

James Adam Esquire 1799-1809

James Adam, 'Second Mate or officer of the Elphinstone an East Indiaman' was buried in the Dissenters graveyard on 18th December 1809. Entries in the Burial registers say that he died of consumption in Heavitree and was buried in Magdalen Street, that he was twenty-nine (on the coffin) and the son of Dr. Adam of Edinburgh.¹

His death was reported in numerous publications, one states 'On the 14th December at Maryton, Exeter. Mr James Adam, late second officer of the Hon. East India Company's ship Elphinstone, and son of Dr. Alexander Adam, Edinburgh.'²

The burial register records the fee for 'Opening a new grave for Mr James Adam son of Dr Adam of Edinburgh a stranger 16/- paid on the day.'³ Unfortunately, we know very little about the life of James and at this point have not been able to trace 'Maryton'. We do however have accounts of his death through records of his father.

James Adam was born on 28th October 1779 and baptised the day after at St. Cuthberts, Edinburgh. His father, Dr Alexander Adam and his mother Agnes (Nannie) Munro. ⁴

Alexander Adam (1741-1809) was Rector of the High School of Edinburgh where Sir Walter Scott was educated from 1779 to 1783. 'One of the most innovative educators of his age, he sought to instil in his pupils not only a grasp of grammar but a sensitivity to literary language'. ⁵

In '*An Account of the life and character of Alexander Adam, LL.D. Rector of the High School, Edinburgh*' by Alexander Henderson, it is stated that, 'James Adam, the Rectors favourite son, returned to England with the homeward bound East India fleet, in the month of November 1809. For some weeks the Doctor (Alexander) had been extremely anxious in his enquiries after the fleet, and he appeared to anticipate his son's arrival with the fondest expectation. These expectations, however were never to be realised; for Mr Adam's constitution had been strongly attacked by consumption, and his father had the mortification to find that he was disabled from undertaking a journey to Scotland. From Heavitree, near Exeter, where his dutiful son had retired for the recovery of his health, he addressed a letter to his father, requesting him to lose no time in leaving Edinburgh, if he expected again to see him in life. But this affecting summons came too late; for, on Wednesday 13th December, while attending his class, Dr Adam was seized with an alarming indisposition which had every appearance of apoplexy, and increased so much that he had to leave the school, supported by his intimate and deserving friend Mr. Gray'

Dr Adam died on 18th December. 'His death was attributed partly to those domestic unhappiness's which have been mentioned, and, in a great measure, to extreme grief at the deplorable state of his son's health. This young gentleman, who was third officer on board the Elphinstone East Indiaman when he fell sick, would upon his next voyage have become entitled to rank of captain.'⁶

There is a portrait of Alexander Adam by Raeburn in the National Galleries of Scotland.

¹ Exeter Mint (Presbyterian) Births, baptisms and Burials 1719-1810, RG4 0336, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk

² From 'The Naval Chronicle Volume 22 July – December 1809'

³ Report and Account book of Dissenters Burial Ground 1748-1831, DRO3693D/0/B/1, www.swheritage.org.uk

⁴ Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms 1564-1950, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk

⁵ <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/education.html>

⁶ '*An Account of the life and character of Alexander Adam, LL.D. Rector of the High School, Edinburgh*' by Alexander Henderson

It is interesting that Dr. Adam died on the day his son was being buried. The writer of the account does not say whether he knew his son had actually died.

In *'The History of Edinburgh, from the earliest accounts, to the year 1780'* by Hugo Arnot reprinted 1816 his death was announced; 'December 18 1809, died at Edinburgh, aged 69, Dr Alexander Adam, Rector of the High School, who filled that important station with much ability and celebrity for 43 years. The funeral of Doctor Adam took place on Friday December 29.'

James was one of five children. Agnes, Christian and Walter born from Alexander's first marriage and Alexander and James by his second.⁷ Agnes married William Prout, the well-known physician and chemist and for much of her life lived in Sackville Street, London with him and her children. Walter became a Medical Doctor and lived with his sister Agnes and her family.⁸

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⁷ Scotland, Select Births and Baptisms 1564-1950, accessed via Ancestry.co.uk

⁸ London, England, Church of England Marriage and Banns 1754-1921 and census returns accessed via Ancestry.co.uk