Experiment Eleven — The Word Cipher Method Compendium

Walter Wilkinson's compendium of the surviving method sources · gorhambury.org/public/experiments/experiment-eleven/ · Cryptographic Audit series · August 2026

What it is

The most relevant surviving documents on the Word Cipher crypto method, gathered in one place, plus a working reverse-engineering effort (Python on GitHub, Jupyter "Experiment-11" notebook, Google Colab deployment for independent replication). Goal: the first complete, detailed public description **and demonstration** of the Word Cipher in ~400 years. Owen's fatal omission — hundreds of pages of decoded *output*, never a detailed description of his *method* — is what this compendium repairs.

The method, as the sources describe it

- **Guide words** ("keys"/"concordents") locate sentences carrying the hidden narrative; **clustering** — anomalous repetition of key words — marks where embedded passages sit.
- Documented procedure: *"pencil around every sentence containing the guide word being used, thus enclosing the keys as well, and these sentences are now read from the wheel to an operator, who typewrites them upon sheets of paper."*
- **No transformation:** the hidden text is fully formed in the public text, merely scattered across multiple works — consistent with the Dispersal Hypothesis.
- **Mechanical and teachable:** eyewitnesses confirm assistants without subject knowledge extracted correct material (Iliad references without knowing Homer) — systematic procedure, not interpretive skill.

The source documents compiled

#	Document	Significance
1	Owen, *Sir Francis Bacon's Cipher Story* Vol. 1 (1895), incl. "Letter to the Decipherer"	The system explained in Shakespearean blank verse; presented as Bacon's own description
2	Detroit Journal (1894), Walter Hunsaker	Early summary + "Keys to the Cipher" section
3	New York Herald (1894)	Contemporary coverage with method references
4	P.J. Sherman, "Dr. Owen's Cipher," *Baconiana* Vol. 2 p. 36 (Apr 9, 1895)	First independent eyewitness description
5	J.B. Millett, "Dr. Owen's Cipher Method," *Baconiana* Vol. III No. 9 (Apr 1895)	An article that ITSELF contains an embedded concealed statement — self-demonstrating
6	J.B. Millett, "The Key to Mr. Millet's Concealed Statement," *Baconiana* N.S. Vol. IV No. 13	The decoded solution to #5
7	Millett's detailed workshop account	Visits to Owen in Detroit: testing, accuracy verification, assistant training, Iliad verification vs. Chapman and Buckley

Why it matters to the audit

- The Millett pair (#5 + #6) is a **known-plaintext test case** independent of Owen's own volumes — a Victorian eyewitness left us a unit test. Ideal centerpiece for the pre-access demonstration and the reproducibility core.
- The teachability evidence is the historical warrant that the method CAN be reproduced by independent workers — the exact question the reproducibility core scores.
- Caveat from the page itself: not a comprehensive list of works carrying embedded messages — the full corpus is potentially ~50 texts across pen-names (see the masks-corpus prediction).