

## James Clarke 15<sup>th</sup> January 1823

## No memorial

James Clarke's death was reported in the Exeter Flying Post of 16<sup>th</sup> January 1823. A short sentence summed up James's life which stated, '*At Topsham J. Clarke Esq. late of this city.*'

Little, so far, is known about James, where and exactly when he was born, who his parents were or what he did for a living (if he needed to). However, we do know quite a bit about the connections between his family, the town of Topsham, and plantations in Jamaica.

Luckily for us James left a will, written the year before he died, which tells us he lived in the Parish of Holy Trinity in Exeter and had at least one property, a house in Magdalen Street.<sup>1</sup> We also find that he had a wife Ann, two orphan nieces Mary West Clarke and Barbara Clarke, daughters of his late brother John, of whom he and his other brother William Clarke of Jamaica were joint trustees. James also sadly states, '*whereas I have some dear relatives to whom indeed I most earnestly wish to leave something as a memento of my sincere affection be it known to them my means occasioned by losses etc are so confined I am forbid doing that I so much wish to do I therefore most earnestly beg that no one of them will consider the omission otherwise then arising from that deficiency.*' There is no evidence that James was bankrupted at any time; perhaps it was poor investment or perhaps like many of his contemporaries he lost much through the Napoleonic wars. We may never know. He appointed his wife Ann and his 'cousin' Rebecca Winter (widow) as executrixes and a Charles Farwell Esquire of Totnes,<sup>2</sup> Captain in the Royal Navy his executor, and in a codicil, he mentions his wife's brother John Huxham and wife Elizabeth.

In 1894, W. H. Hamilton Rogers recorded a memorial stone behind Georges Meeting House commemorating some of the Huxham family as well as James and his wife Ann.<sup>3</sup> Here he noted that James was sixty-eight when he died.

James Clarke and Ann Huxham were married on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1809 at Plympton St. Maurice near Plymouth with George and Rebecca Huxham amongst the witnesses. James was already 'of Holy Trinity' in Exeter but Ann was a 39-year-old spinster of the Parish of Plympton. would have been in his fifties.<sup>4</sup> Ann was one of five children, (John, George, Rebeckah [aka Rebecca] and Ann who were twins (b. 1770) and William) born to George and Mary Vavasor Huxham of Plympton.<sup>5</sup> Their father George died in 1800. In his will he described himself as a Gentleman residing at Holland in Plympton St Mary. Mary, Ann's mother died in Exeter in 1820 and was also buried in the Dissenters Graveyard, Exeter.<sup>6</sup>

Both Ann and Rebecca were mature spinsters when they married, Ann, 39 and Rebecca just a year later aged 40. Rebecca married on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1810 at St Mary Major in Exeter to John Winter a widower and Gentleman from Bristol. William Huxham, James and Ann Clarke and E. Huxham were witnesses.

<sup>1</sup> Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11/1667/471. Accessed via [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Charles Farwell Esquire was a relative by marriage. He was married to Anna Maria Clarke a niece of James.

<sup>3</sup> DCRS, Parish Information Files, Copy inscriptions of Unitarian Burial Grounds, 1894. Held at Devon Heritage Centre. Hand-written notes by historian W.H. Hamilton Rogers includes many, but not all, memorial inscriptions at several burial grounds.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage record accessed via [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> See Huxham Biography [http://edgt.org.uk/uploads/3/4/6/9/34695614/no\\_mem\\_-\\_huxham\\_rev.\\_november\\_2018.pdf](http://edgt.org.uk/uploads/3/4/6/9/34695614/no_mem_-_huxham_rev._november_2018.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 'At Exeter, Mrs M V Huxham, formerly of Plympton, aged 84.' Bristol Mercury 31 Jan 1820. accessed via [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

When William Huxham, James's brother in law was declared bankrupt in 1815 James acted as an assignee.<sup>7</sup>

The next we hear of James is unfortunately his death notice (see Ref. 1). Ann moved to Topsham, when exactly we are unsure. Had they moved before he died or was he just visiting when he died? Ann is listed in Pigot's 1830 Directory under gentry and clergy where it is interesting to note the general text for Topsham says, 'The great number of gentry and opulent individuals resident in Topsham, and its immediate vicinity, is a great source of benefit to the home-trade of its inhabitants and bestows upon the general appearance of the place and neighbourhood an aspect pleasing and respectable.' It is also interesting to see in the gentry list how many single, probably, widowed ladies there were.<sup>8</sup>

In the census of 1841, Ann was living with her widowed sister Rebecca Winter, on the Strand with their grand nieces, Charlotte Moore Huxham, Kate Huxham and the girls' mistress Miss Julia Luscombe and an Edward Huxham, possibly the girls' younger brother. Charlotte and Kate were the daughters of William Huxham their nephew who was a coffee planter in Quilon, India.<sup>9</sup> His children had probably been sent to England for their education.

Ann died on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1841; The Western Times reported that she died, 'on the Strand, Topsham, Mrs Clarke, after a short (but very severe) illness which she bore with great Christian resignation.'<sup>10</sup> She was buried on 16<sup>th</sup> December behind Georges Meeting House in South Street, Exeter.<sup>11</sup>

Ann's Will also mentions Mary West Clarke and Barbara Clarke, her late husband's nieces. It is possible that after their father's death Mary and Barbara came to live in England with their aunt and uncle. James in his will leaves guidance that, 'for their further protection after my decease I earnestly implore my dear wife's continued care and guidance of these dear orphans and for their future support.'

It is more than likely that Mary and Barbara's father was John Clarke who had been part owner of Weymouth Plantation in St. Ann's Jamaica which after his death was managed on behalf of his children by his brother William.<sup>12</sup> If so, William received £1,132 2s 10d in 1836 as compensation for their fifty one freed slaves.

In 1857 Barbara married Thomas Reid Tharp in the Parish Church in Topsham with her sister Mary West Clarke and Harriet Brakespear as witnesses. Barbara was a spinster aged 51 years. She obviously had enough wealth to support herself and was listed in the 1851 census as a landed proprietor. Is this still their land in Jamaica? Thomas was a widower who had been living in Topsham from at least 1841 with his mother and first wife. Barbara would have known him, and it is even possible that the Mary Tharp staying with Barbara in 1851 is Thomas' first wife. Married life was short as Thomas died in 1867; leaving his property Windsor Castle, Green Pond and Vaughans Field in Jamaica to Barbara.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that he wrote and signed his will on his wedding day to Barbara, ten years before

<sup>7</sup> Exeter Flying Post 12<sup>th</sup> March 1818. accessed via [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

<sup>8</sup> Pigot and Co.'s National Commercial Directory of Devon

<sup>9</sup> now known as Kollam, a port in Kerala, India.

<sup>10</sup> Western Times 11 December 1841, accessed via [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)

<sup>11</sup> Register of deaths kept by the Ministers of George's Chapel, Exeter 1837-1882. [www.swht.org.uk](http://www.swht.org.uk)

<sup>12</sup> [www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estates/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/estates/)

<sup>13</sup> The Tharp family had settled in Jamaica from the 1650's.

he died. Barbara's will does not mention any property in Jamaica.

Mary West Clarke, Barbara's sister was even older at the age of sixty-three when she eventually married in 1860. Her spouse Elwes Remnant Charles Hayward was a widower; his first wife had been Mary Elizabeth the niece of Thomas Reid Tharp, Barbara's husband.<sup>14</sup> He had worked as a clerk in the East and West India Dock Company when he and Mary Elizabeth lived in London. Did he move to Topsham after her death in 1864? The two of them and his nephew Edward Charles Dwight are found living at Mount Howe Villa until Elwes death in 1888.

James had another niece, Anna Maria Clarke who married firstly Charles Farwell, Commander in the Royal Navy (see above and Ref. 2) and, after his death in 1836 she married William Brockedon the notable painter, author, and inventor.<sup>15</sup> Both were born in Totnes, Devon.

James Clarke and his family are still something of an enigma. Where were the brothers born? Jamaica? Devon or elsewhere in England? Who were their parents? Further research needs to be carried out and as new information is always appearing it may well be possible to discover more in the future.

Anne Amosford  
September 2020

---

<sup>14</sup> Mary Elizabeth Tharp's grandmother Harriet Ventum (née Crossley) was an author active between 1800 and 1814. She wrote *Selina, Justina: or, The History of a Young Lady* in many volumes amongst other educational books for children.

<sup>15</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Brockedon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Brockedon)