

**SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
ALICE KENDLE¹
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE JANUARY 17TH 1837
AGED 77**

Alice Kendall of Trinity, Exeter, a widow was buried on 22 January 1837 aged 77.²

The Exeter Flying Post reported Alice's death, "*Jan, 17, in the 77th year of her age, after a long illness, Mrs Alice Kendall, for upwards of a half century sextoness at George's Meeting in this city.*"³

Records show that a William Kendal and Alice Southard were married on the 18th of August 1799 at Saint Sidwell's church in Exeter.⁴ Alice would have been about thirty-nine when she married but the transcript is unclear whether she was a spinster or a widow. So far it has not been possible to confirm whether they had any children, where they lived and when William died.

The only Kendall in the 1803 Exeter Militia list was a J. Kendall, stonemason, living in St David's Parish.⁵ Three William Kendalls died in Exeter between 1799 and 1837, but only two are possible candidates for Alice's husband. The names Kendall and Southard are relatively common in Exeter at that time, although no direct links have been discovered yet.

The fact that Alice was a Sextoness shows us that she was affiliated to George's Meeting more than as one of the congregation. A Sexton or Sextoness is a church officer or employee who takes care of the church property and performs related minor duties (such as ringing the bell for services and digging graves).⁶ The Dissenters burial ground and that behind George's Meeting had separate gravediggers, so Alice was not called upon for that service, unlike the duties of Esther Hammerton of Kingston upon Thames (see next page).⁷ The term Sextoness appears to be interchangeable with Sexton here at George's.⁸

The first we hear of Alice in the minute books of George's Meeting is on the 18th of July 1793 when it was resolved '*that Alice Southard do succeed Mary Sharlock as Sexton on the left hand side of this church*'.⁹ Some of the earliest records show that George's had more than one Sexton or Sextoness at any one time, sometimes both husband and wife, each being responsible for different areas of the building. The role of sexton there was one of opening and closing the building, cleaning, including the street outside, ensuring there were enough supplies and the general upkeep of the building.

¹ In the original documents her surname is written as either Kendall, Kendel or kendle.

² Georges meeting burial register (DRO3693D/R1) www.swheritage.co.uk

³ Exeter Flying Post 26 January 1837, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁴ Saint Sidwell's parish transcripts accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁵ Exeter Militia List 1803, W. G. Hoskins, 1972.

⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexton> accessed 10/06/2021.

⁷ 'Portraits, memoirs, and characters, of remarkable persons: from the revolution in 1688 to the end of the reign of George II' (1820), accessed via <https://digital.library.villanova.edu/VuDL/Home/> 14/06/2021.

⁸ Minute book of Georges Meeting 1760-1817 (3693D/0/M/2) accessed at www.swheritage.org.uk

⁹ As note 7.



Portraits, memoirs, and characters, of remarkable persons: from the revolution in 1688 to the end of the reign of George II ' (1820). Image courtesy of Digital Library@ Villanova University.

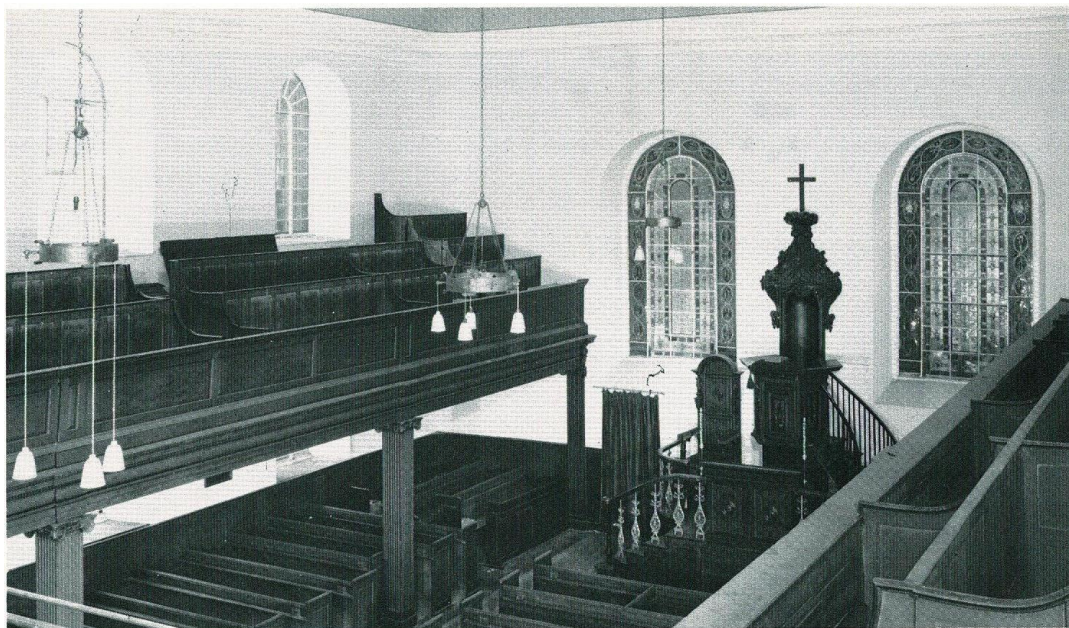


Plate 4. Interior of George's Meeting House, South Street, completed 1760. The elaborate canopy of the pulpit is probably late seventeenth century and may have come from the older James's Meeting House erected in 1687. Photo National Monuments Record.

Taken from 'Eighteenth Century Exeter' by Robert Newton. Apart from the lights, the above image is probably how Alice would have known the meeting house.

We know that the meeting house was hot in the summer months, so the sextons were requested to open all the windows before the morning and afternoon services in the summer.¹⁰

¹⁰ As note 7.

By 1806 Alice had married and the records now show her as Mrs Kendle, along with John Middleton and his daughter Sarah. On the 15th of October 1807, the account book shows that Alice was paid, 'A quarter sallery to Mrs kendle of cleaning the new vestry due midsummer last, 5/3'.¹¹



Georges Meeting House showing where the vestries were attached.

It appears that Sarah Middleton was the sexton in charge of the galleries and Alice for the vestries. Not only are the accounts revealing about the salaries and incidentals paid out but also something of the character of those in the office of Sexton.

In 1809 it was '*discovered that Sarah Middleton the Sexton in the gallery has been in the habit of letting out seats for her own emolument and that her conduct in other respects has been very improper*'. It was resolved that, '*she be desired to attend the next meeting of the trustees and reprimanded likewise that she be informed that unless she desists from such conduct in future she will be discharged*.' Sarah did not desist and was likewise dismissed in 1812. After her dismissal the treasurer, '*also reports that the sittings in the gallery had been regulated pursuant to the resolution thereon*'.¹² Prices were set and who could sit where was agreed.

Mrs Ham, another sexton appointed in 1776 to the 'right hand side of the church'. By 1824 after almost forty-eight years of service she was, '*requested to attend us the next meeting of the Trustees, and that she be told that unless she desists from quarrelling and unless she behaves respectfully to the Treasurer and the Trustees she will be discharged*'.¹³

¹¹ As note 7.

¹² As note 7.

¹³ As note 7.

Throughout the years Alice was paid every quarter plus extra for mops, candles and snuffers and wood, presumably for heating the vestries. Her salary increased gradually throughout the years, and she was also paid '*one shilling for each night of her attendance on any special meetings held during the week*'. This included any committee meetings or lectures given by the clergy. On the 18th of April 1816, the Trustees paid, '*Kendall attending Dr Carpenters Lectures (15), 15/-*'. The next quarter she was paid for attending a further eighteen lectures by him.¹⁴ Presumably she was not paid to 'attend' the lectures but to open the meeting house, prepare and clean afterwards.

At a meeting of the Trustees on September the 27th 1835, '*Elizabeth Kendall having resigned the office of Sexton – Resolved that in consequence of her long past services and good conduct she be allowed during the pleasure of the Trustees the sum of one pound quarterly the payment to commence at Michaelmas 1835*'¹⁵. We know from her death notice that she had been unwell for a while so had she resigned because of her ill health?

She received her four pounds a year up until her death, when on the 7th of February 1837 the account book noted, '*Kendall superannuation pay to Xmas (since dead) £1.0.0d*'. After 1837 those receiving their pay had to sign for it in the account's book. Mary Greenaway, sexton, and Mrs Jennings who replaced Alice as sexton of the vestries could not write so they signed X by their names. Was this also the case for Alice?

In 1806 when Mrs Mary Shares died, she was listed as Sexton in the burial register, but the Account book elucidates it further by saying she had been the Sexton of the Women's gallery at Georges Meeting for several years and as such was exempt from burial fees. This also appears to be the case for other sexton's and so presumably also for Alice. Who paid for her gravestone we do not know.

After Alice resigned as sexton there was an amount of reshuffling at George's. A Mrs Jennings succeeded her having charge of the vestries and her husband took her post as 'Sexton on the other side of the meeting' and William Doeg was appointed as Sexton in the main gallery in the place of him.¹⁶

Anne Amosford 2014 (updated June 2021).

¹⁴ Dr Lant Carpenter, Reverend at George's Meeting until 1817 when he moved to Lewin's Mead in Bristol.

¹⁵ The clerk writing the minutes mistakenly called her Elizabeth. Minute book of Georges Meeting 1818-1880 (3693/0/M/7) accessed at www.swheritage.org.uk

¹⁶ See William Doeg's biography www.edgt.org.uk