. Owen began his military career as a captain of volunteers in Shropshire, in November 1803, at a time when preparations were being made to defend Britain from the expected invasion attempt by Napoleon Bonaparte's armies. In December 1805, with the aid of a recruiting party of the 16<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons stationed at Market Drayton, Owen recruited 30 men, which entitled him to a cornetcy (the equivalent of a second-lieutenant today). Later, in 1806 he joined the regular army as captain of the 16<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons, and in 1809 sailed as one of the reinforcements sent to support Lieutenant-General Arthur Wellesley (soon to become the Duke of Wellington) in defending Portugal against the French invasion led by Marshal Soult. Owen spoke French, Portuguese and Spanish and was often employed on scouting duties.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for their assistance to John Winstone of the Reece Winstone Archive and to Ian Sumner.

<sup>2</sup> Manners, Henry. *Owen, Hugh (1784-1861)*. Dictionary of National Biography. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary\\_of\\_National\\_Biography,\\_1885-1900/Owen,\\_Hugh\\_\(1784-1861\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Owen,_Hugh_(1784-1861))

## The Treaty

Owen was present at the battles of Albergaria and Grijó in the north of Portugal and in the pursuit of the French army from Porto to Salamonde. At the Battle of Talavera, he commanded the British light cavalry



**Colonel Hugh Owen (1784-1860)**

regiments that were armed with carbines, composed of the 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> light dragoons and the King's German Legion hussars. This battle is regarded as one of the most significant of the Peninsular War and gave rise to Wellesley being awarded the title of Viscount Wellington shortly after.

Owen then transferred to the Portuguese Army on 30 June, 1810, which was commanded by Marshal Beresford, first as a captain in the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Portuguese cavalry. He served as aide-de-camp to Lieutenant - Colonel John

Fane, commander of the rearguard of Rowland Hill's division when withdrawing to the Lines of Torres Vedras in October, 1810. Later he joined Sir Loftus Otway's cavalry brigade, commanding the Portuguese cavalry. At the Battle of Vitória he commanded the Portuguese cavalry in the cavalry charge that ended French resistance and soon afterwards was promoted by Wellington to be a major in the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Portuguese cavalry on 15 November, 1813. He continued to serve as an officer attached to the Portuguese Army until April 1814, after crossing the Pyrenees in pursuit of the French.

After the establishment of peace between Britain and France after Napoleon's second abdication, Owen returned to the Portuguese Army in 1815, being promoted to lieutenant-colonel. Marshal Beresford was effectively in charge of Portugal until 1820 in representation of the exiled Regent, later King D. João VI, growing increasingly unpopular in the process, partly because he increased the size of the Portuguese army to 60,000, often by forcibly recruiting agricultural workers. As a colonel, Owen accompanied Beresford on his second trip to Rio de Janeiro in 1820 to try and persuade the king to return to Portugal, but, fortunately for him, returned earlier than Beresford, bringing dispatches for the Cortes that governed Portugal in the absence of the monarch, who had left for Brazil at the end of 1807. He arrived to find that the Liberal Revolution was in progress, with the Portuguese later refusing to allow Beresford to land when he arrived at Lisbon armed with a signed authority by King D. João VI that endorsed his authority. Beresford was thus forced to return to Britain and D. João VI set sail for Portugal on 26 April, 1821, after an exile of 13 years in Brazil.

Like all other British officers, however, Owen was dismissed from the Portuguese Army. On 20 December 1820 he married Maria Rita da Rocha Pinto Velho da Silva in Lisbon, a daughter of a port wine dealer who was the widow of Manuel Velho da Silva, who came from a rich family in Rio de Janeiro. Three days prior to the marriage, Owen was baptised into the Catholic Church. The couple had five children. Hugh Owen, who was born in 1825, Maria Rita Owen, Henrique Owen, Francisca (Fanny) Owen (born 1830), and Carolina Maria Owen, the last-born, in 1833.<sup>3</sup>

The death of King D. João VI in 1826 led to a crisis of royal succession. His eldest son, Pedro I of Brazil, briefly became Pedro IV of Portugal, but neither the Portuguese nor the Brazilians wanted a unified monarchy. D. Pedro consequently abdicated the Portuguese throne in favour of his 7-year-old daughter, Maria, on the condition that

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://geneall.net/pt/nome/258647/hugh-owen/>

when she came of age she would marry his brother, Miguel. Dissatisfaction with Pedro's constitutional reforms caused the 'Absolutist' faction of landowners and the church to proclaim D. Miguel king in February 1828, which led to the start of the 'Liberal Wars', or the Portuguese Civil War, also known as the 'War of the Two Brothers' (*Guerra dos Dois Irmãos*).

Between 1828 and 1832, forces loyal to D. Miguel controlled the mainland, while D. Pedro controlled the Azores. On 8 July 1832 a fleet of 60 ships under the command of the British Admiral, George Rose Sartorius, arrived from the Azores and landed near Mindelo, north of Porto. Some 7,500 men of the Liberal army came ashore and a day later entered Porto, finding the city abandoned by the Absolutist troops, whose leaders, not knowing the exact number of Liberal forces, had decided to withdraw. The tables were then turned, and during the resulting siege of Porto D. Pedro's forces were surrounded by the Absolutists, who also occupied Vila Nova de Gaia on the other side of the Douro river, where most of the port wine was stored. The siege lasted a year until August 1833. Now a full colonel, Owen was asked by D. Pedro to command his cavalry as his personal aide-de-camp, but Owen refused on the grounds that this was not permitted by the British Government without the Sovereign's approval. However, he secretly visited D. Pedro every night to provide intelligence. As a clear gesture of support for the Liberals, Owen offered his first-born son, Hugh, to work for D. Pedro, even though he was just turning seven, albeit a Portuguese national. In a meeting at the Factory House<sup>4</sup>, Colonel Owen was also instrumental in persuading the British community not to abandon Porto.<sup>5</sup>

In 1836, Colonel Hugh Owen published anonymously in London *The Civil War in Portugal and the Siege of Oporto*, said to have been

---

<sup>4</sup> BHSP - <https://www.bhspportugal.org/library/articles/a-short-history-of-the-british-factory-house-in-lisbon>

<sup>5</sup> Martins, Maria João. O coração portuense de D. Pedro IV. *Diário de Notícias*. 20 August, 2022.

written by “A British Officer of Hussars who served in the Portuguese Army during the Peninsular War”. A Portuguese version, also published in London that same year, was entitled *A Guerra Civil em Portugal, O Sitio do Porto e A Morte De Don Pedro*, said to have been written “Por Hum Estrangeiro”. A second edition of the Portuguese version was published in 1915, with a preface by Raúl Brandão, from which much of the information in this article about the colonel has been derived.<sup>6</sup>

Owen was a friend of Joseph James Forrester, wine trader, mapmaker, artist, and photographer, and assisted him in his mapping of the Douro. On 8 October 1844, Forrester called a meeting at his home at Peso da Régua, attended by at least 18 people representing organisations connected with the wine trade. Giving the final speech, he talked about the “apathy” affecting the trade, despite the large quantity of unsold stocks in Gaia, which were caused in part by the illegal purchase and sale to England of wines that were not from the demarcated port area. He also stressed the issue of adulteration, arguing that the practice was so extensive that adulterated wines were what the British “lower classes” now believed represented the true port wine. One of the guests was the Viscount of Santa Marta, former Commander-in-Chief of the Portuguese Army, who requested Owen, another participant, to take notes of the meeting. These were subsequently published, with much controversy.<sup>7,8</sup>

In his later years in the Porto region, Owen, or “*O coronel inglez*”, as he was known, seems to have shared his time between Porto and a small house in Vilar do Paraíso, in Vila Nova de Gaia. Tragedy struck when his daughter, Fanny<sup>9</sup>, died from tuberculosis. She had already become a *cause célèbre* in Porto, having been part of a love triangle with two male admirers, the well-known writer Camilo Castelo Branco

---

<sup>6</sup> Brandão, Raul. Preface to *O cerco do Porto, contado por uma testemunha, o coronel Owen com documentos novos*. <https://almamater.uc.pt/item/86781>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=1Z9kAAAACAAJ&pg=GBS.PA1&hl=en>

<sup>8</sup> Shepherd, Andrew. *Joseph James Forrester*. BHSP Newsletter 8. 2020.

<https://www.bhspportugal.org/library/articles/joseph-james-forrester>

<sup>9</sup> <https://casadecamillo.wordpress.com/tag/fanny-owen/>

and José Augusto de Magalhães. The latter “kidnapped” her and took her to live with him, where she remained for a year, before her death. In conservative Oporto, this, together with the marriage of his first daughter, Maria Rita, to a lowly hospital employee, must have brought both sadness and shame to the colonel and, in 1856 he left his wife, who would die two years later, and returned to Britain, travelling with members of the port-trading Lambert family with whom he was close. In fact, according to Sellers, Colonel Owen lived with the family in Porto on a Quinta they rented, on the site that is now the Crystal Palace Gardens.<sup>10</sup> He died at Garratt's Hall, Banstead, Surrey, on 17 December 1860. As he lay dying it is said that he asked to see, for the last time, his “beautiful uniform of the 18<sup>th</sup> Hussars”.

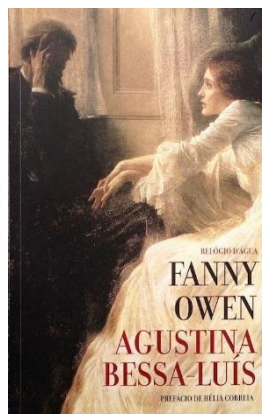
Fanny Owen’s tragic and unconventional life has been the subject of a romantic novel in Portugal, followed a few years later by a film<sup>11</sup>



**Manoel de Oliveira’s  
film ‘Francisca’ (1981)**



**Fanny Owen  
(1830-1854)**



**Bessa-Luis’s book  
‘Fanny Owen’ (1979)**

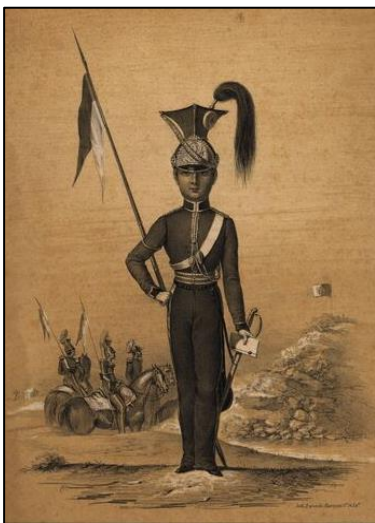
<sup>10</sup> Sellers, Charles, *Oporto, Old and New*. Page 187.

[https://permalinkbnd.bnportugal.gov.pt/viewer/68261/download?file=hg-21155-v\\_0000\\_capa-cap\\_a\\_t24-C-R0150.pdf&type=pdf&navigator=1](https://permalinkbnd.bnportugal.gov.pt/viewer/68261/download?file=hg-21155-v_0000_capa-cap_a_t24-C-R0150.pdf&type=pdf&navigator=1)

<sup>11</sup> In 1979, a novel was written about her by Agustina Bessa-Luís, later made into a film called *Francisca* <https://comunidadeculturaearte.com/ano-agustina-o-triangulo-amoroso-de-fanny-owen/>

Colonel Owen was a knight commander of São Bento d'Aviz and knight of the Torre e Espada (Tower and Sword), and had the Peninsular gold cross, as well as the Peninsular medal, with clasps for Talavera, Albuera, Vitória, and the Pyrenees. Sir John Rennie, who met him in Oporto in 1855, described him as being over six feet tall, with a determined countenance and still full of fire and energy.<sup>12</sup>

## The Son



**Hugh Owen (1825-91): aged eight**

Hugh Owen (1825-91), the son of the colonel, was born on 16 July 1825 and died on 8 August 1891. As noted above, his father offered his services to D. Pedro at the beginning of the Siege of Porto in 1832. This caricature was drawn in 1833, a year later, when he would have been aged just eight.

Owen married Silvia Maria Bull in February 1851, when she was just 14 but already, apparently, a widow.<sup>13</sup> They had their first child, inevitably named Hugo, in November of the same year. They were to have seven more children.<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, little is known about him, other than that he was made the Baron of Torre de Pero Palha on 12 August 1866. According to Portuguese Wikipedia, quoting Zúquete.<sup>15</sup> Owen belonged to the bohemian and literary group that flourished in Porto after the Civil War, and he was a good friend of Camilo Castelo Branco. However, he does not feature much in Bessa-Luis's novel.

---

<sup>12</sup> Manners, op cit.

<sup>13</sup> <https://geneall.net/pt/nome/114374/silvia-maria-bull/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://geneall.net/en/name/54624/hugh-owen-1-barao-de-torre-de-pero-palha/>

<sup>15</sup> Zúquete, Afonso Eduardo Martins. *Nobreza de Portugal e do Brasil*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Vol. 3 pp 444-5. Lisbon, 1989



In 1856 a book was published in London entitled *Here and There in Portugal: Notes of the Present and the Past*, by Hugh Owen.<sup>16</sup> It is often assumed that Hugh Owen (1825-91) was the author and, indeed, at the time of writing this article, the article about him in Portuguese Wikipedia clearly states this.<sup>17</sup> This belief was based on the dedication to Colonel Hugh Owen, “my dear father”, at the front of the book. However, a closer inspection raises doubts about the authorship, as it begins by stating that the traveller recording his reactions to Portugal was visiting from England for health reasons. It does, however, display a considerable knowledge of Portugal, which would likely not have been available to the casual visitor.

### **Hugh Owen: photographer**

Hugh Owen (1808-97) was one of Britain’s earliest photographers. He was a founding member of the Photographic Society in 1853 and a regular exhibitor of photographs. His first efforts in the 1840s involved using the daguerreotype process, the first commercially successful photographic process.<sup>18</sup> In March 1845, prior to giving a lecture on photography in Bristol, he wrote to Henry Fox Talbot<sup>19</sup> to ask for some examples of Talbot’s calotype paper negative method to illustrate his lecture and within two years he had become a master of the technique, joining the Calotype Club in 1847. His calotypes were exhibited at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and so impressed the Commissioners that, along with Claude-Marie Ferrier, he was asked to make photographs of the 155 prize-winning exhibits.

More than 140 bound sets of *Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851: Reports by the Juries on the Subjects in the Thirty Classes into which the Exhibition was Divided*, containing his and

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://purl.pt/17046/1/index.html#/9/html>

<sup>17</sup> [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh\\_Owen](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Owen)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.daguerreobase.org/en/knowledge-base/what-is-a-daguerreotype#:~:text=The%20daguerreotype%20was%20the%20first,on%20a%20silvered%20copper%20plate.>

<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Fox\\_Talbot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Fox_Talbot)



Ferrier's photographs, were presented to Queen Victoria, Heads of Foreign Governments, and the British Museum. In the 1852 Society of Arts exhibition, his views from the Crystal Palace were included in a group of more than 40 calotypes that he presented.

Owen was a vocal opponent of Frederick Scott Archer's<sup>20</sup> collodion photographic process, particularly after he stained his fingers badly in 1855, when using the chemicals required by that process. In 1854 he used the *Journal of the Photographic Society* to defend the calotype method. However, he was fighting a losing battle, as chemicals such as collodion would soon be widely used, helped by the fact that they were not subject to the same patent and usage conditions as Talbot's process.<sup>21</sup>



**Owen's photo of a Portuguese farmhouse<sup>22</sup>**

It seems that Owen then quickly lost interest in photography and it is only recently that his work has been rediscovered and exhibited widely, including in New York. He did, however, remain active in the artistic life of Bristol, working on historical preservation and publishing the lengthy *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol: a history of the manufacture of 'the true porcelain' by R. Champion, with a biography.*

---

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Scott\\_Archer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Scott_Archer)

<sup>21</sup> Figueiredo, Filipe. *Forrester - An amateur photographer in Portugal.*

[https://www.academia.edu/12658502/FIGUEIREDO\\_Filipe\\_2008\\_Forrester\\_An\\_amateur\\_photographer\\_in\\_Portugal\\_in\\_Isabel\\_CLUNY\\_ed\\_Baron\\_Forrester\\_Sense\\_and\\_Sensibility\\_A\\_story\\_of\\_the\\_Douro\\_1831\\_1861\\_Peso\\_da\\_R%C3%A9gua\\_Museu\\_do\\_Douro\\_120\\_133](https://www.academia.edu/12658502/FIGUEIREDO_Filipe_2008_Forrester_An_amateur_photographer_in_Portugal_in_Isabel_CLUNY_ed_Baron_Forrester_Sense_and_Sensibility_A_story_of_the_Douro_1831_1861_Peso_da_R%C3%A9gua_Museu_do_Douro_120_133)

<sup>22</sup> Courtesy of Ian Sumner.

Richard Champion was an English merchant and porcelain manufacturer, who emigrated to the United States in 1784. Owen became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and left his collection of ceramics to the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.

Hugh Owen was born in September 1808 and baptised in July 1809 as “Hugh Owen Jones son of Lydia Jones”, indicating that he was illegitimate. He was born in Market Drayton, Shropshire (also known as Salop). He moved to Bristol, living in the now-demolished Langford Street, and worked as chief cashier for Brunel’s Great Western Railway, a position he is unlikely to have attained without having had an affluent and educated background. He married Mary Anne (née Briggs) and the couple’s first daughter was named Lydia, after his mother. Tragedy struck in 1846 when Owen accidentally spilt alcohol on his wife’s dress and a candle set her alight, from which she died.

Owen seemed content to stay close to home, apart from trips for meetings and to take photographs. His only recorded trip overseas was to Portugal in 1853 or 1854, and he exhibited at least ten prints taken in Portugal, made from paper negatives, in London in 1855. Most of these seem to have been lost.<sup>23</sup> It is probable that by that time he already knew Joseph James Forrester. As already noted, Colonel Owen also knew Forrester as, no doubt, did his son Hugh (1825-91). Forrester was also an amateur photographer who became a member of the Photographic Society in London on 6 July 1854, just 18 months after its founding meeting, which was attended by Owen.<sup>24</sup> But visiting Forrester was certainly not the prime reason for Owen’s trip to Portugal.

By now, readers may have guessed how this story ends. In his preface to the book by Colonel Owen on the Siege of Porto, Brandão notes near the end that the Colonel returned to England where he already “had a son by an English lady, with the same name as the other, who wrote a book criticising Portuguese life”. A close inspection of

---

<sup>23</sup> Some people have attributed these to Hugh Owen, the son from Porto, but there is no evidence that he was a photographer.

<sup>24</sup> Figueiredo, *op cit.*

*Here and There in Portugal: Notes of the Present and the Past*, shows that Hugh Owen the photographer must have been the author. Not only does the text mention Bristol in places, but the Table of Illustrations indicates that the line drawings in the book were made from “photographic pictures by the author”. Furthermore, those credited with the drawings include the photographer, Philip Henry Delamotte, a fellow member of the Calotype Club. Delamotte, a Professor of Drawing and Fine Art at King's College London, is known for his photographic record of the reconstruction of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.

As the dedication to *Here and There in Portugal* is to Colonel Hugh Owen, “my dear father”, there can be no doubt that Hugh Owen (1808-97) was also the son of the colonel. He would have been born a year or so before the colonel left for Portugal and the Peninsular War and Colonel Owen was known to have been stationed in Market Drayton before then. His conversations with his father in Porto would have given him the greater familiarity with the country than a casual visitor might display, which is a feature of the book.

### **Postscript regarding Hugh Owen, the photographer**

As the US Secretary of State for Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, once famously said, and I paraphrase, “there are known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns”. I hope that I have correctly identified all the “known knowns” of this story. As for the “known unknowns” there are several:

- Evidence suggests that Owen the photographer was illegitimate, but, if so, why was he given his father’s name? Naming practices on birth certificates of illegitimate children varied at that time, but if the child was recorded as Hugh Owen Jones, it seems likely that the colonel acknowledged paternity.

- Was the mother wealthy enough to fund the photographer's education or had the colonel been sending money to England, or arranging for money to be paid to her, throughout his career as a soldier and after?
- If the father and son knew of each other's existence, why did it take them 48 years to meet?
- If the colonel knew of Hugh's existence, why did he give his second son the same name? Was it because at the time it was the convention to name the first son after the father and to not have named his first son in Porto after himself would have raised suspicions?
- Finally, what impact, if any, did the visit of Hugh Jones, the photographer, to Porto have on the Colonel's decision to return to England?

If anyone can assist with some answers, or even with answers to "unknown unknowns", please get in touch with the author.<sup>25</sup>

—— ooOOoo ——

*Andrew Shepherd is the BHSP's Webmaster and edits the quarterly Newsletter.*

---

<sup>25</sup> [library@bhspportugal.org](mailto:library@bhspportugal.org)