

## John William Reed, 1843 - 1899

by Brian Stevenson  
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J.W. Reed's microscope slides are encountered with some frequency (Figure 1). The majority, if not all, are of botanical specimens, his chosen specialty. As Brian Bracegirdle suggested in *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters*, Reed was an amateur. But only in the strict sense, having a money-making day job while pursuing microscopical research in his spare time. He was a Fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society and a member of the Quekett Microscopical Club (and for two years, a member of the Club Council), as well as being a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society. In sum, a man of his times, a middle-class gentleman who sought to enlighten himself with scientific explorations.



**Figure 1.** Examples of microscope slides produced by John W. Reed. There are no indications that he sold his slides, so these presumably came from his private collection or from exchanges with colleagues. All known Reed slides are of botanical subjects. Another example can be seen in Bracegirdle's *'Microscopical Mounts and Mounters'*, plate 30, slide O. The *Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* indicates that Reed exhibited the leftmost slide, of *Cucumis sativus*, on January 14, 1881, and the slide next to it, of *Juniperus communis* leaves, on April 29, 1881.

John William Reed was born during the late summer of 1843, in Manchester, England. His father, William, was a Wesley Methodist minister. The Reeds evidently moved frequently, presumably due to father William's ministering circuit. John's sister Ellen, 3 years his junior, was born in Helstone, Cornwall. The 1851 census, conducted 4 years after Ellen's birth, found the Reeds living in Barnsley, Yorkshire. In 1861, they lived in Islington, Middlesex, near London.

John became involved with the insurance industry early on. At the time of his 1867 marriage, the 23 year-old Reed was a "superintendent of agents". His wife, Mary, was the daughter of Marmaduke Miller, a hat manufacturer and Methodist minister. The Miller Memorial Church, in Tottenham, is named after Rev. Miller. John and Mary's first son, John Marmaduke Miller, was born in 1868, and the Reeds lived with the Millers until at least the time of the 1871 census.

By 1877, the Reeds lived in a separate home, at 27 Clarence Street, Islington. That year, John Reed joined both the Quekett Microscopical Club and the Royal Geographic Society. The Reeds also gave birth to their second son, the grandly-named Alfred Arthur John William Reed. Alfred's christening record indicates that John Reed had made a career change between the time of the 1871 census and 1877: he was now a "pianoforte maker". The construction

pianofortes, harmoniums and reed organs, and repairs of damaged instruments, was Reed's occupation until the end of his life (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Examples of J.W. Reed's work as a manufacturer of keyboard instruments. At the upper left are two photographs of Reed's nameplate from such instruments.

Reed was elected to the Council of the Quekett Microscopical Club in 1879, and served through 1881. He was elected as Fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society in March, 1881. Reed was evidently an ardent microscopist, and very often exhibited slides at Quekett meetings.

Between the time of the 1881 census and Reed renewing his Quekett membership for 1882, the family moved to 17 Colebrook Row, Islington. The instrument factory was then located on Hanover Street (Figure 3).

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*Figure 3. Advertisement by John W. Reed, from the United Methodist Free Churches Magazine, 1884.*

Between 1889 and 1891, the Reed family moved from Islington across the Thames to Dorking, Surrey. The 1891 census recorded John, Mary and 14 year-old son Alfred as “boarders” in the home of Stephen Wilkins, a boot maker and Baptist minister. John Reed was listed as being a “pianoforte manufacturer” and an employer of workers. The reason for this move from a private home and live-in servant in 1881, to a boarding situation in 1891, is not known, but suggests financial setbacks for the Reeds.

John William Reed died in late October-early November of 1899, at the age of 56. The report of the November 17, 1899 Ordinary Meeting of the Quekett Microscopical Club stated “*The Secretary said that most of the members were probably aware that since their last meeting they had lost in a very sad way one of their most useful members, Mr. J.W. Reed. The Club had been indebted to him in many ways: he had rendered them considerable service at their soirees by securing a most excellent band free of all cost; and he had also read papers, amongst which those on Pyrenean plants and on the fungus diseases of plants would be particularly remembered. They would all miss him very much, and his loss as a member of their Committee would also be much felt. The President said that at the meeting of the Committee that evening a vote of condolence and sympathy with the family of Mr. Reed had been passed, and he was sure that this would meet with the concurrence of the Club as a whole.*”

## Resources

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Christening record of Alfred Arthur John William Reed (1877) Islington St. Peter

England census, birth, marriage and death records, accessed through [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk)

*English Mechanic and World of Science* (1879) News of the Quekett Microscopical Club, Vol.

29, page 542

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1877) Election of J.W. Reed, Vol. 4, page 352

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1879) List of Officers and Committee elected in July, 1879, Vol. 6

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1879) Records of specimens exhibited at Quekett meetings by J.W. Reed, Vol. 6, pages 35 and 42

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1880) List of Officers and Committee elected in July, 1880, Vol. 6

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1880) Records of specimens exhibited at Quekett meetings by J.W. Reed, Vol. 6, pages 85, 89, 93-94, 121-129, 182-190, 217-221, and 223-228

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1881) List of Officers and Committee elected in July, 1881, Vol. 6

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1881) Records of specimens exhibited at Quekett meetings by J.W. Reed, Vol. 6, pages 272, 276-277, 315-318, 321-326

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1882) List of Officers and Committee elected in July, 1882, New series, Vol. 1

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1898) Report of the Ordinary Meeting of March 18, which included an extended discussion on J.W. Reed's paper on the fungus *Uromyces pisi*, Series Two, Vol. 7, pages 121-123

*Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club* (1899) Report of the Nov. 17 Ordinary Meeting, with discussion of the death of John W. Reed, *Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club*, Series two, Vol. 7, page 333

*Journal of the Royal Geographic Society* (1877) Election of J.W. Reed, Vol. 47

*Journal of the Royal Microscopical Society* (1881) Election of J.W. Reed, Vol. 1, page 172

*The Liberator: a Monthly Journal of the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control* (1868) Report on a lecture by Rev. Marmaduke Miller, Jan. 1, page 14  
Marriage record of John William Reed and Mary Miller (1867) Islington St. Peter

Reed, John W. (1895) Notes on some plants collected in the Pyrenees, *Journal of the Quekett Microscopical Club*, Series two, Vol. 7, pages 65-74

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United Methodist Free Churches Magazine (1884) Advertisement for harmoniums and pianos from J.W. Reed, "Advertiser" section

Images and information on musical instruments manufactured by John W. Reed (links current as of November, 2011)

[http://tardis.dl.ac.uk/FreeReed/English/organ\\_book/node14.html - SECTION0001437000000000000000](http://tardis.dl.ac.uk/FreeReed/English/organ_book/node14.html - SECTION0001437000000000000000)

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