

Memorial 25

**IN MEMORY OF
JOHN COX
A TRULY HONEST MAN
WHO DIED ? 1812 Aged 77
Also of ELIZABETH his wife
who died ?¹**

.....

The above epitaph is all that now remains of the inscription on the memorial stone. The 1894 transcription sheds more light on the missing dates - *'John Cox , a truly honest man 21 Jan 1812 aged 77 Elizabeth his wife 11 Feb 1796 aged 66.'*²

Mrs Elizabeth Cox was laid to rest around the 16th of February 1796; a new grave was made for her for which eight shillings was paid on the 16th.³ No record of her burial has come to light in any register as yet. Likewise, when her husband John died in 1812 the only record was that of *'opening grave for Mr Cox'*, and four shillings was paid for this sometime in February.⁴

In a letter written in 1889, John Cox's great grandson John Cox Lake, wrote that the remaining inscription on the gravestone that is no longer discernible was to Elizabeth Cox, John's wife.⁵

*"On sickness or distress to aid
She readily drew near;
Of that she had she freely gave'
Nor e'er withheld a tear."*

There is little we know of John and Elizabeth. It is possible that Elizabeth's maiden name was Dowdney, although this has not yet been confirmed.⁶ A John Cox, Sulphurer, was one of the congregation that separated from Bow Meeting in 1795. They set up the new independent meeting at Castle Street the year after where he became one of the Trustees.⁷ However when *The Monthly Magazine* reported John's death in 1812, his full involvement with Castle Street became clear; *'In his 77th year, Mr John Cox, of Exeter, Deacon of Castle Street meeting from its foundation.'*⁸

The term Deacon originates from the Greek word *diákonos* meaning "servant" or "minister." The New Testament, defines it as an appointed member of the local church who assists by serving other members and meeting material needs.⁹

¹ 2014 transcription.

² William Henry Hamilton Rogers' 1894 transcription www.swheritage.org.uk

³ Exeter Dissenters graveyard account book 1748-1832 accessed at South West Heritage Trust www.swheritage.org.uk

⁴ As note 3.

⁵ letter supplied by descendent of John Cox.

⁶ A marriage between John Cox and Elizabeth Dowdney took place on the 25th of December 1753 in Tiverton, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁷ Nonconformity in Exeter 1650-1875, Allan Brockett, 1962

⁸ The Monthly Magazine or British Register, Vol 33, Part 1 for 1812, accessed via www.googlebooks.co.uk

⁹ <https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-a-deacon-700680> accessed 06/07/2021.

Although there were a few burials at Castle Street Meeting John was buried with his wife Elizabeth. According to John Cox Lake, John was the father of Samuel Cox the next person to be interred in the grave. Samuel was described as a Sulphurer when he died in 1827 so it is highly possible that the son had followed his father into that trade.

Sulphuring in this instance was probably the process of bleaching cloth by using sulphur dioxide rather than the sulphurers connected to brewing. A sample of white fabric labelled '*Sulphur Shalloons*' is preserved in Claude Passavant's dispatch book from 1763-4 which is held in the London Metropolitan Archives.¹⁰ In 1784 Tuckers Hall listed in its Minutes Book the prices for various types of wool cloth including sulphured items.¹¹ In 1817 the factory in Tiverton sold by auction numerous items relating to the manufacture of Worsted including, '*a complete set of large troughs for sulphuring*'.¹² Another advert in 1820 mentions, '*a sulphur house and stove*' in connection to a sale of a weaving mill.¹³

Samuel Cox was born about 1757. He married Elizabeth Barker on the 21st of July 1777 at Holy Trinity church in Exeter.¹⁴ Elizabeth was only sixteen when they married and according to John Cox Lake, he "*stole her from a boarding school*" in Exeter. John Cox and William Cox were present as witnesses. Elizabeth was the 'eldest of the two daughters of Captain Barker of the firm of Barker and Manning, shipowners of London'.¹⁵ They had been sent to boarding school in Exeter from where Elizabeth and Samuel eloped.

Samuel and Elizabeth reportedly had a total of twenty-one children, fifteen of whom died before adulthood.¹⁶ It is difficult to verify this as only eight baptismal records have been found so far and not all in the same parish. The earliest at Trinity were Harriet (1778), Maria and Caleb (1784). They were followed by two children at All Hallows on the Walls, Mary Ann Barker (1787) and Samuel (1791) and the final three, Samuel (1800), Isabella (1802) and Caroline Cotterell (1807) were baptized at Castle Street. Both Samuels and Isabella died in infancy.

It appears that Samuel was something of a character, although listed as a sulphurer, he was also well versed in the area of Astrology. When he died the *Exeter Flying Post* reported, '*On Saturday last, in Frog Lane, Westgate in this city, aged 70, Mr Samuel Cox. The deceased was a man of strong mind, and singular habits, and as a propounder of the future fate and fortunes of the weak and credulous, had acquired a fame nearly equal to the renowned Lilly.*¹⁷ *This occupation necessity compelled him to follow, and credulity among the great and little vulgar, supplied him with dupes, even to the latest hours of his life. It is but justice however to add, that he has often amused the writer of this article, with traits of folly to which he was continually witness, while pretending to practice an art, fairly foisted on him at an early period of life from having the character of a learned and the science of Astrology, taken up as an amusement, became in its degree a means of livelihood. Deception can never be vindicated, nor so far as it meant to be vindicate the deceased – but this put aside, he was an honest and independent man, and an affectionate father to a numerous family.*¹⁸

¹⁰ Published in The Exeter Cloth Dispatch Book 1763-1765, Ed. Todd Gray, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 2021.

¹¹ Tuckers Hall Minutes (58/7/5/5) available at South West Heritage Trust www.swheritage.org.uk

¹² Exeter Flying Post 10 April 1817, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

¹³ Exeter Flying Post 29 June 1820 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁴ Holy Trinity marriage register accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁵ As note 5.

¹⁶ Stated in John Cox Lake's letter.

¹⁷ William Lilly (1602-1681), astrologer.

¹⁸ Exeter Flying Post 15 November 1827 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk



An example of astrological predictions for 1829. © The Wellcome Collection.

Elizabeth died at the beginning of 1835 and was buried on the 21st of January.¹⁹ Of the children that Samuel and Elizabeth had, the six that we know of who grew to adulthood all married and had families of their own.

Harriet married John Hutchings, a Fuller by trade. They married on the 28th of September 1798 at St John's in Exeter. Both were described as from the parish of All Hallows on the Walls.²⁰ In the 1841 census they were recorded in Holloway Street with their children. By 1851 they were living in Atwill's alms-houses on New North Road.²¹ By the 1850's the alms houses were for the accommodation of poor, aged, woollen industry workers of the city of Exeter.²² Harriet died there in June 1862 and was buried at St. David's on the 10th.²³

Maria married James Palliet Rodier on the 19th of November 1807 at St. Peter's, Exeter Cathedral.

¹⁹ Georges meeting burial register 1824-1837 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

²⁰ All Hallows on the Walls did not have a standing church at this time and St John's was the next parish.

²¹ 1841 census accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

²² A complete description of Atwell's charity is published in *The History and Description of the City of Exeter, and Its Environs, Ancient and Modern*, Alexander Jenkins, 1817.

²³ St. David's parish records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

Both were listed as 'of the Close'. Samuel Cox, presumably her father, was one of the witnesses.²⁴ In 1841 they were living in James Street in St Mary Major with James as a wool stapler.²⁵ By 1851 he was still a wool merchant, but they had moved to St David's Hill. Tucker's Hall Minutes Book mention his son William Bickham Rodier being apprenticed to his father in the 1820's as a weaver.²⁶

Caleb married Mary Morris on the 26th of December 1807 at St David's church with Samuel Cox and Elizabeth Morris as witnesses.²⁷ Caleb was a conveyancer by trade. At some point before 1832 he moved out of Exeter and settled in Beaminster for a time before moving to Devizes in Wiltshire. On the 26th of March 1831 Caleb became a 'Freeman' of Exeter, '*Caleb Cox of Beaminster, Co. Dorset gent, by succession*'.²⁸ Caleb died on the 15th of July 1869 at his son's house in Hawksbury Upton, Gloucestershire.²⁹ The fact that Caleb was a freeman by succession would mean that Samuel his father was also a freeman.

Elizabeth Barker married Josiah Lake on the 18th of November 1809 at St Mary Steps with Samuel Cox as one of the witnesses.³⁰ Josiah was described in the 1803 Militia List as 'lame, due to an accident as a child'. He worked as an office clerk but died when he was only thirty-one in 1817, at Rackclose Lane leaving Elizabeth with five children. After Josiah died there was '*An appeal to the public*' for subscriptions for the widow and her '*five children*'.³¹ A newspaper advertisement placed by Elizabeth '*begs to return her most grateful acknowledgements to a generous public for the kind assistance afforded herself and infant family.*' This generosity enabled her to start a straw-hat and clear-starcher business at 33 New Bridge Street in 1818.³²



26th April 1855 Exeter Flying Post

By the time of her death in 1866, both she and Elizabeth her daughter had moved to 42 High Street, Exeter.³³ This was next door to John Hinton Lake, a dispensing chemist. It has not been possible to determine whether John Hinton Lake and Josiah Lake were related.

²⁴ St. Peters, Exeter Cathedral records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁵ A woolstapler buys the raw fleece, grades it, and sells it on.

²⁶ Tuckers Hall Minutes accessed at the Southwest Heritage Trust.

²⁷ St. David's parish records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁸ Exeter Freeman, 1266-1967, ed. Margery M. Rowe and Andres M. Jackson, 1973 Devon and Cornwall Record Society

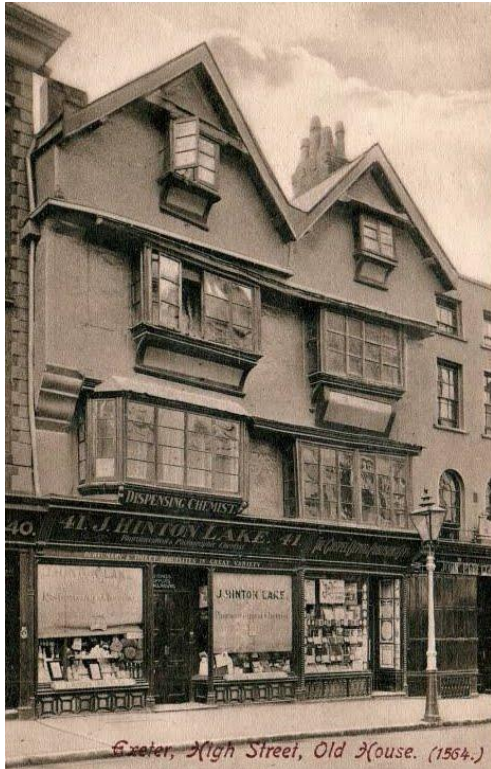
²⁹ The Bristol Mercury 24th July 1869 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³⁰ St Mary Steps parish records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³¹ Exeter Flying Post 27th November 1817, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³² Exeter Flying Post 29th January 1818 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³³ This was directly next to John Hinton Lake's shop.



John Hinton Lake at 41 High Street showing
42 just to the left of the lamppost.

Henry Cox is the only son to have any of his own family buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard. Henry married Ann Sparke on the 4th of May 1818 at Holy Trinity church; his sister Harriet Hutchings was a witness.³⁴ Henry appears to have had a varied career which became evident in 1840 when he became bankrupt. *'Henry Cox late of Fore street Hill in the city of Exeter Attorney's clerk and Sulphurman previously of Frog street Exeter Attorney's Clerk, Sulphurman and General Shop keeper formerly of Frog street aforesaid Stone Mason, Sulphurman'*.³⁵ Like his father he started out as a Sulphurman but it is possible with the declining and changing cloth industry he had to change trade. Henry and Ann had at least nine children, five possibly six died in childhood, and of those named, **Marianne** (1825-1829), **Samuel Barker** (1828-1829), **Emily** (1830-1834), **William Sparkes** (1836-1837) and **Samuel Lake** (1837-1838) are all buried in the graveyard. There is no known marker for these burials but there is evidence that the first three may have been buried in the same grave. A new grave was made in September 1818 for Mrs Cox's child at a cost of 8 shillings.³⁶ This

child is not named, and no baptism has been found. The grave was re-opened for Marianne and Samuel at a cost of 4 shillings each time. Henry died in 1888. *'October 23, at 89 Paris Street, Exeter, Mr Henry Cox, late of the Mint, aged 91'*.³⁷

Caroline Cotterell married William Porter at St Edmunds church on the 25th of July 1830.³⁸ William was a cabinet maker by trade. They moved away from Exeter to Somerset and then Cheshire before returning to Exeter and in 1851 they are to be found at 10 Bear Street with nine children.³⁹ William died in 1860. By 1871 Caroline and her family had moved to London where she died aged eighty-seven in 1893.

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October 2021

³⁴ Holy Trinity parish records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³⁵ The London Gazette, 30th March 1840 <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

³⁶ As note 3.

³⁷ The Western Times, October 25 1888 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³⁸ St Edmunds parish records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³⁹ 1851 census accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

