

James Adam Esquire 1779-1809

No memorial

James Adam, 'Second Mate or officer of the Elphinstone an East Indiaman' was buried in the Dissenters graveyard on 18th December 1809. The burial register notes that he '*died of a consumption at Heavitree and was buried in Magdalen Street,*' that he was twenty-nine (on the coffin) and the son of Dr. Adam of Edinburgh.¹

His death was reported in numerous publications. One stated that he died '*On the 14th December at Maryton, Exeter. Mr James Adam, late second officer of the Hon. East India Company's ship Elphinstone, and son of Dr. Alexander Adam, Edinburgh.*'² The notice in the Perthshire Courier of the 25th of December that year stated that, '*At Heavy tree, near Exeter on the 14th curt. Mr, James Adam, eldest son of the late Dr Adam.*' Maryton has not been traced and may be a mistaken transcription for Heavy tree (Heavitree).

The burial register records the fee for '*Opening a new grave for Mr James Adam son of Dr Adam of Edinburgh a stranger 16/- paid on the day.*'³ We know little about James' private life, but we do however have accounts of his career and his death through records of his father as shall be seen later.

James was born on Thursday 28th October 1779 at Bristo Street in Edinburgh. He was baptised the day after at St. Cuthbert's Chapel of Ease which was close to his home.⁴ Witnesses at his baptism included Mr Robert Halden (Haldane) Esquire of Airthey aged 15 and his brother James aged 11.⁵ His parents, Dr Alexander Adam, and Mrs Agnes Munro⁶ had married on the 26th August 1775 at Kinloss where Agnes's father James was the Minister. Their marriage was reported at the time in the Scots Magazine.⁷

James was the couple's third child, Alexander their first son was born on the 3rd June 1776 and baptised on the 21st at St. Cuthbert's and a sister Mary Ann was born on the 8th March 1778 and baptised on the 30th March.⁸ Both of James' siblings died young and unfortunately, Agnes appears to have died shortly after giving birth to James.⁹

Alexander remarried ten years later to Jane Cosser on the 30th April 1789 at St. John the Evangelist, Smiths Square, London.¹⁰ In the church register he is listed as a bachelor. Alexander and Jane had three children together, Walter born in 1792, Agnes born in 1793 and Christian (Christina) born in 1795. All were baptised at St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh.¹¹ James would have been thirteen when his half-brother was born.

¹ Exeter Mint (Presbyterian) Births, baptisms and Burials 1719-1810, RG4 0336, accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

² From 'The Naval Chronicle Volume 22, July – December 1809'

³ Report and Account book of Dissenters Burial Ground 1748-1831, DRO3693D/0/B/1, www.swheritage.org.uk

⁴ St. Cuthbert's Parish Register accessed via <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

⁵ Memoirs of the lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of his brother, James Alexander Haldane. by Alexander Haldane, Esq., of the Inner Temple, Barrister-at-Law, 1853.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/ABL0508.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext> accessed 19/5/2022

⁶ In Scotland it was common to continue to use the woman's maiden name after marriage.

⁷ The Scots Magazine, August 1775 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁸ As note 4.

⁹ At present this is hearsay via www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁰ Westminster, London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1935 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

¹¹ As note 4.

James, as mentioned above, was in the employ of the East India Company (EIC) when he died.¹² It is not known when James first ventured onto the sea as a profession but as an officer, he would have had to be sworn into the company's service.¹³ It is possible that he may have started at an early age like many young men at that time such as James Haldane who was present at his baptism.¹⁴

The first records that have been found so far show him at the age of twenty-two in 1803 as the Third Mate on the *Cirencester*, under Captain Thomas Robertson.¹⁵ This was the ship's 5th voyage to Bombay, Madras and China returning in spring 1805.¹⁶ According to Edward Keble Chatterton, '*To become a third mate he had to be aged twenty-one and been two voyages in the Company's service to and from India or China*'.¹⁷ So it is to be assumed that James had been in service from at least the age of nineteen.



The *Cirencester* off the coast of St. Helena

He was promoted to 2nd Mate for his last two voyages aboard the *Elphinstone*, a much larger ship, under Captain Milliken Craig.¹⁸ These were the ship's 2nd and 3rd voyages also to Bombay and China. As second mate James earned £76 10. 8d for each voyage. There were only two people that outranked him, Milliken Craig, the Commander who earned £191.6.8d and the Chief Mate who was paid £95.13.4d., whilst the 3rd Mate's salary was less at £66.19.4d. '

¹² East India Company, *Elphinstone* Pay Book (L/MAR/B/201/H) held in the Asian and African studies Library in the British Library.

¹³ The old Eastindiamen, E. Keble Chatterton, 1914. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54561/54561-h/54561-h.htm> accessed 24/05/2022.

¹⁴ As note 5.

¹⁵ https://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_ship&id=29222
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cirencester_\(1795_EIC_ship\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cirencester_(1795_EIC_ship))

¹⁶ The *Cirencester* Logbook 1801-3 is in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

¹⁷ As note 13.

¹⁸ IOR/L/MAR/B/201C and D, Journals of Captain Milliken Craig in the Asian and African Studies Library in the British Library.

The EIC's employees were permitted private trade and depending on rank the tonnage was proportionate. As Second Mate he was allowed six tons on each leg of the journey but not allowed to include woollen goods or firearms on the way out or tea (from India), chinaware, raw silk, or Nankeen cloth, musk, camphor, or poisonous drugs on the return journey. Presumably, the East India Company had the monopoly on these wares themselves. This trade was lucrative and a bonus to their wages even with customs and a percentage going to the EIC.

Before being allowed to proceed to his duty on board, an officer had to sign a contract for performing the voyage, and a petition for his "private trade" outwards. James would have had to send details of what he wanted to trade to the Committee of Shipping of the East India Company, giving the weight and details of items.



The Honourable East India Company Emblem

Arthur McArthur the purser on board the *Elphinstone* who died in November 1809 wrote in his Will that 'My agreement with Captain Craig of the *Elphinstone* this voyage is 7 ½ per cent upon the profits of the voyage arising from private trade and passengers.' Did James have a similar agreement? Unfortunately, no Will for James has been discovered.

Voyages like these lasting almost two years can be summed up by a memorial in the old Holy Trinity Church, Exeter to William Brabazon Wye the Chief Mate who sailed with James on his final voyage:

*Sacred to the memory of William Brabazon Wye Esqr. aged 37
Late Commander of one of his Majestys Packets on the Falmouth Station.
**A long and lingering illness contracted during 23 years service in climates
ill adapted to a European constitution** deprived the service of an able
experienced commander, society of a valuable member, his numerous friends
and relations of a warm friend, a dutiful son, an affectionate brother, his
disconsolate widow of a fond and indulgent husband to whose memory
this last tribute of her grief and affectionate remembrance is erected
on the 3rd of October 1812.¹⁹*

James boarded the *Elphinstone* for what we now know to be his last journey, at Gravesend on the 4th December 1807.²⁰ As the Second Mate he was allowed to carry on board various stores including wine, beer, and spirits; and various groceries for his own consumption. On the outward journey there were a total of four hundred and eighty-seven people onboard, one hundred and fifty were crew, the

¹⁹ Exeter churches; notes on the history, fabrics and features of interest in the churches of the Deanery of Christianity, Devon, Cresswell, Beatrix F. 1908

<https://archive.org/details/exeterchurchesno00cresiala/page/n3/mode/2up> accessed 24/05/2022.

²⁰ As note 17.

remainder being passengers, military recruits for the Honourable East India Company and Lascars.²¹

Commander Craig kept, (as did all ships' Captains) a detailed journal noting everything that happened each day including their position, the weather, moon phases etc. By the 23rd January 1808 they were sailing past the Eddystone Lighthouse. At various stages of the journey, they travelled in convoy with other company ships.

Life on board settled into a routine of cleaning decks, mending sails, pumping out water and other everyday duties. However, there were incidents which made life less mundane such as a wedding on Monday 14th March 1808. *'At 11 A. M. Andrew Moore Dawe Esqr. and Miss Eliza Ann Susan Hare were united in the Holy Bands of Matrimony.'* A few days later on Saturday 19th March 1808 *'At 4 P.M. sharks were seen about the ship Mrs Eliza Dawe being somewhat anxious to see them fell overboard from the Great Cabin window, her husband only in their cabin. Threw ropes to her and lowered down the gig into which she was taken before any of the sharks returned to the stern.'*²²

As Second Mate James was given various responsibilities such as commanding one of the gun decks; retrieving 'runners' (deserters) and using *'mathematical telegraph'* signalling to other ships in the convoy.²³

By Monday 24th April 1809 on their return journey Captain Craig noted *'It is with much concern that I have to observe that the surgeon's sick report of this day contains no less than 22 patients unfit for duty mostly from Fluxes'*. The day after again he wrote *'It is with much pain I have to observe the surgeon's report contains the same number and he informs me that he imputes their complaints to a want of a warm breakfast the poor creatures Tea and sugar being expended. Humanity requires the interference of the Honble Court to order and command every one of their ships to furnish a warm breakfast for their men which would be no great expense and would save the lives of hundreds annually.'*

He continued with reports of the sick, delegating jobs because his officers were unfit for duty. On Sunday 4th June 1809 there were still a high number, *'Twenty five unfit for duty, among whom my chief and second officer.'*

This was the last entry regarding the sick and there was no mention of them regaining their health so is it to be assumed that James was unwell from then until his death six months later.

By early September 1809 they were at Downs and from there gradually made their way to Deptford where the ship was anchored.²⁴ When and where James disembarked is not documented. Likewise, whether he had his six tons of cargo on board we may never know.

²¹ Lascars were sailors or militiaman from the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, the Arab world, British Somaliland, or other land east of the Cape of Good Hope, who were employed on European ships from the 16th century until the middle of the 20th century. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lascar>

²² As note 16.

²³ In the Log of the Lady Jane Dundas, Captain Sir Hugh Lindsay mentions that on Tuesday 31st March 1807 he gave Captain Harington a spare copy of the newly published, *Telegraphic signals; or marine vocabulary*, Popham, Home, Sir, 1801, C. Roworth Printer, Bell Yard, Temple Bar. <http://3decks.pbworks.com/f/Admiral%2520Home%2520Popham%2520Telegraph%2520signal%2520book%2520Final%2520edition.pdf> accessed 24/05/2022.

²⁴ Downs is a sheltered area of water off the Kent coast near Deal. 'Ships awaiting an easterly wind to take them into the English Channel and those going up to London gathered there, often for quite long periods.' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Downs_\(ship_anchorage\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Downs_(ship_anchorage))

Alexander Adam L.L.D.

James's father Alexander (1741-1809) was Rector of the High School of Edinburgh. Many well-known figures were educated there including Sir Walter Scott and Robert Adam the architect. Walter Scott wrote later that Alexander was *'One of the most innovative educators of his age, he sought to instil in his pupils not only a grasp of grammar but a sensitivity to literary language'*.²⁵ As Rector he opened his home to numerous student lodgers and as seen at James' christening where the Haldane brothers were present embraced them into his family life.



In *'An Account of the life and character of Alexander Adam, LL.D. Rector of the High School, Edinburgh'* by Alexander Henderson, it is stated that, *'James Adam, the Rectors favourite son, returned to England with the homeward bound East India fleet, in the month of November 1809. For some weeks the Doctor (Alexander) had been extremely anxious in his enquiries after the fleet, and he appeared to anticipate his son's arrival with the fondest expectation. These expectations, however were never to be realised; for Mr Adam's constitution had been strongly attacked by consumption, and his father had the mortification to find that he was disabled from undertaking a journey to Scotland. From Heavytree, near Exeter, where his dutiful son had retired for the recovery of his health, he addressed a letter to his father, requesting him to lose no time in leaving Edinburgh, if he expected again to see him in life. But this affecting summons came too late;*

for, on Wednesday 13th December, while attending his class, Dr Adam was seized with an alarming indisposition which had every appearance of apoplexy, and increased so much that he had to leave the school, supported by his intimate and deserving friend Mr. Gray'

Dr Adam died on 18th December. *'His death was attributed partly to those domestic unhappiness's which have been mentioned, and, in a great measure, to extreme grief at the deplorable state of his son's health. This young gentleman, who was third officer on board the Elphinstone East Indiaman when he fell sick, would upon his next voyage have become entitled to rank of captain.'*²⁶

It is interesting to note that Dr. Adam died on the day his son was being buried. Alexander Henderson the author of the account does not say whether he knew his son had died.

DIED.

At Edinburgh, on Monday, Dr Alexander Adam, the venerable Rector of the High School, who has filled that important station with so much ability and celebrity for a great number of years. His funeral is to be a public one, and is to be on the 29th instant.

At Heavy Tree, near Exeter, on the 14th curt. Mr, James Adam, eldest son of the late Dr. Adam.

Extract from the Perthshire Courier 25th December 1809

In *'The History of Edinburgh, from the earliest accounts, to the year 1780'* by Hugo Arnot reprinted 1816 his death was announced; *'December 18 1809, died at Edinburgh, aged 69, Dr Alexander Adam, Rector*

²⁵ <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/education.html>

²⁶ *'An Account of the life and character of Alexander Adam, LL.D. Rector of the High School, Edinburgh'* by Alexander Henderson

of the High School, who filled that important station with much ability and celebrity for 43 years. The funeral of Doctor Adam took place on Friday December 29.' Unlike James' funeral his father's gave the appearance of a state affair. All the boys from the High School were present as were 'Heads of the Supreme Court, Judges and Ministers of Edinburgh' amounting to some seven hundred mourners processing to the churchyard of St. Cuthbert's Chapel of Ease on Beccleuch Street.

In Alexander's Will written in 1806 and the Inventory of his possessions undertaken after his death, it transpired that he '*died possessed of one sixteenth share of the new ship Elphinstone East Indiaman cost £2600*'.²⁷ His '*Profits on last voyage*' were also taken into account but were blank. He left James, '*my share in the Indiaman ship Elphinstone.....*' and '*as James may need money to purchase a ship I hereby empower my wife to advance to him what sum she may judge proper upon his giving sufficient security.*' He also stated that '*If any difference should happen among my children which I trust will not be the case I appoint my wife to settle it with the assistance of her brother and son and of James's Uncles who I am sure will determine what is equitable; and I especially request that matters may never be brought to a legal litigation.*'²⁸

James' half siblings

Walter (1792 - 1857) became a Medical Doctor, graduating from the University of Edinburgh on 1st August 1816. He was admitted a Licentiate of the College of Physicians of London in 1818 and a Fellow of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1819. He is noted for his work 'On the Osteological Symmetry of the Camel' in 1832. Walter lived part of his time in Edinburgh at 39 George Square the home of his father and mother and with his sister Agnes and her family in London.

Agnes married William Prout, the well-known physician and chemist and for much of her life lived in Sackville Street, London with him and her children.

Christina also married a medical doctor, Robert Renton who became senior surgeon to the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.

James Munro's uncles

The uncles Alexander Adam mentioned in his Will were probably James's mother's brothers, Thomas and George Munro and possibly his uncles by marriage Captain Milliken Craig, the commander of the *Elphinstone* and the Reverend Alexander Scott.

Thomas Munro (1756 - 1815) was one of the most successful surveyors in Jamaica during the period of slavery.²⁹ He owned Kinloss Sugar Estate in Trelawny Jamaica until his death when the estate was transferred to his two nephews Robert Haldane Scott and Thomas Munro (Scott) Munro the sons of James Scott and Margaret Munro.³⁰ In 1817 they returned ownership of 195 slaves.³¹

Captain Craig (1765 - 1820) had married Janet Munro (1767 - 1836), Thomas' sister, in 1796. In his Will he wrote that the marriage was '*the greatest misfortune and curse which ever befel me not only destroying my peace of mind and every hope of conjugal comfort of Issue and happiness.*'³² He made

²⁷ The Elphinstone was built in 1801.

²⁸ Alexander Adam's Will 1810, Wills and Testaments SC70/1/2 Edinburgh Sheriff Court Inventories image 395-405 accessed via www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk 22/04/2022.

²⁹ B.W Higman, Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, (University of the West Indies Press, 2001), p 34.

³⁰ Centre for the study of the Legacies of British Slavery <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

³¹ Former British Colonial Dependencies, Slave Registers, 1813-1834 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

³² Milliken Craig's Will PROB 11/1637/365 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

special blame on 'her brothers George Munro and the late Thomas Munro have too much to answer and who took good care of her marriage settlement to have it over my Lands of Ballewin and quite tricked and deceived me out of any fortune with her by fair promises besides the recent act of deceit and injustice of her late brother Thomas Munro by leaving a large fortune to her entire.'



Portrait of Captain Craig in his East India Company uniform

It may therefore be unlikely that Milliken Craig was one of the uncles referred to in Alexander Adam's Will however as we have seen James Adam had made at least two journeys with Captain Craig. By the time he died Milliken Craig owned or co-owned numerous plantations in the United Colonies of Demerary and Esquebo, Guyana. Balcraig 117 slaves, Nismes (Craig Nismes), Mindenburgh, Vrouw Anna (25) (Craig Adam), Den Amstel (113) Geneve, Patientia, Catharina, Welgelegan, Elizabeth and Belle L'Alliance.³³

Anne Amosford

2016 updated June 2022.

³³ As note 28.