

No memorial

Mrs Mary FOLLETT (died 1781)

Mary Follett died in April 1781 aged 56 and the account book for the Dissenter's Graveyard shows that a payment of 5 shillings "*for breaking the ground for Mrs Follett*" was made on 9th April.¹

No will has been found, nor any other documents relating to her life in Exeter. Who was this lady? What was her husband's name and what family did she come from? The only clue is in the burial register for Bow Meeting where, alongside her name and age, is the note "*Mother to the Rev'd Mr Follett of Newton*".²

Reverend John Follett was a minister at Salem Chapel, Wolborough Street in Newton Abbot from about 1780 to 1796. A note in the register there says, "*a register of baptisms since my settlement at Newton and after my ordination 2nd April 1782*" and is signed by John Follett. There follow several baptisms from 1780 and 1781 conducted by Mr Baynham of Totnes, then from September 1782 to November 1796 the baptisms were all conducted by John Follett.³ It is likely that he was acting as an assistant minister from 1780 until his ordination in 1782.

On 4th March 1788 at Wolborough parish church were married "*The Rev'd John Follett (Minister at the Meeting of Protestant Dissenters) of this Parish and Miss Elizabeth Hancock of this Parish one of the People called Quakers*".⁴ John and Elizabeth moved from Newton Abbot to Topsham at the beginning of 1797 and baptisms conducted by him at the Presbyterian Meeting Rooms there ran from February 1797 to March 1836. Elizabeth was buried in Topsham on 22nd May 1835 and "*Rev'd John Follett the deservedly respected minister of this congregation for 39 years was buried in the meeting house (under the Table Pew) 12th April 1836 – he was a good man*".⁵ The *Exeter Flying Post* reported his death in the 14th April edition and stated that he was "*in the 78th year of his age*" which would put his year of birth around 1759.⁶

Mary Follett also had a daughter, Martha Mary, who, according to her age at death, was born around 1763. An announcement in the *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* of 26th January 1792 reported the wedding of "*Mr John Eustace, merchant, of Bridport, to Miss Follett, sister of the Rev John Follett of Newton Abbot*"⁷ which had taken place on 3rd December 1791 at Ottery St Mary with John Follett as one of the witnesses.⁸

Martha and John Eustace had a daughter Mary **Whitty** Eustace who was baptised on 15th July 1794 at Bridport⁹, she died in infancy and was buried in Bridport on September 1794.¹⁰ Her middle name may provide evidence of her forebears as it was common practice to pass on a mother's or grandmother's maiden surname as a child's middle name.

Towards the end of her life Martha went to live in Topsham with her brother John. She was buried

¹Report and Account Book of Dissenters Burial Ground DRO 3693D/O/B/1

²Exeter Bow Meeting Births, Baptisms and Burials TNA/RG/4/965 accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

³Newton Abbot Salem Chapel Baptisms TNA/RG/4/445 accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

⁴Devon Marriages and Banns. South West Heritage Trust accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

⁵Topsham Presbyterian Burials TNA/RG/4/1222 accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk

⁶Exeter Flying Post 14th April 1836 accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk

⁷Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 26th January 1792 accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk

⁸Devon Marriages and Banns. South West Heritage Trust accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

⁹Dorset Bridport Chapel Births and Baptisms TNA/RG/4/344 accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁰Dorset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1538-1812 accessed on www.ancestry.co.uk

there on 18th November 1835 aged 72.¹¹

In their wills both Rev'd John Follett and his sister Martha left legacies to their cousins, the children of their uncle Abraham Follett of Sidmouth who had died in 1814.¹² Their father must therefore have been one of Abraham Follett's brothers. However, this clue doesn't help to identify their father as there were many Folletts in Sidmouth and the surrounding area and no baptisms for Abraham or his brothers have been found as yet, though it is possible that Abraham was the son of Samuel Follett and Hester Clapp.

A search was made for a marriage between a Mr Follett and a Mary in the mid to late 1750s. The following couple appear to be the most likely to have been the parents of Rev'd John and Martha Follett, especially in light of the middle name "Whitty" given to Martha's daughter.

John Follett and Mary Whitty were married by licence at Lyme Regis on 23rd March 1757.¹³ One of the witnesses was Robert Clapp. According to the marriage licence, which was issued on the same day, John was a merchant aged 25 and Mary was 27.¹⁴

Mary Whitty was the daughter of Rev'd John Whitty and Elizabeth Kenway who had married in Membury in 1714. Rev'd Whitty was born in Axminster but moved to Lyme Regis where he was the minister of the Congregational Church from the mid 1720s until his death in 1762. He was responsible for the building of the new chapel in Coombe Street in 1755. His nephew Thomas Whitty was the founder of Axminster Carpets. In his will Rev'd Whitty left the rents of his houses in South Street in Axminster to his daughter Mary the wife of John Follett and his son Samuel Whitty, who died in 1769, also left money to his sister Mary Follett.¹⁵

So it would seem that Mary Whitty, daughter of Rev'd John Whitty, married John Follett and became the mother of Rev'd John Follett and Martha Mary Follett. When and where her husband died and when and how Mary came to live and die in Exeter are questions as yet unanswered.

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¹¹Devon Topsham (Presbyterian) Burials TNA/RG/4/1222 accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

¹²England and Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858 accessed on www.ancestry.co.uk

¹³Dorset Marriages accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁴Sarum Marriage Licence Bonds accessed on www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁵England and Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858 accessed on www.ancestry.co.uk