

GOVE, Philip (d. 9 May 1844)

No Memorial

The Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen has occupied Tuckers Hall on Fore Street Hill in Exeter since 1471 (Fig. 1). It is one of the city's finest historic buildings and for over 165 years from



Fig. 1. The frontage of Tuckers Hall, Exeter.

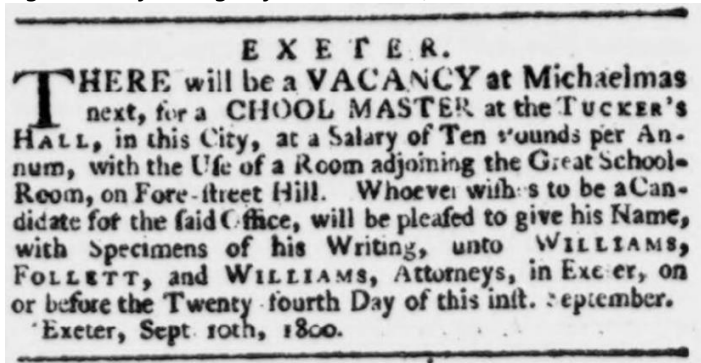


Fig. 2. Exeter Flying Post, 11 September 1800.

1675 it housed a school for the benefit of the sons of freemen. Originally, a school master was appointed and he was obliged to teach ten boys. When John Warren (appointed 1794) was removed from the role in 1800 an advertisement appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* inviting applications for the vacancy created (Fig. 2). The advertisement stated that the salary was £10 *per annum* with "Use of a Room adjoining the Great School-room", presumably as living quarters.

On 13th October 1800, a notice appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post*:

"TUCKER'S HALL SCHOOL. Fore Street Hill. P. Gove returns his sincere thanks to his Friends for Favors already received at his late school in Magdalen Street, and respectfully informs them and the Public, that having been elected Master to the above School, he is now removed to the Tucker's Hall, on Fore Street Hill, where he teaches Youth of both Sexes in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and the English Grammar. Those who shall please to honor him with the Instruction of their Children, may depend no exertion on his Part will be wanting to facilitate their improvement.

N.B. Boarding Schools and Private Families attended."

Philip Gove, the newly appointed School Master, was then aged about 34 years of age. He was married with four young children, all of whom had been baptised at Bow Meeting House located in Smythen Street close to Tuckers Hall. It seems likely that Philip had been a pupil at the Tuckers Hall School.¹ It is interesting that his announcement referred to teaching "*Youth of both Sexes*", not just boys, and that his main subjects included the three "Rs" and grammar in contrast to his predecessor's syllabus which included mensuration, surveying, navigation, fortification and gunnery.² Presumably, Philip had taught similar subjects at the school in Magdalen Street referred to in his Notice. It has not been possible to determine where this schoolhouse was sited, but Newton (1990) suggested that it was likely to be a "dame school".³ These were small, privately run schools for young children usually run by a woman (the "dame") that offered rudimentary education in return for a small fee.

One of the scholars taught by Philip at Magdalen Street was Henry Ellis (b. 1790) who became a watchmaker and ran a celebrated business in the High Street, Exeter, next to the Guildhall. In the first volume of his Memoirs, Ellis wrote, *"I had occasionally taken lessons of my father in writing, but I was not sent to a regular writing school until I was nine years and half old. My schoolmaster's name was Gove, who I believe was assiduous in bringing me forward, as I was said to have made considerable progress under his tuition."* Ellis later remarked that *"Many of his old pupils followed him..."* when Gove moved to the Tuckers Hall School.⁴ Another student of Philip Gove's who went on to great things was Richard Durant (1791-1878). Durant's father was a fuller who became a freeman in 1777. Richard Durant became a wealthy silk merchant who purchased the Sharpham estate at Ashprington, near Totnes, in 1841. He went on to be High Sheriff of Devon in 1851 and Master of the company at Tuckers Hall in 1857/8.^{5,6}

The condition of Tuckers Hall when Philip Gove became Master was poor. A committee established by the Hall in 1818 to inspect the school reported that *'the school appears to be inconvenient for the purposes to which it is applied, as the [school] room is not floored'*. On the master agreeing to increase the number of boys to fifteen the Company agreed to pay for the insertion of a floor.² It is not known what the living quarters were like, but Philip and his wife Elizabeth had three further children by 1805.

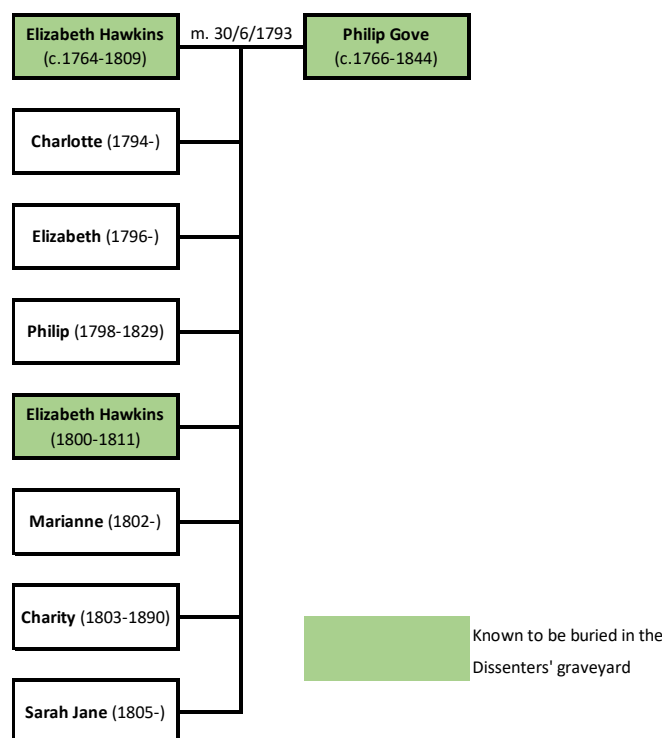
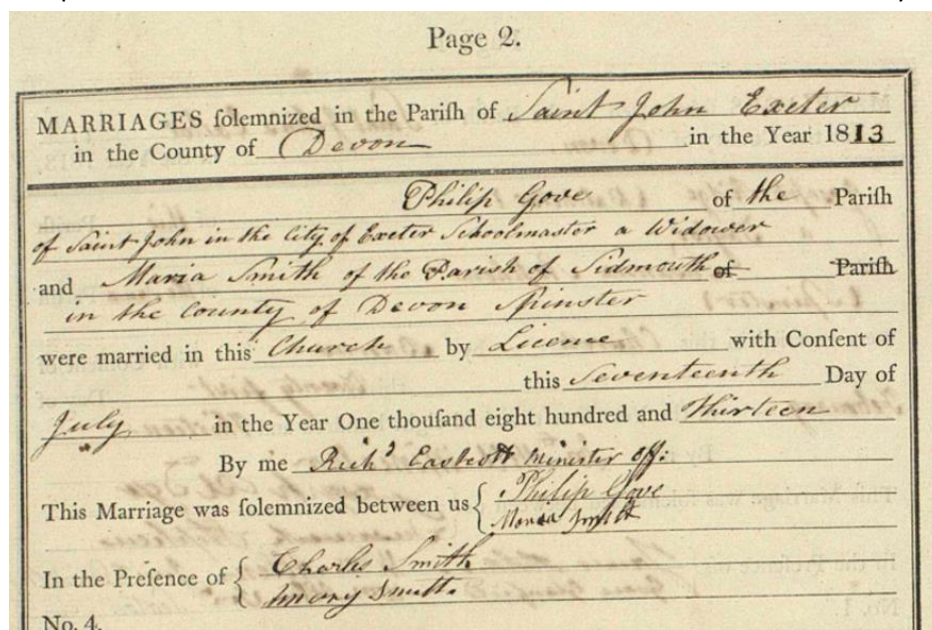


Fig. 3. Children of Philip and Elizabeth Gove.

Elizabeth, Philip's wife, died in November 1809 aged 45 years and was buried in the Dissenters' graveyard. It was reported that she died of a "lingering illness" which she bore with "great resignation and fortitude".⁷ A headstone was erected in the graveyard (memorial 83) but only fragments now remain. The inscription recorded in 1894 was, *"Elizabeth, wife of Philip Gove/Nov. 23 1809 77 years/Also Elizabeth dau of the above."*⁸ Clearly, her age was incorrectly recorded by W.H. Hamilton Rogers.

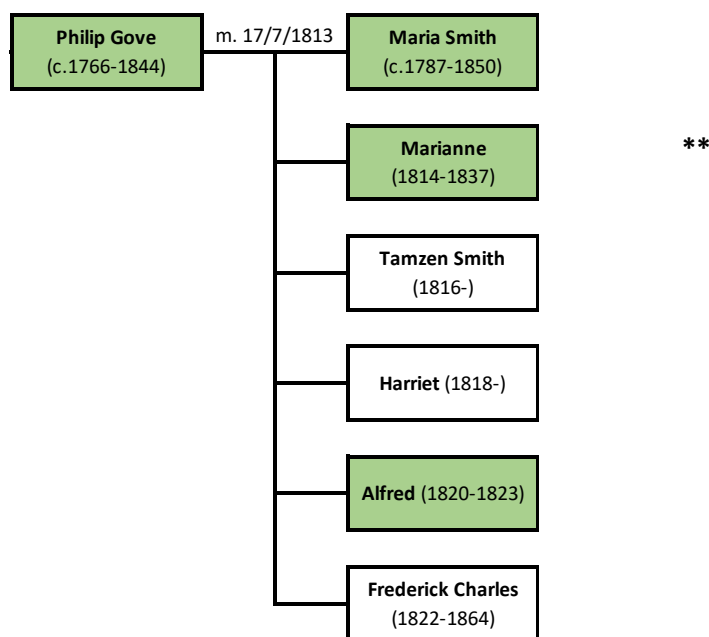
Philip remarried in 1813. His bride was Maria Smith from Sidmouth and they married on 17th July. Maria



was about 26 years of age – not much older than Philip’s eldest daughter. Philip was in his late forties.

Maria and Philip had five children and were apparently still living at Tuckers Hall (140 Fore Street Hill) as this was the address given for Philip Gove “writing master” in several directories.⁹

Fig. 4. Marriage certificate for Philip Gove and Maria Smith, 1813.



Known to be buried in the
Dissenters' graveyard

Fig. 5. Children of Philip and Maria Gove.

** It seems likely that this child was known as “Maria”, although she was baptised Marianne, as Philip’s fifth child had been named Marianne (in 1802) and no evidence has been found to show that she had died before 1814. The burial record stated “Maria”, as did a death Notice in the *Exeter Flying Post*.¹⁰

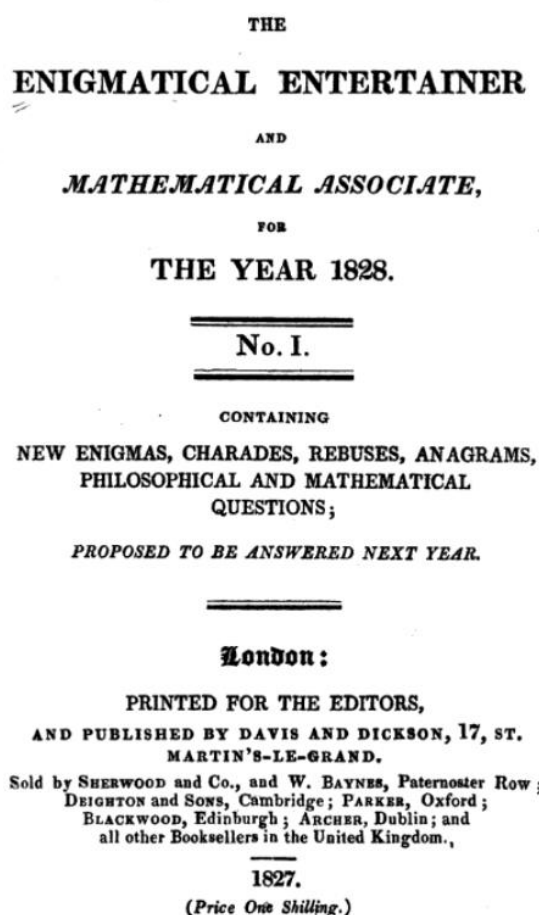
Philip's eldest son, Philip junior, was a clerk at the Exeter Gas Works and he died, "...after a long and painful illness" on 15th November 1829 aged just 31 years.¹¹ He was buried in the Dissenters' graveyard with his mother, sister and half-brother.

Some correspondence between Philip and various members of the Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen has survived. It is clear that the Company wanted the school to close. In a letter to the Master, Warden and Assistants dated 26 August 1841 Gove wrote, "*Having been several times inform'd by Mr John [sic] Cresswell that if it was not for me the School would probably be discontinued and the Scholars consign'd over to some other School, and a great expence would be saved thereby*". He went on to request that he should receive a pension after so many years of service, "*— Gentlemen I considered that my long service together with my advanced age being now upward of seventy five years old having been forty one years in my present situation I considered I should be resigning be granted a Superannuation equal to what I now enjoy...*".¹² There is no evidence that a pension was agreed; indeed later letters from his widow suggest that she had to work to support herself and five 'delicate' children.

The Tuckers Hall School closed in 1841 when Philip Gove retired. According to the obituary of Richard Durant compiled by Revd Harpley in 1878, "*He [Durant] was educated in the school at Tucker's Hill [sic], then conducted by Philip Goye [sic], a poet whom he afterwards pensioned*".¹³

Philip Gove – the writer of verse

Throughout his career Philip Gove published poems and word puzzles, riddles, in various newspapers and magazines.



Some of the riddles, usually entitled 'Enigma', 'Charade' or 'Rebus' received replies of solution in later issues, but many apparently did not – perhaps because of their impenetrability. The *Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany*, published in Sherborne from 1783 printed an, as yet unascertained, number of Gove's submissions. The earliest found so far was a twenty-line Rebus published in 1786.¹⁴ The *Ladies' Diary* also published several submissions from Philip Gove, and he was a keen solver of other people's riddles, winning eight diaries in 1823 for answering the Prize Enigma. In 1828 he contributed five Enigmas to the *Enigmatical Entertainer* alone, though several other people exceeded that level of insertion.

An example (below) of the form of the riddle appeared in the October 17th 1803 issue of the *Weekly Entertainer*.

Fig. 6. First page of *The Enigmatical Entertainer* (1828).

An ENIGMA, by P. Gove of Exeter

*Fly the scenes of dissipation,
Where her motley crew repair,
Fir'd by wild intoxication,
Oaths and curses strike the ear.*

*Banish'd hence by wild confusion,
To those votaries I am lost,
Many will, by calm reflection,
Know it to their grief and cost.*

*Heavenly boon! O precious blessing!
Of more value far than gold;
Those who lose me how distressing!
I cannot be bought or sold.*

*You who now possess this treasure,
Use me well, and you will find,
Calm content, and lasting pleasure,
To possess your hearts and minds.*

The answer, provided by John Old Zillwood (1785-1871; later the Revd, Rector of Compton in Hampshire) appeared in the 5th December 1803 issue of the *Weekly Entertainer*:

*GREAT God! in whose almighty hand
Of life and death the issues stand,
Let REASON e'er his vigils keep
As down the rough and rugged steep
Of life with fainting steps I creep.*

Philip Gove was clearly recognised as an accomplished contributor of word-based puzzles. When the *Western Times* could not include some items in their pages, they printed a Notice – “Mr P. Gove’s *Enigma and Charades are clever, but we have not space for them and the host of imitators that would follow*”.¹⁵ By this date he was in his mid-70s.

Amongst his many published poems is a tribute to Admiral Lord Nelson (d. 21 October 1805) that appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* a few weeks after the Battle of Trafalgar.¹⁶

On the DEATH of LORD NELSON

*ALAS! Old England’s glorious Chief is fled!
The British Hero’s number’d with the dead.
Britannia mourns, and all her sons deplore,
That her bright star, brave Nelson, is no more!
Around her shores is heard the following strain,
That damps the joy upon the conquest gain’d*

*He was belov'd! ador'd! a patriot true!
 A braver hero the earth never knew;
 He, who so oft had brav'd the shafts of death,
 In Victory's arms has now resign'd his breath.
 Fearless of danger, he each foe defied,
 He liv'd victorious, and he conquering died!
 His gallant heart disdain'd a life of ease,
 His country call'd – he fought the boisterous seas;
 The splendid actions that his valor won,
 Proclaim'd that he was Victory's darling son:
 And, whilst the Nile shall lave fam'd Egypy's shore,
 Or Copenhagen's city shall endure;
 Whilst Vincent's rock, and Trafalgar of fame,
 Shall stand, they'll echo with brave Nelson's name:
 And whilst Britannia rules the wat'ry main,
 She will "avenge the godlike hero slain."*

The poem, one of countless penned to commemorate Nelson, was clearly remembered by Exonians as it was reported that he favoured the audience at the Sixth Devon Agricultural Show in 1834 by reading the *Death of Nelson*.¹⁷

Earlier examples of his poems published in *The Weekly Entertainer* included, ***Verses composed, by P. Gove, of Exeter, when walking through a Church-yard at night*** (1796).¹⁸

*While thro' these gloomy paths I tread,
 May serious thoughts impress my mind!
 Sweet meditation lend thy aid,
 And raise my thoughts to things divine!*

*Ye vanities of life! no more
 Allure me with your transient gleam;
 Here ends your splendour! Here is o'er
 Your short liv'd, false, delusive dreams!*

*In narrow bounds, here rest in peace,
 The young, the old, the rich, the poor;
 Here honours and distinctions cease,
 The place that knew them knows no more.*

*Retir'd from noise, and worldly care,
 Their sleeping dust together blend,
 'Till the last trump shall rend the air
 And re-unite their dust again.*

*Here mournful yews their shades extend,
 And deeper darkness veils the ground;
 How awful is this nightly scene,
 While solemn silence reigns around!*

And *Sonnet addressed to Sleep* (1799).¹⁹

*Come gentle sleep! Restoring power!
Extend thy aid, and sooth my pain;
Release from grief but one short hour
A willing captive to thy chain.*

*Let no disturbing dream molest,
But leaden slumbers close my eye;
My perturbed mind have rest,
Without one intermitting sigh.*

*Then shall I wake, with grateful strain,
And bless that power that gave me peace;
That power that gave a lapse from pain,
That power that bade my sorrows cease.*

*Come then, Oh sleep! thy aid extend,
Thy willing suppliant thus befriend!*

The sonnet was signed, "PHILIP GOVE, schoolmaster, Exeter".

On the DEATH of EARL HOWE was published in the *Weekly Entertainer's* issue of 17th March 1800.²⁰ The 1st Earl Howe was Admiral of the Fleet and he commanded the victorious British fleet on the Glorious First of June in 1794 during the French Revolutionary Wars. He died in London on 5th August 1799.

Come, generous Britons! ye whose feeling hearts
Can heave a sigh, can shed the sorrowing tear,
Mourn the brave Howe, who late resign'd his breath
Well crown'd with honours, and matur'd in years.

Oft o'er old ocean has he fearless roam'd
Braving all dangers with a placid mien;
Dauntless engag'd our most insulting foes,
And crush'd the arrogance of France and Spain.

By those heroick actions he has won
Th' applause which laud his ever valu'd name;
Deserving honours have to him been paid,
Honours which rank him high in British fame.

Let not oblivion veil these glorious deeds,
But dear remembrance radiantly adorn
Each Briton's mind! And may the illustrious page
Transmit them safe to ages yet unborn!

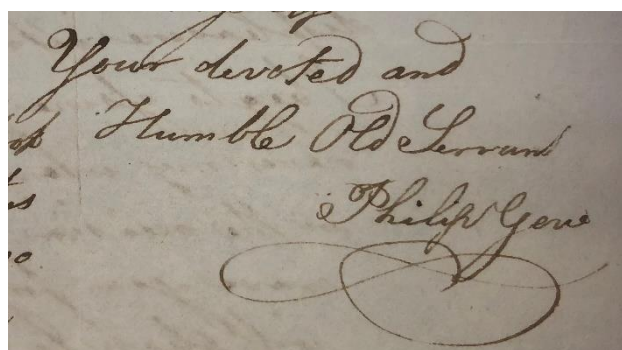
What tho' the earth contains his mortal part,
Doom'd there to mingle with its kindred clay;

Swifter than light his spirit took its flight
To the bright mansions of eternal day.

Unfortunately, not all his poetic contributions were published. The *Western Times* of 24th June 1837 reported, “We are compelled to defer the feeling lines of Mr. P. Gove of Fore Street Hill, on the death of the King – for want of space.” William IV had died at Windsor Castle a few days beforehand. So far, his verses have not been discovered.

Philip Gove died on 5th May 1844, predeceasing his second wife by six years. A simple notice read, “May 5, Mr. Philip Gove, aged 78, who was for 42 years schoolmaster at the Tucker’s Hall, in this city”. There was no obituary or recollections from grateful past scholars. In one of his letters, Philip permitted himself to reflect on his long career, “...it is a source of pleasing reflection to me, that during so long a period I never had any complaint made of my conduct and I am happy to add that numbers in this City still appreciate my conduct, as a Master.”¹

His poignant signature (Fig. 7, below) on one of the letters refers to him as “Your devoted and Humble



Old Servant”.¹ In the same letter he apologised for, “...my sight being so imperfect and my mind much depress’d.” At the end he was clearly a frail and elderly man.

He was buried in the Exeter Dissenters’ graveyard on 9th May 1844, but it does not appear that the grave was ever marked.

Ian M. Varndell
November 2021

REFERENCES

¹ DHC ECA 58/7/10/7g In an undated letter (but thought to have been written in 1842) to Thomas Sanders Esq. Philip Gove remarked that he had “... first received my instruction in (the School), which was 7 years.....as Scholar.”

² Youings, J. (1968) *Tuckers Hall Exeter: The History of a Provincial City Company through Five Centuries*. University of Exeter Press, 272pp.

³ Newton, R. (1984) *Eighteenth Century Exeter*. University of Exeter Press, 206pp.

⁴ DHC 76/20/1 Memoir of Henry Ellis, Vol. 1.

⁵ *The London Gazette*, Suppl. No. 21181, February 11 1851, p. 363.

⁶ <http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/people/tuckers-masters.php> Accessed 12/11/2021.

⁷ *Exeter Flying Post*, 16 November 1809.

⁸ DHC Devon & Cornwall Record Society (DCRS), Parish Information Files. Copy inscriptions of Unitarian Burial Grounds, 1894, recorded by W.H. Hamilton Rogers.

⁹ *Exeter Pocket Journal*, 1816 and 1841; Besley's *Exeter Directory* for 1835. All accessed at the DHC.

¹⁰ *Exeter Flying Post*, 20 July 1837.

¹¹ *Exeter Flying Post*, 21 November 1829.

¹² DHC ECA 58/7/10/7d.

¹³ *Rep. Trans. Devon. Assoc. Advmt. Sci.*, **10**: 52 (1878).

¹⁴ *The Weekly Entertainer: or Agreeable and Instructive Repository*. R. Goadby & Co., Sherborne, **9** (223): 357 (1786).

¹⁵ *Western Times*, 5 June 1839.

¹⁶ *Exeter Flying Post*, 5 December 1805.

¹⁷ *Western Times*, 8 November 1834.

¹⁸ *The Weekly Entertainer: or Agreeable and Instructive Repository*. R. Goadby & Co., Sherborne, **28** (701): 99-100 (1796). It is not known which graveyard inspired his words.

¹⁹ *The Weekly Entertainer: or Agreeable and Instructive Repository*. R. Goadby & Co., Sherborne, **34**: 400 (1799).

²⁰ *The Weekly Entertainer: or Agreeable and Instructive Repository*. R. Goadby & Co., Sherborne, **35**: 219 (1800).

Key

DHC – Devon Heritage Centre.

ECA – Exeter City Archives.