

Woolcott Family

No memorial

William Woolcott (buried 1826, aged 2 months)
Isabella Woolcott (buried 1830, aged 2 years)
Mary Woolcott (buried 1834, aged 20 months)
Mary(II) Woolcott (buried 1837, aged 16 months)
Elizabeth Woolcott (buried 1841, aged 2 years)
Isabella Woolcott (12 August 1804 – 26 October 1846)

Five infant children of Frederick and Isabella Woolcott are known to have been buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard and they were joined by their mother on 29th October 1846.¹ She was only 42 years of age and the cause of her death is unknown. Isabella was the fifth child and fourth daughter of John and Elizabeth (née Ham) Soper. At the time of their marriage in July 1796 John was stated to be a plush weaver living in St Mary Major parish, although the Militia List of 1803 states that he was a labourer.² Isabella was born on 12th August 1804 and was baptized at George's Meeting House, Exeter, on 6th August 1807 by Revd James Manning.³

Isabella's husband was Frederick Woolcott, a cordwainer, who also attended George's Meeting House, although he had been baptized at the parish church of St Pancras, Exeter, on 31st August 1803. They married at Exeter St Mary Major on 29th May 1824. Their first child, John Frederick, was born on 27th March 1825 and he was baptized at George's Meeting on 17th April 1825. In all, Frederick and Isabella had ten children between 1825 and 1844, and at least four of them were alive at the time of the National Census in 1851.⁴

Frederick Woolcott (1803-1861)

Frederick became a freeman cordwainer by succession on 10th March 1830, but there is little in the written record about this aspect of his life.⁵ He is better known for his long association with Exeter Police. Frederick Woolcott was appointed to the old City Watch in September 1830 and became an Inspector of the Watch some time before 1834. Exeter City Police was formed in 1836 and in 1843 he was listed as a Day Officer with the rank of Inspector, aged 39 years, married with five children.⁶ His trade was given as a cordwainer and all of the thirteen officers listed had a stated occupation.⁷

¹ DHC 3693D/B1 Dissenters' Burial Ground. Reports, accounts etc. at the above from 1782-1832.

² *Exeter Militia List 1803*. Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1972. Both John (d. 1845 aged 69) and Elizabeth (d. 1850 aged 80) were buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard as were two of their children (in 1813 and 1816). At the time of his death John was recorded as being a stonemason.

³ England & Wales Non-conformist and non-parochial register; RG4>Devon>Presbyterian>Piece 0965 Bow Meeting. Accessed at www.ancestry.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

⁴ 1851 England Census>Exeter Districts accessed at www.ancestry.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

⁵ *Exeter Freeman 1266-1967*. Edited by Margery M Rowe and Andrew M Jackson, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1973. His father, also Frederick, had been a tailor like his father, James, attaining his Freedom in 1820. James had also been the City Crier. James's father, Robert, was the first of the Woolcott/Wollacott family to become a Freeman. He achieved this in 1737 after being apprenticed to John Spyryng, a tailor.

⁶ DHC PA/1/5/1/1/9 Exeter City Police – Names of the Day Officers belonging to the Exeter Police 26th December 1843.

⁷ There were four cordwainers, and other occupations included boot-maker, brick-maker, butcher, coach-painter, comb-maker, discharged soldier, fuller, harness-maker and joiner. Their ages ranged from 32 to 61 years.

There are many reports in the local newspapers referencing the police work of Frederick Woolcott and some examples appear below.

Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, Saturday 9th August 1834. “*Thomas May*, smith, was charged by Woolcott, one of the Inspectors of the Watch, with a violent breach of the peace, assaulting him when in custody, and threatening to beat his brains out with a large stone. The evidence of Woolcott was corroborated by John Martin, and this was the second assault committed by the defendant within a few days. The Bench fined him 40s., and in default of payment to be committed to the House of Correction for two months.”

Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, Saturday 5th December 1835. “On Saturday, at the Guildhall, a young man named *Ryan*, was convicted of assaulting Woolcott one of the City Watch on the night of the 12th instant, in St Mary Arches-street, and fined 10s. He was apprehended on suspicion of having been concerned in removing the tomb-stones in Bartholomew-yard, and attempted, in his defence, to set up an *alibi*, but failed in satisfying the Bench that the Watchman had made a mistake in his person, he being well known to the officer before.”

Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, Saturday 17th March 1855. “*John Western* was charged with assaulting Inspector Woolcott and P.C. Mortimore. On Sunday morning the defendant was in Market-street creating a disturbance, and upon being requested to move on by Inspector Woolcott he became very abusive and struck the officer. He was then taken into custody, and with the assistance of P.C. Mortimore he was removed to the Station-house, but not before he had kicked Mortimore several times. The Bench fined the defendant 10s. and expenses, or a fortnight’s imprisonment.”

Exeter Flying Post, Thursday 31st May 1849. “Wm. Rowe, a lad bathed in tears, was brought up by Inspector Woolcott, charged with having robbed his master, Mr. Wm. Rawlings Sobey, of Queen-street, silversmith.”

Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, Saturday 3rd January 1857. “AN IMPOSTER. REPORTED ROBBERY AND ATTEMPT AT MURDER. At a late hour on Tuesday night last, a young woman aroused the inmates of The Three Horse Shoes Inn, near Cowley Bridge, with a pitiful tale that she had been ill-treated by five men, who had attacked her on the road near Cowley Bridge; that they had beaten her, robbed her of 10s., and then thrown her into the river, where she had had a narrow escape of being drowned. Her clothes were dripping wet, and believing her tale the landlord granted her admission, and had her wants supplied. The next day, Mr. Edye, surgeon, of Exeter, was called to attend her, and to him she told the same story. Information was given to the Exeter police, and Inspector Woolcott went with Mr. Edye to gain some information as to the alleged girl’s assailants. Various questions were put to her, and at length she admitted that her whole story was a fabrication, and that she had thrown herself into the water. She gave her name as Susan Tremlett, and stated that she had been a servant in the employ of Mr. McLean, in Bartholomew-street, Exeter; and upon enquiry it was ascertained that she had absconded from Mr. McLean’s service the previous Saturday, with some of his property in her possession. We learn that the girl has since been sent to her friends, who reside in the neighbourhood of Crediton.”

Most of the reports relate to petty thefts, incidents of begging and vagrancy, minor assaults and anti-social behaviour. He seems to have been a conscientious officer and, on at least one occasion, was reprimanded by the Bench for having left the town, “..in quest of an escaped convict, without previously acquainting his superior officer or the Mayor”. The reporter concluded that, “..the fault was evidently an

“excess of duty” and we were glad to find it leniently dealt with”.⁸

Frederick Woolcott was promoted to the rank of Inspector in June 1842. The promotion arose because Inspector Henry Lascelles filled a vacancy occasioned by the death of John Taylor, sergeant-at-mace. The Watch Committee recommended that Woolcott, “.. should be promoted to Lascelles’ place”.⁹ In Summer 1847, Mr David Steele, Superintendent of Barnstaple Police was appointed as Superintendent of the “New” Police Force in Exeter. An article in the *Western Times* reported, “THE NEW POLICE FORCE. Eighteen new men were elected on Saturday last, by the Watch Committee, and the appointments were confirmed by the Council on Wednesday. A very fine body of men presented themselves as candidates. The new superintendent, Mr David Steele....will attend at the Guildhall, on Saturday, August 14th, when the force will be regularly organized. The following are appointed inspectors: Messrs. Back, Wolcott (*sic*), Stuckes, Joslin, and Ellicombe....”¹⁰

Reform of the local police force continued. The Watch Committee recommended that on the 31st August 1847 the whole of the night police be discharged, with the men eligible for selection for the new force. New officers should not be above 30 years of age or below 5 feet 7 inches in height. The reform went further, “None of the police to be employed in any other business”, and clothing (a uniform) would be provided.¹¹ The superintendent was to be paid £130 per annum; there were to be five inspectors (each at 21s per week), seventeen constables at 16s, four staff bearers, “the present officers at 18s., but their successors at 16s.”, and three sergeants at mace at 21s. The shifts were long – the day shift from 6a.m. to 9p.m. with one superintendent, one inspector, seven constables and three sergeants; by night four inspectors and fourteen constables. There were reportedly 120 public houses in Exeter at this time, so drunkenness and anti-social behaviour required a significant night-time watch.¹²

In October 1846 Frederick’s wife Isabella died, aged only 42 years. Their youngest child, Thomas, was just three years old.¹³ Two years later, on 31st October 1848, Frederick re-married. He was living in Waterbeer Street, Exeter, as was Jane Fare (b. 1809), an unmarried servant “sojourner in this parish”. They married at St Pancras parish church (see below).¹⁴

1848. Marriage solemnized in the Parish Church in the Parish of Saint Pancras in the County of Devon

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
64	October 31 st	Frederick Woolcott	off full age	Married	Policeman	Waterbeer Street	Frederick Woolcott	Sailor
		Jane Fare	off full age	Single	Servant	Waterbeer Street	John Fare	Gardener

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church officiated by me, Edmund T. G. Lane

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Frederick Woolcott and Jane Fare in the Presence of us, Edmund T. G. Lane and John Fare

⁸ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, Saturday 21st May 1842. Accessed at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

⁹ *Western Times*, Saturday 12th February 1842. Accessed at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

¹⁰ *Western Times*, Saturday 14th August 1847. Accessed at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

¹¹ *Western Times*, Saturday 19th June 1847. Accessed at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

¹² <http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/em/organisations/policehistory.php> Accessed 1st October 2023.

¹³ England and Wales births, 1837-2006. Accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

¹⁴ Devon Marriages and Banns, 2949A/PR/1/11. Accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

By 1850, Woolcott was listed as a staff bearer as well as an Inspector, but it is not known whether he was paid for both posts.¹⁵ He was similarly recorded in 1853.¹⁶

In January 1858, the High Constable, Mr William Morgan, died and his position was filled by William Howard. The Mayor, William Buckingham, appointed Frederick Woolcott as Sergeant-at-Mace.¹⁷ Later in 1858 Woolcott was disqualified from registering as a voter - The *Western Times* (Saturday 2nd October 1858) reported that, "Frederick Woolcott (sergeant at mace and freeman) was objected to by Mr Stogden¹⁸ on the ground that he was not a sergeant at the time of the passing of the act¹⁹ which disqualified police officers from voting....It was proved, however, that Woolcott had not been in his present office long enough to entitle him to vote,..."

Frederick Woolcott held the position of Sergeant-at-Mace until his death in May 1861, aged 58 years. The Census return for 1861 completed just one month before Frederick's death recorded him living at 26 Bartholomew Street in St Paul parish with wife Jane and youngest son Thomas, a hairdresser.²⁰ His occupation was given as "(Mayor's) Sergeant-at-Mace".²¹ Two other Sergeants-at-Mace were recorded in Bartholomew Street in the same Census: John Gingham and wife Charlotte at number 27, and Henry Lascelles and wife Sarah at number 28.

Frederick's death was reported in several local newspapers, including the *Western Times* (Saturday 25th May 1861): "We regret to announce the death of one of our worthy city Sergeants-at-Mace, Mr Frederick Woolcott. The deceased was connected with the police for 30 years. He was a very active officer, and for detective purposes, we believe, was very trustworthy and efficient. On the death of Mr. Morgan, Mr. Woolcott was made Sergeant-at-Mace, and he has continued to discharge his duties up to a short period, with satisfaction to the authorities." Frederick was buried in St Paul's, Paul Street, Exeter on 23rd May 1861.²²

Jane Woolcott continued to live in Exeter until her death in March 1876.²³ In the 1871 Census she was living in Waterbeer Street with her grandsons Frederick (12) and Walter (9), the sons of James Woolcott, Frederick and Isabella's eighth child, a hairdresser who had moved to London in the 1850s.

Ian Varndell
October 2023

Note.

There is also a recorded burial of a Mary Wollacot in 1782. It is possible that she was the wife of Robert (see reference 5). Robert Wollacott married Mary Tomes in February 1737 at St Mary Arches, Exeter. If this Mary was Robert's wife, she would be the great-great-grandmother of Frederick's infant children. Whether other members of the Woolcott/Wollacott families were buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard has not been recorded.

¹⁵ White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Devonshire and the City and County of the City of Exeter (1850).

¹⁶ Besley's West of England Pocket Book (1853).

¹⁷ *Exeter Flying Post*, Thursday 21st January 1858 and *Western Times*, Saturday 13th March 1858.

¹⁸ John Stogden, a lawyer from Gandy Street, Exeter acted on behalf of the Liberals.

¹⁹ The County and Borough Police Act 1856.

²⁰ Frederick and Isabella's eldest son, John Frederick, was listed as a hairdresser in the 1841 Census, but by 1851 was recorded as a copper smith. He died in 1863.

²¹ 1861 England Census>Exeter St Paul>District 7 accessed at www.ancestry.co.uk on 1st October 2023.

²² Devon burials, 303A/PR/1/15, accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk on 3rd October 2023.

²³ Jane was buried in Higher Cemetery, Exeter, on 23rd March 1876, aged 67 years.