

## Memorial 30

**George Withers** died September 1749  
**Susanna Withers** died August 1755  
**Eliz. Withers** died May 1756  
**Susanna Withers** died March 1762  
**Benj. Withers** died March --  
**Eliz. Withers** died 16th September 1792  
**John Withers** died 6th April 1807

This memorial ledgerstone is very eroded and some words have been lost or are difficult to decipher.



The stone was not recorded by W.H. Hamilton Rogers in 1894, so it is possible that it was already overgrown by that date. There is also no record of the stone during the 1984 or 2010 surveys. The stone was uncovered during the restoration project in 2014 and the names and details above were recorded.

George Withers was the son of the Reverend John Withers of Exeter (1669-1729)<sup>1</sup> and his wife Elizabeth. He was baptised by the Reverend John Lavington at the Bow Meeting on 27 March 1717.<sup>2</sup> George died in 1749. The 2014 transcription records his death in September but this is now in doubt as he signed his Will on "*the ninth day of October*"<sup>3</sup> and was buried later that month on the 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup>

We know a little about George from his Will of 1749.<sup>3</sup> He was a haberdasher, in partnership with his brother Benjamin, a grocer. Benjamin had been a subscriber to the founding of the Dissenters' Graveyard and would later subscribe to the building of the new George's Meeting House.<sup>4</sup> George didn't mention a

wife or children but did state his "*great affection*" for Sibella Stephens, daughter of Samuel Stephens, an Exeter apothecary. In addition to his brother, Benjamin, George also had a brother, John, and a sister, Susanna; these two he made his executors with instructions to provide for their Mother. George stated his wish that that "*my body be buried in the Dissenters New Burying Ground without the South Gate*" and he was buried there on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1749, the service conducted by Mr Green.<sup>2</sup>

Susanna Withers was described as the daughter of George's brother Benjamin. Her burial service took place on 8 August 1755 and was conducted by the Reverend Abraham Tozer. Susanna was described as "a child" no age is given<sup>2</sup>. No record has yet been found of her birth or baptism.

Elizabeth Withers was the wife of Benjamin Withers. There is a record of a marriage between Benjamin Withers and Elizabeth Lee on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1735 at St Leonards Exeter.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth died in May 1756 but no burial record has been found, probably because there is a gap in the records at this period.

Susanna Withers died in March 1762. This Susanna was George's sister as described above. Again, no burial record has been found.

Benjamin Withers is described as the son of B... Withers, possibly George's nephew, son of brother Benjamin but the stone is eroded and details lost. No records have yet been found to confirm this.

Elizabeth Withers (c.1741-1792) was the daughter of Benjamin Withers. No record of her birth or baptism has been found but the burial record gives her age as 51.<sup>2</sup> Her father left her a large legacy in his Will.<sup>6</sup> We can learn a little about Elizabeth from her own Will.<sup>7</sup> She was living in Lymptone at the time of her death and left legacies for the support of both George's and Gulliford Meetings together with their Ministers. Elizabeth also mentioned her cousins Thomas Huckell Lee and Nathaniel Wakeford. This connection with the Lee family probably comes from her mother but more research is needed to make the link between the families. The Lee family has a chest tomb in Gulliford graveyard and Thomas is recorded as a Trustee of Gulliford in 1777.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth was buried on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792, the service conducted by James Manning.<sup>2</sup>

John Withers (1738-1807) was the son of Benjamin Withers and followed him in his trade as a grocer.<sup>6</sup> No record of birth or baptism has been found but the burial record gives John's age as 69.<sup>2</sup> Once again we can learn something of John from his Will.<sup>9</sup> It is a long and detailed document, the probate copy runs to 27 pages and there are 33 codicils. The Will was originally written in October 1792 with the first codicil dated November 1792, including a provision for "*my late sisters Riding Mare ... to be kept free from hard labour and never to be sold or lent*". The other codicils are regular additions spanning the years until 1806.

John, like his sister Elizabeth was living in Lymptone at the time of his death on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1807. The link with the Lee family is again apparent as John made "*my cousin*" John Huckell Lee and "*his brother in law*" Nathaniel Wakeford his executors, although by codicil 12, added in 1798, there seems to have been a dispute of some kind because Nathaniel Wakeford was removed "*I have this day ordered in writing that Nath'l Wakeford shall not be my Executor or have any management of my Effects...*" There were several bequests to George's and Bow Meetings including one specifically for "*the training of boys to sing psalm tunes at the time of public worship*".

The transcription from the memorial stone records John's date of death as 6<sup>th</sup> April 1807. A notice appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* on 9<sup>th</sup> April, "*On Monday last died at Lympton, near this city, John Withers, esq. aged 69 years, after a lingering and painful illness, which he bore with patient resignation.*" He was buried on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1807, the service conducted by Reverend James Manning<sup>2</sup>.

#### Sources:

- <sup>1</sup> Surman Index Online - <https://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/> (Accessed May 2021).
- <sup>2</sup> Register of Births and Baptisms at the Bow Presbyterian Meeting House in Exeter, Devon from 1687 to 1823 with A Register of Burials From 1748 To 1824 accessed via TheGenealogist.co.uk 2021 (April 2021).
- <sup>3</sup> *Will of George Withers - Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) Wills, 1384-1858* [database online]. TheGenealogist.co.uk 2021 (accessed May 2021).
- <sup>4</sup> Report and Account book of Dissenters Burial Ground 1748-1832 (DRO3693D/0/B/1).
- <sup>5</sup> *England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973* accessed via Ancestry (April 2021).
- <sup>6</sup> *Will of Benjamin Withers - Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) Wills, 1384-1858* [database online]. TheGenealogist.co.uk 2021 (accessed May 2021).
- <sup>7</sup> *Will of Elizabeth Withers - Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) Wills, 1384-1858* [database online]. TheGenealogist.co.uk 2021 (accessed May 2021).
- <sup>8</sup> Friends of Gulliford Burial Ground <http://fogbg.org.uk/> (accessed May 2021).
- <sup>9</sup> *Will of John Withers - Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) Wills, 1384-1858* [database online]. TheGenealogist.co.uk 2021 (accessed May 2021).

Sue Moss, May 2021