

REV. ABRAHAM TOZER (c 1715-1794)

No Memorial

ABRAHAM TOZER (1750-1821)

REBECCA TOZER (1801-1802)

WILLIAM TOZER (c 1804-1881)

REBECCA TOZER (1831-1832)

2 un-named infants buried 1800 & 1805

Four generations of the Tozer family were buried in the Dissenters Graveyard; Reverend Abraham, his son, four grandchildren and a great-grandchild. There were many other Tozer families in Exeter at the time and there are several other Tozers buried in the Graveyard who cannot be shown to be related to this family.

Abraham Tozer was born about 1715 and probably grew up in a house on the High Street which his father, Aaron Tozer, had inherited from his own father, also called Aaron, who died in 1686.¹ Aaron was a Haberdasher - a seller of small wares such as needles, pins, buttons, ribbons, lace etc. Some haberdashers sold hats, gloves, muffs and fans; others sold cloth, thus overlapping with the Mercers and Drapers trades. Aaron was listed as a haberdasher of hats in the 1723 Oath Rolls.² He must have been reasonably well off as on his death in 1743 was able to bequeath two hundred pounds apiece to his son Abraham and to his four unmarried daughters.³

Abraham had at least eight siblings: John (1703), Susannah (1704), Elizabeth (1705), Mary (1706), Solomon (1711), Samuel, Ann and Frances (1719) who would marry William Kennaway in 1750. The older children were all baptised at the parish church of Allhallows Goldsmith Street⁴ but by 1719 the family were attending Bow Meeting where Frances was baptised on 20th December 1719.⁵ No baptism records have been found for Abraham, Samuel and Ann but all three were mentioned in their father's will. Their mother's name is unknown.

Non-conformists were debarred from attending university at Oxford or Cambridge but there were several "dissenting academies" around the country which provided access to higher education for those outside the Church of England. Abraham studied at the Northampton Academy under Dr Philip Dodderidge in about 1735.⁶

After completing his studies Abraham settled in Norwich where from about 1739 he was an assistant to Reverend Thomas Scott at the Old Meeting House.⁷ Abraham was ordained on 20th June 1745 at the Old Meeting House. Philip Dodderidge was in attendance and preached a sermon. Abraham then worked as co-minister with Thomas Scott until Scott's death in 1746. In 1747 Abraham was joined as co-minister by Reverend Samuel Wood.⁸

On 21st July 1748 Abraham married Rebecca Holman at St Leonard's church in Streatham.⁹ She was the daughter of William Holman, a draper of Sudbury in Suffolk, and his wife Frances. Their first child, Abraham, was born on 9th April 1749 and baptised by his father on 15th April at The Old Meeting House. He must have died in infancy for their second son was also named Abraham; he was born on 8th June 1750 and baptised on 10th July by Philip Dodderidge. A third son, William, was born on 28th January 1753 and baptised on 12th February.¹⁰

In 1754 Abraham and his family moved back to Exeter and in 1755 he became a minister at Bow Meeting¹¹; a post which he was to hold for the next forty years.

The Tozers' youngest child, Rebecca, was born two years later and was baptised by Abraham on 5th June 1757.¹² She died at only a few weeks old and was buried at St Paul's church on 20th July.¹³

Bow Meeting was one of the "Three united congregations of Protestant dissenters", the others being James' Meeting and Little Meeting. James' and Bow each had two ministers who would preach in rotation at Little Meeting. Abraham worked alongside John Lavington at Bow while the two ministers of James' Meeting were Stephen and Micajah Towgood. John Lavington died in 1759 and was not replaced, leaving Abraham as sole pastor of Bow. Around this time Little Meeting was closed and a new meeting house was built to replace James' Meeting. This was George's Meeting in South Street. It opened in 1760 and was paid for from the proceeds of selling Little and James' Meeting houses and by subscriptions raised from members of the congregations and sympathizers. Abraham contributed £15 towards the costs.

Under the influence of the Towgoods and their successors the congregation of George's Meeting gradually became more Unitarian in their beliefs whereas Abraham Tozer and his flock at Bow remained orthodox and Trinitarian in outlook. While the two meetings still called themselves the "united congregations" and the three ministers continued to preach in each others chapels the congregation at Bow would only allow their own minister to officiate at the Lord's Supper there.¹⁴

Abraham died in 1794. He was buried in the dissenters graveyard on 8th May by James Manning. "*Rev'd Abraham Tozer, 40 years minister of the two United Congregations of Protestant Dissenters in Exeter, aged 79.*"¹⁵ The date of Abraham's wife's death is unknown; there is more than one entry in the burial records of the Dissenters Graveyard that refers to "Mrs Tozer" but none that can definitely be ascribed to her.

Abraham's death led to a crisis at Bow Meeting. A meeting of subscribers to the "two united congregations" was held in July 1794 and invited Rev. Joseph Bretland to become minister at Bow. However, he was a Unitarian and most of the more orthodox congregation of Bow were unwilling to accept him. They left the "united congregations" and in 1795 formed a Congregational Church in Castle Street under the Rev. John Giles. Bow Meeting house was pulled down shortly afterwards.¹⁶

Abraham was survived by his two sons William and Abraham.

William Tozer was apprenticed in 1767, aged 14, to his uncle Chaplin Holman who was a draper in Sudbury, Suffolk.¹⁷ In 1775 he married his cousin Frances Holman, with whom he had two daughters; Frances (1776) and Rebecca (1777). Following Frances' death in 1778 William married Hannah Finch and they had four children; Hannah (1780), Sarah (1782), Abraham (1783) and William (1789). All of his children were baptised at Sudbury's non-conformist chapel¹⁸. By the time of his death William was a wealthy man, styling himself a gentleman and leaving several thousand pounds to his children. He also left £10 to the Sunday school of the Old Meeting in Sudbury.¹⁹ He died in Exeter in 1820; perhaps on a visit to his brother. No record of his burial has been found but there was an obituary in the local Suffolk paper: "*Wednesday last, at Exeter, after a lingering illness, which he supported with exemplary patience, Mr William Tozer, of Sudbury, in the 67th year of his age. His urbanity as a gentleman, his kindness as a neighbour, his sincerity as a friend, his affection as a relation, and his benevolence and piety as a christian, have endeared him to the memory of all who knew him.*"²⁰

William's brother **Abraham Tozer** was apprenticed in 1765, aged 15, to Joseph Sanders, a linen draper of Exeter.²¹ He appears to have been married twice, though his first wife's name is unknown. He had a son, Abraham, around 1793. He married Ann Pickard in 1798 at St Stephens in Exeter²² and they had at least six children; Ann (1799), Rebecca (1800), Rebecca (1801), Frances (c1803), William (c1804)

and an un-named child in 1805. No baptisms have been found for William or Frances, but the other three girls were baptised at George's Meeting.²³

Of Abraham's seven children only Abraham, Ann and Frances survived to adulthood. Four of Abraham's children were buried in the Dissenters Graveyard; "*a child of Mr Abraham Tozer*" in 1800 (this may have been the first Rebecca); **Rebecca** aged 8 months on 7th May 1802; "*an infant child of Mr Abraham Tozer*" on 21st August 1805 and **William**, aged 14, on 3rd November 1818. It is possible that the Ann Tozer who was buried there on 11th November 1806 aged 35 was Abraham's wife.²⁴ Abraham died in 1821 and was buried on 10th January at the Dissenters Graveyard.²⁵ Apart from some legacies to his brother William's children he left everything to his son Abraham who was referred to as a gentleman of Alphington.²⁶

The younger Abraham married Elizabeth Corbett in Walthamstow in 1824.²⁷ They lived in Alphington for a number of years and their children Abraham (1826), Elizabeth Ann (1827), Richard James (1828), and Frances (1830) were all baptised at George's Meeting.²⁸ Another daughter, **Rebecca**, was born in 1831 but died at the age of six months and was buried at the Dissenters Graveyard on 13th January 1832.²⁹ She was the great-granddaughter of Rev. Abraham and there were now four generations of the Tozer family buried at the Dissenters Graveyard.

A few months later, on 26th August 1832, another daughter, Rebecca Maria, was born. She was baptised at George's Meeting on 24th April 1833³⁰ Not long afterwards Abraham and his family left Exeter and their two youngest children Ellen and Edgar were born in Elizabeth's home town of Walthamstow in Essex.³¹

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