
James Ovens

The following notes are the result of joint research by Brian Torode and Richard Barton...

James Ovens was baptised on 21st July 1850 at Wellington in Herefordshire. His father, Charles Ovens, was a gardener. In 1861 the Ovens Family was living in Worcester and it may have been in this city rather than Cheltenham that James trained to be a sculptor with Boultons.

We next find Isaac (sic) Ovens in the 1891 census living at 117 Northants Road, Heigham, Norwich, and he is described as a Sculptor. In 1901 I have not found him but his wife, Ann, and children were living at 22 Milner Road, Preston.

The children's places of birth indicate that the Ovens were living in Dublin in 1881, Preston in 1882, 1886 and 1888 and Norwich in 1890 and 1893.

Ten years later the Ovens were living at 58 Heigham Road, Norwich. By now James was aged sixty and described as a Stone and Wood Carver and working on his own account. He and his wife had been married for thirty-three-years and they had had eight children. Their seventeen-year-old son, Thomas Edward, was described as engaged in Carving and Masonry.

James Ovens may have died in the Ipswich RD in 1928.

C.M. 27.11.1886:

Local sculptor **Mr Ovens** (a pupil of Mr Boulton of this town) has completed a bust of Dr. Berwick, late Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle. He has completed some splendid works of statuary for some of the largest and most noted Catholic places of worship in the country.

A Great Gothic Fane – The Catholic Church of St. John the Baptist, Norwich, 1913, page 217:

[St John the Baptist Cathedral, Norwich](#) – Built between 1882 and 1910. '**Mr. James Ovens**, of Norwich, sculptor and carver, is responsible for the greater part of the beautiful carving. He is well known in Catholic circles throughout England and Ireland, and the churches at Cambridge, Bungay, Stoneyhurst college, etc., contain fine specimens from his chisel...'

Anthony Rossi, Norwich Roman Catholic Cathedral – A Building History, 1998, Miscellany I, the Chapels Society, page 22-3:

'The stonework – The stone carvings of which these shields form part are another outstanding feature of St John's. Apart from the tympanum outside the north transept already mentioned, carved in the workshop of Robert Bridgeman and Sons of Lichfield, most of the work is said to have been done by **James Ovens**, who according to *A Great Gothic Fane* was ... (*see above*); he apparently began as an obscure monumental mason working from a yard in Stafford Street a short distance from St John's. The quantity of stone carving is so great and so varied that even allowing for the extended building period it is difficult to believe that it can all have been the work of one man, though there is most certainly a stylistic consistency in all the smaller details within the cathedral. When the nave opened one reported that the major part of the carving had been done by Mr. J. Ovens of Dereham Road and that 'what remained was entrusted to Messrs Farmer and Brindley of London'. At the end of James Ovens's life the Duke contributed to the cost of keeping him in a Sanatorium...'