

No Memorial

Reverend Stephen Towgood

Stephen Towgood died in October 1777. One newspaper article noted that he died, '*At Exeter, the Rev. Mr. Stephen Towgood, a dissenting minister, of that city, aged 86.*'¹ Right up until his death he was working with his cousin Micaiah Towgood as joint ministers at George's meeting in South Street, Exeter.²

If the newspaper article is to be believed Stephen was born in about 1691. He was the son of the Reverend Stephen Towgood of Axminster (d. 1713?) and Deborah his wife (née Britain). Stephen the elder and Deborah had been married in 1684 at Henstridge in Somerset on the 21st January. The register entry recorded, '*Stephang Towgood de Axminster in Com Devon and Debora Britain de hoc parochia matrimonium in ierunt.*'³

Stephen was one of at least five children his siblings being Deborah (c.1696 -?), Matthew (c.1684 -1757), Peter (1692- 1758?) and Nehemiah (1700- ?).

Stephen followed in his father's footsteps and became a Dissenting Minister. He studied at Taunton Academy and according to the Reverend Kirk he was a candidate in May 1713 for the Exeter Assembly.⁴ Stephen was ordained in Axminster on 4th July 1716. It was witnessed by John Ball, John Walrond, Richard Davis(?) and James Peirce. '*We bear witness to Mr. Stephen Towgood. Admitted to the Ministry of the Gospel (by examination first) by the laying on of hands, Fasting by the Presbyters.*'⁵



Axminster United Reformed Church with the original church building on the left (built 1660).

His early career is difficult to piece together as no definitive records have yet been found relating to his

¹ Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 30 October 1777 accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

² See Micaiah Towgood biography www.edgt.co.uk

³ Henstridge parish register accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁴ The Taunton Dissenting Academy, The Revd Brian Kirk B.D. 2005 (Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society).

⁵ Ref. 3542D/C3 Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) www.swheritage.org.uk

ministerial placements. There are more questions than answers. However, it is known that on February 1st 1721 Stephen married Mrs Mary Lissant, a widow (née Hawker), at Hawkchurch near Axminster. The entry in the register reads '*Stephen Towgood of Swanwitch and Mary Lissant of Stockland*'.⁶ Swanwitch, or Sandwich were early names used for Swanage in Dorset. Was Stephen a Minister in Swanage at the time of his marriage? They had at least one child, a daughter, Hannah born in about 1725.

Mary was the daughter of James Hawker (d. 1682), a Clothier from Luppitt, Devon. At present her mother's name is unknown. Mary had two siblings, Hannah (?-?) and James (1665-1727). By the time their father wrote his will in 1782 he was remarried to Elizabeth.⁷ He left Mary property at Thorncombe (now in Dorset) and Blackenfields in Luppitt.

Mary married her first husband John Lissant, an Apothecary, from Ottery St. Mary in Devon in about 1697. They had two children Mary (1698- c.1734) and John (? – 1732). Mary the daughter married one John Calley of Topsham an apothecary like her father. She unfortunately died soon after her brother but before her mother wrote her will in 1734. No burial record for John Lissant senior has been found yet.

When John Lissant junior wrote his will in 1725, he was living in Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight. In a lease dated 1727 relating to lands in Luppitt, Stephen and Mary Towgood and John Lissant her son were given as living in Newport on the Isle of Wight. Was Stephen a Minister there having moved from Swanage?

In 1727 Stephen and Mary moved to Topsham where Stephen took up his ministry at The Old Meeting House.⁸ Stephen's own house is mentioned in an indenture dated 6th July 1776, '*All that tenement or dwelling house situate near the higher end of Topsham Town aforesaid thentofore in the tenure of one Slocombe since Rimons but then lately repaired by Stephen Towgood then late of Topsham aforesaid Minister of the Gospel and then in the possession of the said Stephen Towgood his assignee or assigns undertenant or undertenants*'.⁹ Does this indicate that Stephen kept his house in Topsham until his death in 1777?

In 1733 Stephen, his wife Mary and her daughter and son-in-Law along with John Walrond of Exon and one Elizabeth Lane of Tiverton (the confederates) were mentioned in a Bill of Complaint issued by Philip Lissant the brother of Mary's first husband.¹⁰ The complaint referred to three properties in Fore Street in Taunton that had belonged to John Lissant the elder which after his decease passed to his son. Philip Lissant believed his brother had left them to him should John Lissant junior have died without issue. The Confederates he believed were blatantly withholding the properties and any rental profits from him. The outcome of this complaint is not known but by the time Hannah married only one property in Taunton was mentioned in her marriage settlement.¹¹

Of Stephen's work in Topsham, we are unsure but Matthew Lee of Ebford noted in his diary that in 1734 he had been chosen treasurer of the Thursday lectures at James's meeting in Exeter. He wrote that of those 'Strangers' that preached that year a Mr Towgood was mentioned three times.¹² It is not known whether this was Stephen or Micaiah his cousin.

⁶ Hawkchurch records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

⁷ Ref: DD/HLM/7 Will and codicil of James Hawker of Luppitt, 1782 Somerset heritage Centre (SHC).

⁸ A History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England... Jerom Murch 1835.

⁹ 53/6 Box 56 Covenant between Alexander Hamilton Esquire and Gregory Jackson Esquire, Devon Heritage Centre.

¹⁰ C11/851/142 Lissant v Towgood 1733 National Archives, Kew.

¹¹ Hannah Towgood and Joseph Wakeford of Andover marriage settlement (49/9/1/193) DHC

¹² Matthew Lee's diary and account book 1733-1767 (2889Z/F1) DHC.

In 1743 the Reverend John Enty of Exeter died, and Stephen was invited to move to Exeter to take up the post of pastor at James's Meeting in Enty's place. Unfortunately, Mary, Stephen's wife died in October 1744.¹³ She was buried on the 13th of that month in Topsham.¹⁴ It appears he had accepted the Invitation to join the Exeter ministers before his wife's death but didn't take up the position until early 1745.

A note in James's Meeting minute book states, '*NB. In Jan. without any previous appointment or notice given as usuall to proceed to an election of a Minister in the roome of Mr John Enty lately deceased yet on the meeting of the Contributors to adjust the subscriptions that had been procured in each quarter to advance the Ministers Fund it was incisted on that an Invitation should be forthwith sent to the Reverend Mr Stephen Towgood of Topsham to succeed the Rev'd Mr John Enty deceased as one of the joynt Pastors to the 3 Congregations. Note as this method is without precedent and contrary to our Rules usually observed – tis hoped it will be avoided if another such an occasion for choice of another Minister should occur.*'¹⁵

A year before her death Mary's nephew John Hawker, a linen draper in Exeter had been elected one of the 'Committee of Thirteen' who administered the Minister's funds within Exon. It is possible that John Hawker had put Stephen's name forward for minister. He moved to Trowbridge in Wiltshire in about 1747.¹⁶

Seats at James's Meeting were constantly in discussion. In replacing Mr Enty, it is assumed that Stephen would take his seat but at a committee meeting on 19th January 1744 '*Mr Vowler was desired to acquaint Mrs Enty that tis necessary to get a convenient seat for ye Rev'd Mr Towgood and that she may take her choice of the seat she sets now in, or of that her sister's Savery set in.*' On 12th April 1744 the Committee met at Mr John Hawker's house and, '*agreed that the Committee will be at ye charge of removing ye Rev'd Mr Towgoods household goods from Topsham to Exeter.*'

Stephen remarried in February 1749 at St Sidwell's Church in Exeter. His second wife Mrs Mary Savery was the daughter of Servington Savery (d. 1743). The use of 'Mrs' being a convention used for high standing spinsters in the eighteenth century. Servington of Shilston in Modbury, Devon had moved to Exeter where he was also one of the 'Committee of Thirteen'. Mary's sister Ann was the widow of the Reverend Mr Enty, and it may well be Mary who was mentioned in the entry above regarding seats at James's.

Of the many responsibilities of a minister, baptism was one of the most important. Matthew Lee notes in his diary that on '*Friday May 11th 1753 Mrs Lee was delivered of a son after 3 hrs travel, at my house in Trinity Parish, Exeter, abt. 6 o'clock in the morning; who was baptiz'd there on Sunday June 3rd following by the Rev'd Mr Stephen Towgood by the name of Thomas Huckell Lee.*'

At a committee held at George's Meeting 21 July 1767 talking about a new mahogany pulpit and canopy there was a reshuffling of seats and pews '*Also agreed that.....the Revd Mr Stephen Towgood the late Mr Paul's.*'

Seat shuffling at George's meeting was often the priority at committee meetings. On September 29th 1774 the disposal of vacant seats was on the agenda again. '*The Revd Mr Stephen Towgood at his request to go into No 73 Mr Powell seat but if the Revd Mr Towgood should leave it Mr Powell to have it again*'

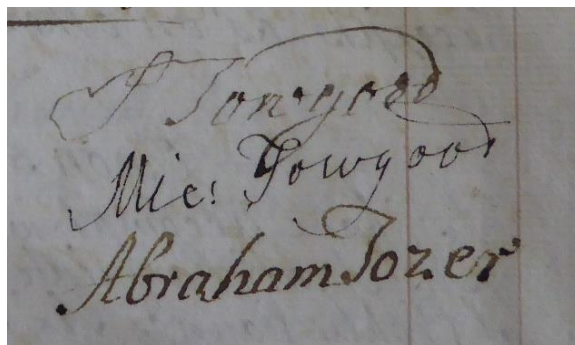
¹³ October 1744 comes before January 1744 in the Julian Calendar which didn't change until 1752.

¹⁴ Topsham parish register accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

¹⁵ James Meeting Minutes 1708-176 (3693D/0/M/1) DHC.

¹⁶ John Hawker's Will 1780 (PROB 11/1060/284) accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

Towards the end of his life, his signatures for receipt of his quarterly pay became visibly frailer.



Stephen Towgood signature for receipt of pay 1776 (top).

When he died the local newspaper noted that, *'Tuesday last died, at his house near Bartholomew yard, aged 86, Mr. Stephen Towgood, Dissenting Teacher, a man of strict integrity, and whose loss will be regretted by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.'*¹⁷

His death in October 1777 was only noted in the accounts book as, *'Mr Stephen Towgood a cave not paid'*.¹⁸ It may have been that as a serving minister his burial fees were paid for by the congregation. Considering the length of his ministerial service, Stephen didn't leave a tangible legacy. Unlike his cousin he was not a prolific author, and the only published source is his sermon of 1737.¹⁹ In 1779 another Towgood burial was noted in the account book, *'recd Mrs Towgood opening her cave 10/- paid Dec 28 1779'*.²⁰ It is possible that this was Stephen's wife Mary, but that has not been proven.

In a lease for Willands and Notts Place in Axminster dated 1780, Mary Towgood widow, deceased, was mentioned along with Matthew Lee and Hannah his wife, the granddaughter of Stephen Towgood. This Mary Towgood was the wife of Stephen as they are also mentioned in a similar lease dated 1758. That lease showed that Mary died after Stephen but before 1780 and it is therefore possible that the lease directly related to the death of Mary Towgood in 1779. No newspaper or other reports have been found relating to her death.

Hannah Towgood (1725-1746) Not buried in Exeter.

Stephen and his first wife, Mary's daughter Hannah died when she was only twenty-one and just a year after her marriage to Joseph Wakeford junior of Andover.

Mr Wakeford Junior and Miss Towgood's marriage settlement dated 24th May 1745 is a lengthy settlement laying out what land and money Hannah was given as a dowry and naming various trustees.²¹ The settlement was quadripartite between *'Stephen Towgood of the City of Exon Gentleman and Hannah Towgood of the said City spinster daughter only child and heir presumptive of the said Stephen Towgood of the first part John Duntze of the said City Merchant and Micaiah Towgood of Crediton in the County of*

¹⁷ Exeter Flying post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser 17-24 October 1777, DHC

¹⁸ Report and Account Book of Dissenter's Burial Ground 1748-1832 (3693D/0/B), DHC

¹⁹ The Ministry of the Gospel a Good Work: A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. Daniel Harson, at Moreton-Hampstead, Devon, July 27. 1737 By Stephen Towgood. To which is added a charge delivered on the Same Occasion. by Henry Grove <https://wellcomecollection.org/> accessed 22/10/2022.

²⁰ As note 16.

²¹ For an explanation on marriage settlements see

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Marriage_Settlements_in_England_and_Wales accessed 01/11/2022.

Devon Gentleman of the second part Joseph Wakeford the Elder of Andover in the County of Southton Merchant of the third part and Joseph Wakeford the younger of Andover aforesaid Merchant eldest son and heir apparent of the said Joseph Wakeford the elder of the fourth part.'

She presumably died through complications in childbirth in June 1746 and was buried on the 29th. Her daughter Hannah who survived was baptised at East Street Independent in Andover a month later, on 20th July.²²

Hannah the elder, like many young women of her generation wrote poetry and possibly through parental influence hymns and prose. Her writings, as well as copied portions of the diary of Mary, Mrs. John Walrond, wife of the Presbyterian Minister of Ottery St. Mary (-1729) and Bow Meeting, Exeter (1729-55) and a distant relation through marriage, were kept by Joseph Wakeford and his second wife Mary Steele Wakeford.²³

Transcribed after her death, a substantial part of the collection of her twenty writings were published in 1764 and 1765 in *'The Christian's Magazine, or A Treasury of Divine Knowledge'*. Three poems were later published in the Protestant Dissenters' Magazine -

'The Vanity of Wishing' in vol. 1 (1794)

'A New Year's Midnight Reflection. By a Lady," in vol. 2 (1795)

'A General Hymn of Praise for Creation' in vol. 3 (1796)

For the complete poetry, prose, and published correspondence of Hannah Towgood Wakeford, along with a complete biographical account, see Timothy Whelan, *Nonconformist Women Writers, 1720-1840*, vol. 4 and vol. 8. For a more detailed biography of Hannah.²⁴

The land she inherited passed to her daughter who married Matthew Lee of Ebford near Exeter.

Stephen's siblings

Deborah (c.1696 -), married Daniel Abbot an Axminster clothier on 1st April 1719 in St. Cuthberts, Wells, Somerset. She was living in Shepton Mallet at the time perhaps with her mother and brothers.²⁵ The marriage was mentioned in a letter written by John Davie Towgood in 1720, that *'Mr. Allotts (sic) is lately married to his Uncle Towgood's daughter'*.²⁶

Matthew (c.1684 -1757), also followed in his father's footsteps and became a Presbyterian minister. He was reputedly at Wilton, Wiltshire in 1715.²⁷ Later, he became an assistant at George's Meeting Colyton in 1716.²⁸ He then moved to Shepton Mallet and served there between 1716 and 1729. While there he married Elizabeth Slade in the Cathedral church of St Peters in Exeter on 20th October 1726. He was *"of Shepton Mallet"* and she was from Colyton.

In a deed dated 1729 relating to land in Axminster Matthew was mentioned as *"late of Shepton Mallett in the County of Somersett now of Colyton in the County of Devon Gent"*. It seems possible that he moved back to Colyton before taking up a ministerial post in Poole, Dorset, where he served from 1729

²² East Street Independent records accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk.

²³ The Steele Collection in the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford.

²⁴ <https://www.nonconformistwomenwriters1650-1850.com/poetry/wakeford-hannah-towgood>

²⁵ Her mother gave consent to her marriage. www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁶ Early Modern letters Online Ref. 47906, letter 43 folio 1, Bodleian Library, Oxford -

<http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/profile/work/a973ea09-b325-469f-8ab6-7ffb38130f6f> Accessed 8/12/2022.

²⁷ Wilton: Churches and protestant nonconformity – www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/wilts/vol6/pp28-33 Accessed 7/12/2022.

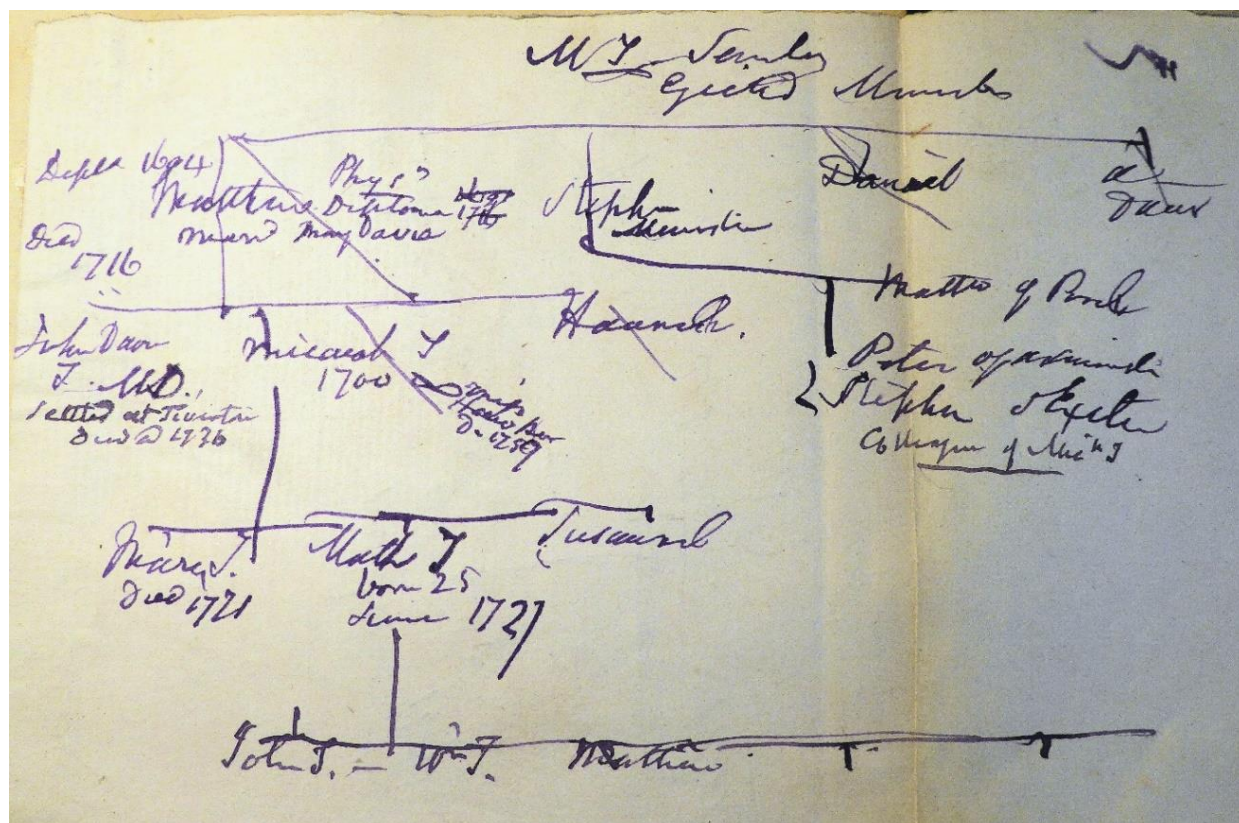
²⁸ As note 8.

until about 1735. Elizabeth died in 1734 and was buried in Colyton.

An extant certificate dated 3rd March 1739 for the house of Matthew Towgood on High Street in Poole as a Presbyterian meeting house shows that he was still there in 1739 but at some point he gave up the ministry to become a maltster and brewer. In 1742 he became bankrupt but was granted his certificate a few months later. Sometime before his death in 1757 he moved to Swanage, Dorset. He died intestate.

Peter (1692- 1758?) was in trade as a clothier in Axminster. He married Mary Newberry in 1715 in Axminster. In 1743, like his brother Matthew became bankrupt. However, unlike his brother it appears he ended up in the Devon County Debtors prison in St Thomas, Exeter.²⁹ He may well have changed his 'career' after this bankruptcy and moved away from Axminster as the last mention of him is in an administration bond dated 14th December 1757 for his brother Matthew. '*Peter Towgood of Whitchurch Canonorum, Schoolmaster the natural and lawfull brother and administrator of all and singular the goods chattels and credits of Matthew Towgood late of Sandwich, widower intestate, deceased*'.³⁰

Nehemiah (1700-) followed in his father's footsteps and became a dissenting Minister. Like his brother, Stephen, he probably attended the Taunton Academy.³¹ An entry in the list of students '*Neh: Towgood*' is more than likely Nehemiah.



Handwritten Towgood family tree attached inside Sussana Towgood's presentation copy of *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Micaiah Towgood*, By James Manning 1792. Stephen and his two brothers on the right but no mention of Nehemiah.

²⁹ London Gazette 28 May 1743 <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/8227/page/5> accessed 06/12/2022.

³⁰ Administration Bond (DA/A/1757) Dorset History Centre <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre>

³¹ Minute Book of the Exeter assembly (1652-1794) 3542D/M/1/1 Devon Heritage Centre www.swheritage.co.uk

In 1731 an entry in the *Kentish Weekly Post* mentioned that, '*The Rev. Mr Nehemiah Towgood, a Dissenting Minister in the West, had lately the Degree of Doctor of Physick conferr'd upon him by one of His Majesty's Universities.*'³² Letters written between James Jurin the scientist and physician, and one Nehemiah Towgood of Shepton Mallet in 1727 provide an account of individuals that Towgood has inoculated with the Smallpox vaccine.³³

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³² Kentish Weekly Post 23 June 1731. Accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³³ The Correspondence of James Jurin <http://emlo-portal.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/?catalogue=james-jurin> accessed 28/10/2022.