

Elizabeth BOWDEN

Elizabeth was born circa 1743. No documents confirming her birth and subsequent marriage have been found to date. However, according to the record of her burial in 1824, she was married to J BOWDEN, Schoolmaster, and was 81 years old when she died.¹

Elizabeth died on 21 June 1824. The newspaper report of her death, in 1824, reads, "On Monday last, aged 81, Elizabeth, wife of James Bowden, writing master, Paris Street. – The long life of this truly excellent woman, has exhibited a scene of usefulness rarely equalled, affording a bright example of the superiority of Christian principles in the regulation of the conduct, while engaged in the more active duties and bustle of the world, and the calm and peace it is capable of affording at the last and closing scene, as displayed in the fortitude and pious resignation with which a long and severe illness was borne, the remembrance of which her many virtues will not soon be forgotten by her sorrowing husband and lamenting friends."²

Elizabeth's body was buried with the Reverend Joseph BRETLAND and his family. The Accounts Book reads, "Opening Mr Bretland's cave for Mrs Bowden – 10/-".³

Sources

1. Burial Register held by EDGT
2. Exeter Flying Post 24 June 1824
3. Accounts Book held by EDGT

Thomas BOWDEN

Thomas was born circa 1761. No documents confirming his date of birth nor his marriage have been found to date. However, according to the record of his burial in 1843, he was 82 years old when he died.¹

Thomas's last Will and Testament is dated 29 November 1837 when he left his effects to his daughters, Sarah BOWDEN and Elizabeth KEANS(?) who was widowed and living in London, and his son, William BOWDEN who was also residing in London at that time. He appears to have had very little to bequeath to his children – only his bedding, clothes and wearing apparel, a clock and two watches and some silver spoons. Any residue and remainder, he bequeathed "to my beloved brother, James Bowden" who he also appointed as his sole Executor. The Will was witnessed by William WILLCOCKS and Susan LAKE (see under James Bowden).²

Thomas was buried on 25 March 1843.¹

Sources

1. Burial Register held by EDGT
2. Devon Wills ref. 1078/IRW/B/1243 Devon Heritage Centre

James BOWDEN

James was born circa 1766. No record of his birth has been found to date but, according to the record of his burial in 1848, he was 82 years old when he died.¹

In 1710, a Protestant Dissenting Charity School had been established in Paris Street, in Exeter. On 12 December 1798, Trustees of the School had accepted the resignation of the Schoolmaster, Mr BINFOLD, who had also said he would leave the School House by Lady Day. The Trustees agreed that he would be discharged of his duties at Christmas that year “in consequence of his misconduct”.²

At a further meeting, 10 days later, it is recorded that Mr MERIVALE and Mr MILFORD had recommended Mr BOWDEN to be the new School Master and this was resolved unanimously.² James BOWDEN, had previously been responsible for a school on Stepcote Hill in Exeter.³

The main school building as 13 Paris Street⁴ and Schoolhouse, i.e the School Master’s house, was No. 11 Paris Street.⁵

At some point in the early 1800’s, James was joined by his niece, Sarah BOWDEN, as School Mistress. Sarah was the daughter of James’s brother, Thomas BOWDEN. In 1841, when the school pupil numbers were 31 boys and 24 girls, there had been a division so that James was Master of the Boys’ School and Sarah was Mistress of the Girls’ School. The boys were taught Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and the girls were taught the same but with the addition of Sewing and Knitting.⁶

James worked at the school until the mid 1840’s when it was time for him to retire. He was replaced by Mr James McKEAG from Lisburn in Ireland.

The Western Times 05 February 1848, published a fitting tribute:-

“THE LATE MR. BOWDEN – The following most just eulogy of this venerable teacher, whose death is recorded in our obituary, is written by one who well knew his virtues. We take it from The Flying post. “His life was of distinguished usefulness, and conducted with the even tenor of a true and sincere Christian. In early life, he conducted a school on Stepcote Hill, in this city, which, from the progress made by his pupils, obtained a deserved celebrity. Mr Bowden’s qualifications as an instructor, were not showy – (indeed his habits were unobtrusive and rather retiring than otherwise) – but they were sound, and a vacancy occurring in the Mastership of the Protestant Dissenters’ charity school, in Paris Street, he was solicited by the then trustees, to take charge of it, and at length accepted the offer so handsomely pressed upon him. For his school he did much, and at a period when matters of this description engaged a more than ordinary share of public attention in Exeter, it was conceded that the protestant dissenters charity school was among the best conducted and most efficient schools of this description the city possessed; and many – very many who have since proved ornaments to society received their education in it.

Mr. Bowden, however, was not merely the schoolmaster in the common acceptance of that term, but shone also in the higher branches of mathematics, in which he was celebrated as

a teacher, and his name held in great reputation by the professors in this branch of study, as well in the Universities as at Greenwich, and principal seminaries of learning in the kingdom, and not a few who now rank high in the senate, in science, and in literature, take pride in making it known how greatly they stand indebted for their knowledge to Mr. James Bowden, of Exeter. He continued in charge of the school in Paris-street, until the infirmities of age warned him it was time to seek retirement.” [Mrs Somerville, the celebrated mathematician, was one of his pupils].”

James’s last Will and Testament is less than a dozen lines! He bequeaths all his Estate and Effects to his nieces, Susan LAKE and Sarah BOWDEN.⁷ He died and was buried on 31 January 1848.⁸

Sources

1. Burial Register held by EDGT
2. Paris Street School 1785-1843 (Ref. 3693D/0/E/1 – Devon Heritage Centre)
3. Western Times 05 February 1848 (www.findmypast.co.uk)
4. Architect’s drawings 13 Paris Street (Ref. 3693D/0/E/4 – Devon Heritage Centre)
5. Exeter Itinerary & General Directory 1828 (pub. T & H Besley)
6. Exeter Pocket Journal 1841 – Exeter Heritage Centre
7. England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills 1384-1858 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
8. Burial Register held EDGT

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