

No memorial

Hannah KENNAWAY (died 1749)
Richard KENNAWAY (died 1755)
Robert KENNAWAY (died 1789)
Shepherd KENNAWAY (died 1823)
Elizabeth KENNAWAY (died 1825)
Mary KENNAWAY (died 1828)
Ann FAIRBANK (died 1831)
William Benjamin KENNAWAY (died 1834)

The Kennaways were a prosperous merchant family who arrived in Exeter in the early 18th century. They lived in Holy Trinity parish and made their fortune firstly from the cloth industry and later from banking and the wine trade. It is clear that they were part of the non-conformist community in Exeter with several baptisms taking place at Bow Meeting and some burials in the Dissenters' graveyard; they also donated towards the costs of building George's Meeting House. But they also retained strong links with Holy Trinity church and family members continued to be buried there even after the Dissenters' graveyard had opened. By the 19th century it is likely that some branches of the family had reverted to Anglicanism.

William Kennaway (senior) was a sergemaker who married Joan Abraham at St Sidwell's in Exeter on 28th February 1714.¹ The following year he joined the Gild of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen and was Master of the Gild in 1738; his sons and grandsons would continue this tradition.²

William and Joan had at least six children: Robert, William, Abraham, Richard, Eliza and Elizabeth but the only baptism that has been found was Richard's which took place at Bow Meeting on 30th January 1725 and is the first evidence that the family were dissenters.³ The infant Eliza was buried on 2nd September 1722 at Holy Trinity church as was William's wife Joan on 11th January 1738 and his seventeen year old son Richard on 19th May 1742.⁴ William was married a second time to Ann Harris on 5th April 1744 at Exeter Cathedral.⁵

William was buried on 17th March 1769 at Holy Trinity church⁶ and left £20 to his wife Ann, his son Robert received £100 and was forgiven any debts he had owed to his father. The rest of William's estate was to be divided between his sons Abraham and William and his daughter Elizabeth, the three of whom were to be his executors.⁷

By the 1740s William's sons Robert, William and Abraham were establishing themselves in the cloth business and settling down to raise families of their own.

The first Kennaway to be buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard was **Hannah Kennaway**, an infant, who was buried on 14th July 1749.⁸ No baptism has been found for her but, based on her given name, it is possible that she was the daughter of **Robert Kennaway**. Robert had married Hannah Brinley at Holy Trinity on 31st March 1746⁹ and they went on to have another daughter named Hannah in 1751 followed by Elizabeth in 1755, both of whom were baptised at Bow Meeting.¹⁰

It is possible that the **Richard Kennaway** "a child" who was buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard on 26th October 1755 was also a son of Richard and Hannah, but with no baptism record found he could equally have been a son of Richard's brother Abraham.¹¹

Robert joined the Gild of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen as a sergemaker in 1759 and he was Master of the Gild in 1763. It is not known when Robert's wife Hannah died, though there is a record in the Dissenters' graveyard account book of a payment of 10 shillings received from Mr Robert Kennaway for opening a cave on 8th December 1769 which could perhaps have been for Hannah's burial.¹² He must have been widowed around this time as he married Ann Jones at Holy Trinity on 22nd January 1772; the marriage was witnessed by Sexie Blight and Richard Radford.¹³ In 1789 the *Bath Chronicle* carried an announcement of the death of Robert Kennaway. He was described as a maltster, so he must have been diversifying in his business practices, and he died "suddenly".¹⁴ He was buried in the Dissenters' Graveyard on 6th December 1789.¹⁵

William Kennaway (junior) joined the Gild of Weavers Tuckers and Shearmen in 1739 and was master in 1755. He was a sergemaker like his father but over time built up the business to a much larger degree. He established the firm of Kennaway and Co. in 1743 and under his sons and grandsons it would diversify into the banking and wine importing trades with premises in Palace Gate and Commercial Road.¹⁶

William married Frances Tozer (sister of the Rev. Abraham Tozer who was the minister at Bow Meeting) on 12th February 1750 at St Leonards church in Exeter¹⁷. Their eldest child, William, was born in 1751 and was followed by six more who were all baptised at Bow Meeting by their uncle Abraham Tozer; Frances (1755), Richard (1756), John (1758), Robert (1761), Susannah (1762) and Thomas (1763)¹⁸.



William Kennaway c1718-1793

Image credit: Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery

William's wife Frances died in 1788 and was buried at Holy Trinity on 15th August¹⁹. In 1789 William purchased Wynards Almshouse and its lands from Lord North. The trustees of the Dissenters' graveyard had been leasing the land for the burial ground from the Wynards estate since it had opened in 1748 so William Kennaway was now the landlord of the Graveyard.

For the Wynards Almshouses William Kennaway *"proved a faithful patron, he not only thoroughly repaired the houses, but beautified the chapel, and presented to it a neat service of silver communion plate; he also caused a large vault to be made in it, for a dormitory for himself and family, in which he lies interred and a handsome marble monument has been erected to his memory"*²⁰.

William died on 18th January 1793 and was buried in Wynards chapel²¹. He was described in the *Sherborne Mercury* as *"An eminent and wealthy merchant of Exeter...His domestic and social virtues endeared him to his relations and friends – his integrity, candour, charity, and universal benevolence, justly entitled him to the respect of the public."*²²

William was clearly a wealthy man; in his will he left several thousand pounds to each of his sons and daughters. The Wynards Estate was bequeathed to his eldest son William who died in 1819 leaving it to his nephew Mark Kennaway (son of William and Frances's son Thomas).²³

William and Frances's sons and grandsons continued to be prominent in local circles. Their son John was a soldier with the East India Company and a diplomat. In 1791 he was created Baronet of Hyderabad. He returned to England in 1794 with his brother Richard, who had made his fortune with the Board of Trade in Bengal and together they purchased Escot House near Ottery St Mary. Their brother Thomas continued to run the family wine importing business, his son Mark, who was a solicitor, inherited Wynards and Mark's brother William was Mayor of Exeter in 1831. However none of William's immediate family were buried in the Dissenters' graveyard.

Abraham Kennaway married Mary Shephard at Modbury on 16th September 1741.²⁴ They had at least nine children; Elizabeth, Alice Shephard, Jane, Joyce, William Benjamin, Mary, Ann, Mary and Abraham. The first Mary died as a child and was buried at Holy Trinity on 31st May 1748 the others were mentioned in Abraham's will but no baptisms have been found for any of them.²⁵

Abraham joined the Gild of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen as a fuller in 1742 and was Master of the Gild in 1746. In 1763 *The London Gazette* reported that some of his serges, as well as those belonging to Ann Moor, which were on the drying racks at Frienhayes had been maliciously damaged and a reward of £50 was offered to find the perpetrators²⁶. During the 1770s he served on the Chapel Committee of George's Meeting during along with his brother William²⁷.

In 1790 Abraham died and was buried on 13th November at Holy Trinity²⁸. He had been successful in his business endeavours and was able to leave £1000 each to his two sons and his five unmarried daughters²⁹. His daughter Ann had presumably already been given her portion at the time of her marriage to Francis Fairbank of Ely Place in London in 1780; she was the only one of the six daughters to marry.

Although Abraham and his wife Mary (who died in 1805) were both buried at Holy Trinity five of their adult children were buried in the Dissenters' graveyard. Alice Shephard was almost certainly the **Miss Shepherd Kennaway** aged 69 who was buried there on 10th June 1823. She was followed by her sister **Elizabeth Kennaway** on 21st June 1825 aged 81. **Mary Kennaway** died in 1828 and was buried on 19th February. **Ann Fairbank** (née Kennaway), whose husband had predeceased her, was buried in the Dissenters' graveyard on 6th August 1831³⁰.

The last Kennaway to be buried in the Dissenters' graveyard was Abraham's son **William Benjamin Kennaway** who was a merchant in the cloth industry like his father and grandfather. He joined the Gild of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen in 1784 and served as Master in 1788 and again in 1818. He doesn't appear to have married and left his property to his surviving sisters Joyce and Jane³¹. He was buried on 23rd September 1834 aged 72.

There are still reminders of the family in Exeter and the surrounding area; one of the former warehouses on Commercial Road by Exeter Quay bears the sign "Kennaway and Co. Limited Bonded Stores", this was one of the premises of Kennaway and Co, built in the 1890's. Kennaway House in Sidmouth (then called Fort House) was leased by William and Frances' son Richard in 1815 and later passed into the hands of his brother Sir John who enlarged it. Escot House, near Ottery St Mary, is still lived in by descendants of Sir John.



Kennaway's Bonded Stores situated on Commercial Road, Exeter Quay.

Sarah Taylor
January 2025

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NB There are three burials for Elizabeth Kennaways around this time: a) 1798 at Holy Trinity; she was the *sister* of Robert, William and Abraham – the executors of her will were her nephews William B Kennaway and Robert Kennaway. b) 1820 at Holy Trinity; she was the wife of Abraham, son of Abraham and Mary – announcement in Exeter Flying Post. c) 1825 in register of George's Meeting; by a process of elimination she must be the daughter of Abraham and Mary.
- ³¹ William Benjamin's will: England and Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858. PROB11 Piece 1836 on www.ancestry.co.uk
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