

# The Reverend Ernest F Letts MA.

He was 'gently born' Sydenham in 1851. He proceeded to Holy Orders a time when most Anglican clergy were of independent means, often gentry and sometimes of aristocratic stock, who could rely on trusts, even estates, and other sources of income to supplement whatever else was provided by the 'benefice'.

He was educated at Trinity College Dublin and New College, Oxford. For all of his life, the entirety of the island of Ireland was still under the British Crown. Movement between the two islands, especially by the upper classes, was very fluid, often with family seats both sides of the Irish Sea. However, beneath that polished and privileged veneer, all was not as it may have seemed. In the appendices there are timelines of key events: one for Britain and Ireland in his lifetime; and another with more detailed events in Ireland during the lifetime of his daughter Winifred. Both illustrate the crescendo of voices of the Home Rule Movement 1870-1921.

At the time of writing, the precise chronology of his path to ordination and the pattern of his ministry which brought him to the North West of England is unknown to me. However, shortly before his preferment at Newton Heath, he appears in the Census of 1881 in Salford, after a spell in Oxford, by which time he was already Minor Canon of Manchester Cathedral. He had married young, and into the noted Ferrier family. Interestingly, the distinguished mezzo-soprano Kathleen Ferrier recorded the Anglo-Irish composer, Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's setting of Winifred's poem *A Soft Day*. Just how close a relative of his wife she may have been is not yet established.

## All household members

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Gender	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Ernest F	Letts	Head	Married	Male	30	1851	Vicar Minor Canon Ma & Precentor Of Manchester Cat	Sydenham, Kent, England
Mary I	Letts	Wife	Married	Female	33	1848	-	Ireland
Mary F S	Letts	Daughter	Single	Female	5	1876	-	Oxford, Oxfordshire, England
Dorothea M	Letts	Daughter	Single	Female	4	1877	-	Oxford, Oxfordshire, England
Harold W	Massing	Boarder	Single	Male	15	1866	(No Occ)	Liverpool, Lancashire, England
Elizabeth A	Brunt	Servant	Widow	Female	44	1837	Housekeeper	Staffordshire, England
Martha	Wain	Servant	Single	Female	19	1862	Housemaid	Ireland

<https://findmypast.co.uk/1881-census/ernest-f-letts-0018260065>

1874. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Raams in the County of ...

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
26 <sup>th</sup>	Aug. 6.	Ernest Frederick Letts	24	Bachelor	Gentleman	Raams	Thomas Letts
		Mary Isabel Ferris	27	Spinster		Michellam	Alexander Ferris

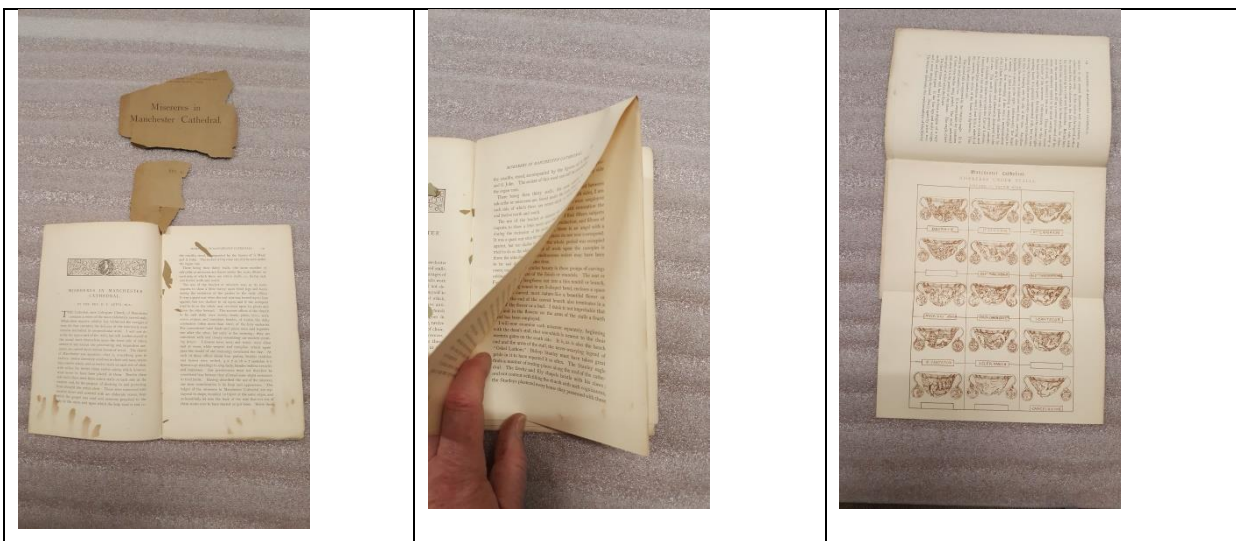
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by a license or after

This Marriage was solemnized between us, { Ernest Frederick Letts } in the Presence of us, { Mary Isabel Ferris }  
Thomas Letts  
Alexander Ferris  
Euphemia Ferris

It is his eldest daughter Mary, born 1876, two years after his marriage and some six years before her younger and more famous sister Winifred, kept meticulous dairies of family life, often illustrated with photographs. These unpublished documents remain in the private domain.

Scholars of this period of Manchester's history may disagree with my perception of Newton Heath during the periods of Lett's cure, but it seems to me that it was pretty much at its zenith as a powerhouse within the industrial machinery of Great Britain and its empire. This is reflected in the many handsome homes within the Clayton Vale portion of the parish, for businessmen and upper-management. Daughter churches within Newton Heath, such as St Ann's and St Mark's, and the chapel of ease, St Cuthbert's, were flourishing. The parish church, All Saints, still uses some of the furnishings and fabrics from these houses of God which came and went in barely a century.

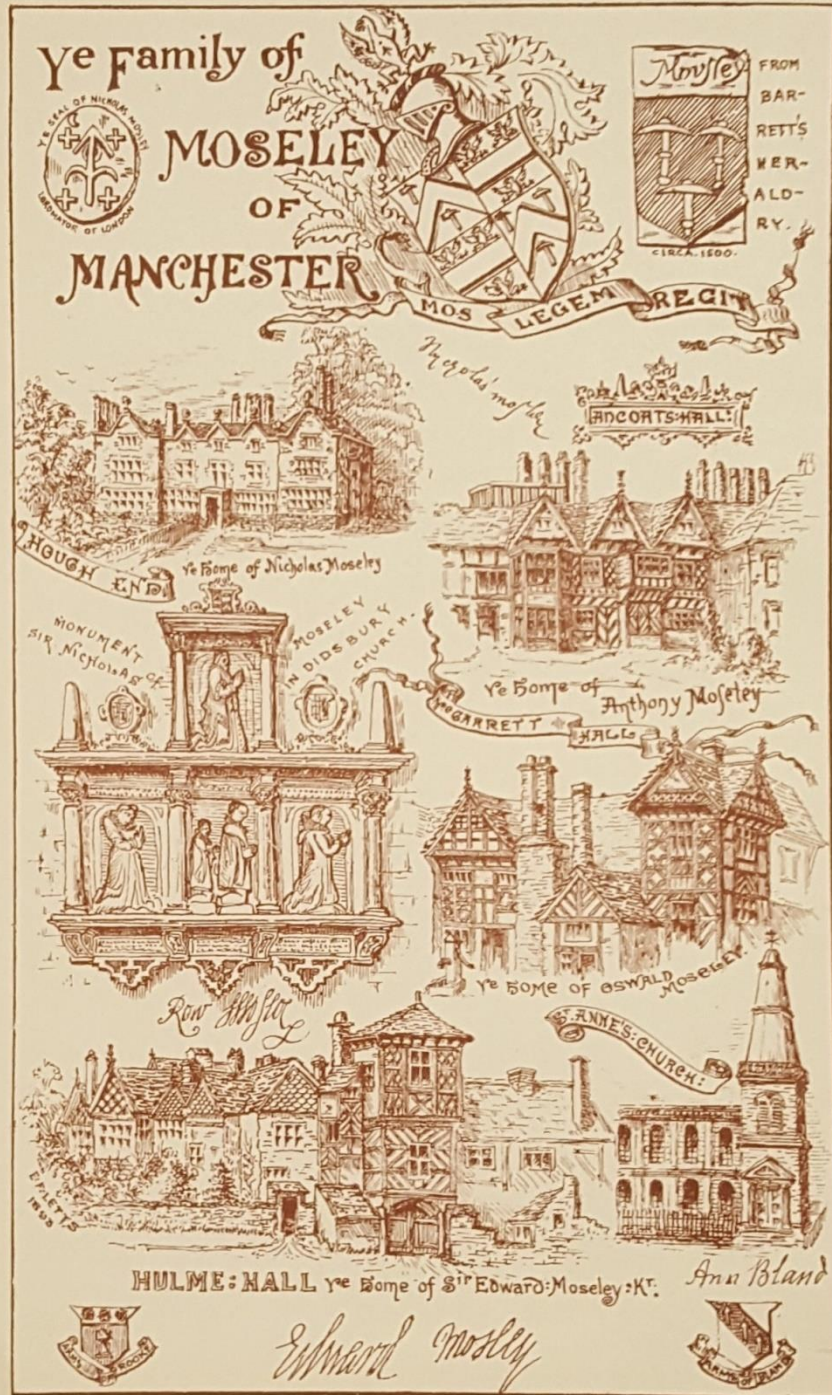
When one 'Googles' – other search engines are available - 'The Reverend Ernest Letts' the first entries bring up his antiquarian work, especially his meticulous drawings of the misericords and monuments in Manchester Cathedral. There are also illustrated time-lines and family trees of distinguished families from the Manchester area. These are his own illustrations within the pamphlets he wrote and published. Online, these artefacts are currently misattributed, as recently they have been transferred from Manchester Art Gallery to the (University of) Manchester Museum. I am very grateful to Dr Susan Martin, Human Cultures Curatorial Assistant (Egyptology, Archaeology, Anthropology) for granting me access to photograph these incredibly fragile documents. Some of the pamphlets contain leaves still uncut from their quarto printing as you may see from these photographs of his pamphlet on the misericords of the cathedral.



This is meticulous work of one with an eye for detail.

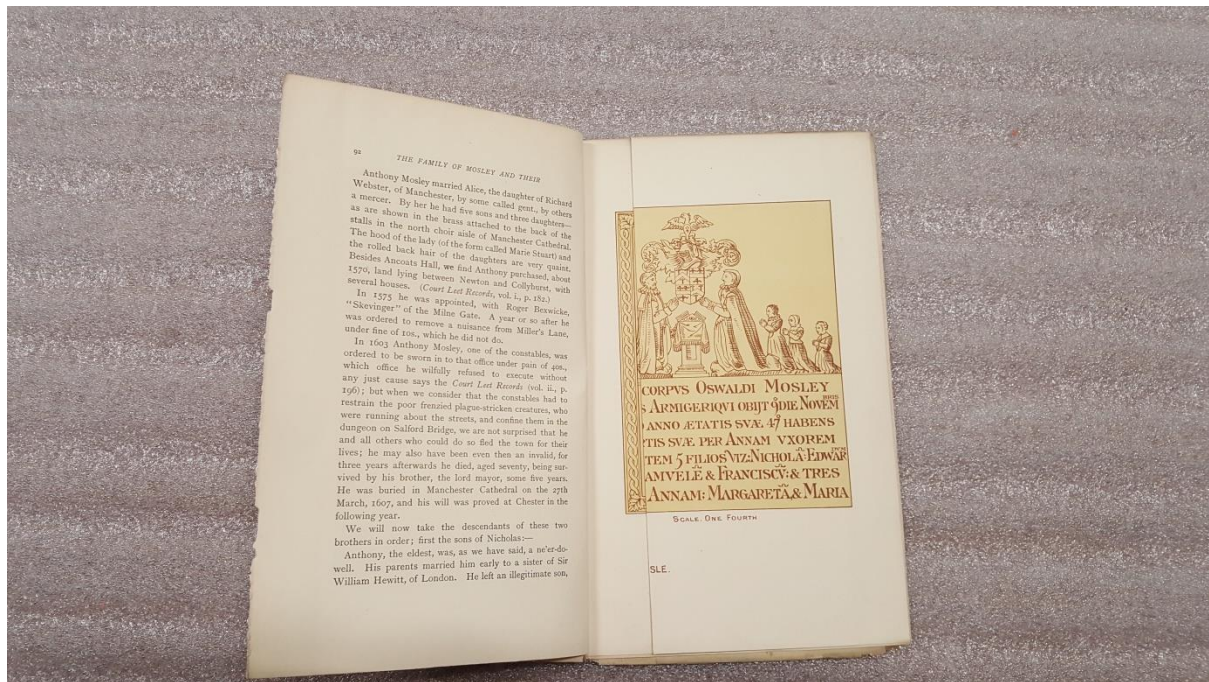


Another publication concerns the Mosely family

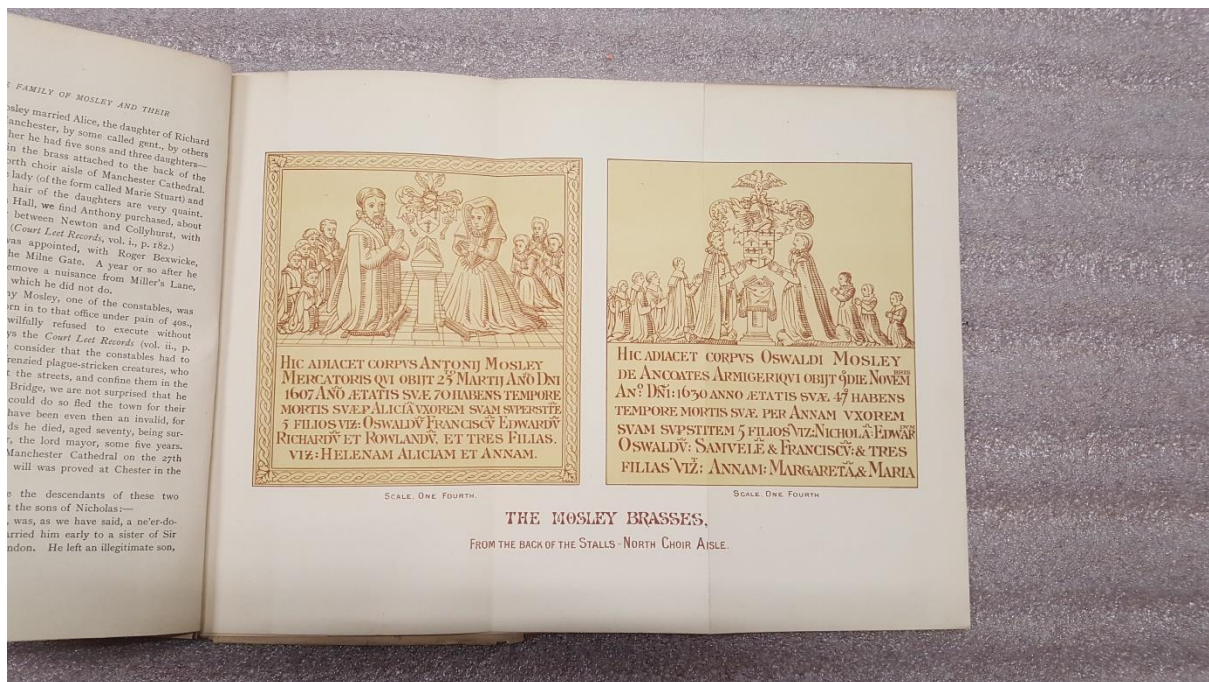




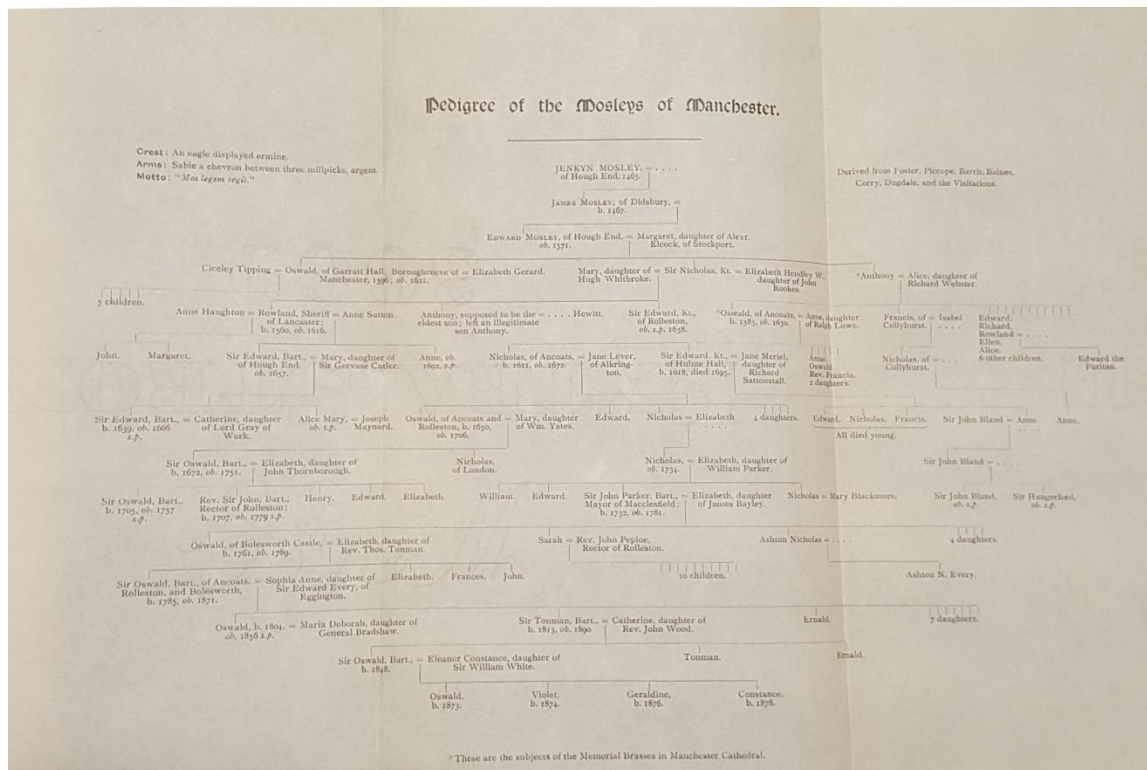
This



becomes this



From Letts *The Family of Mosely and their brasses in Manchester Cathedral.*



### *The Pedigree of the Mosleys of Manchester*

My reading of Letts is that he was clearly a clergyman of great ability and piety, yet gentle and merciful. His life was cut short at a time when quite possibly a senior preferment would ordinarily have been expected to have come his way. He seemed to me to have the right balance of scholarship, piety and humanity.

Parish records from the 1890s show his participation in events of the numerous groups associated with and within the parish. It is difficult for us to imagine today the all-pervasive influence of parish churches such as All Saints in the lives of 'all sorts and conditions' of people. There was the school, already in its third building, musical and other groups, some gendered some not. For a reading of this may I point you to Pauline Ryan's assiduously researched and delightfully written *Journeying on; but not without a tear*<sup>1</sup> privately published for detailed accounts of what parish life was like.

The church building Letts inherited was a result of three phases. First, the initial build of 1814-16; then the enlargement by two bays 1844; and finally other alterations to the main body of the church and with the addition of the chancel, amply funded by the Taylor family of Brookdale House, completed by 1879 and then adorned with the magnificent reredos as a memorial to Mary Taylor who had died that year.

Meanwhile, beyond the church porch, but within Newton Heath, there was other industry, literally and metaphorically with which we live today, but whose provenance is perhaps not as widely known as it ought to be. Even so, today, these two phenomena are the things for which Newton Heath is famous today: the Blackpool Tower and Manchester United Football Club, both of which saw their flourishing in Lett's time.

<sup>1</sup> If you wish for a copy for £10.00 plus p&p please contact the Parish Office.

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Newton Heath Parish Church – All Saints.