

No memorial

Mrs. ELLIOT buried 1759
Capt. ELLIOT buried 1769

Mrs. Elliot

Nothing more than the date of this person's death has been found. Perhaps she was related to the said Capt. Elliot as the Accounts Book shows that 5/- was paid "for a grave for Mrs Elliot (sic)" and payment "for Capt. Elliots grave" ten years later was 2/6p. This suggests that they may have been placed in the same plot.

Capt. Elliot

In all the research carried out to date with regard to the said Capt. Elliot, there is no evidence that the person buried in the graveyard in 1769 carried the title Captain except in Slater's Directory 1852 for Topsham. The wording in the Directory was "*The principal charity is a large free-school called "Elliot's Charity School", partly supported by a bequest of Captain Samuel Elliot, assisted by voluntary contributions*" and we know that this refers to Mr Elliot, Gentleman. All documents reviewed, including his last Will and Testament¹, refer to Mr. Samuel Elliot, Gentleman and, on that basis and in the absence of a memorial stone, the following information concerns Mr. Samuel Elliot, Gentleman of Topsham, aka 'Captain Elliot'.

It has not been possible to identify the parents nor the date of birth of Samuel Elliot. However, there are two possibilities (assuming that he was born in Topsham). Firstly, he may have been born in 1702 and baptised on 24th May of that year and that his parents were Thomas and Hannah Elliot making him 67 years old at the time of his death, or it is possible that he was baptised on 15th March 1749 and his parents were Thomas and Joan Elliot.² The former is the most likely candidate given that his Will written in 1768 shows him to have been a wealthy man who owned a great deal of land and property which it is unlikely he could have acquired by the age of 21 years.

No evidence has been found to suggest that Samuel Elliot ever married. There are many legacies recorded in his Will and those names have been explored to attempt to identify his family. Some of the names are recorded as Samuel's kinsfolk but none have been clearly identified as family members. There are the three daughters of Joan Marsh whom Samuel refers to as "my late kinswoman". All three daughters had married and were named as Mary Irish, Ann Furse, and Joan Marks. Each received a legacy of £100. Nothing has been found so far to link Joan Marsh to Samuel Elliot as a member of his family.

It is clear that Samuel was a benevolent gentleman, leaving monetary legacies to his Executors, Nicholas Peters (Surgeon), Abel Thomas (Shipwright), the Presbyterian Ministers Reverends Stephen and Micajah Towgood, Reverend Aaron Pitts, Reverend Aaron Tozer, and their families, and local Topsham people including a woman named Martha Venn "if she lives with me at my decease". It is likely that Martha was Samuel's house keeper/servant. His philanthropic nature went further when his Will stated that all his household goods, plate and debts due and owing, and all his Consolidated Annuities and Money in the publick (sic) funds he left for his Executors to share with deserving local people in Topsham and nearby Clyst St George. The precise wording in the Will is significant, "*..to distribute at their discretion fifty pounds part thereof amongst ten of the most Sober and necessitious familys in Topsham to wit five pounds*

to each family or the parent thereof and to distribute twenty pounds more thereof equally amongst twenty of the most distressed persons of Sober Characters of the parish of Clyst St George to wit twenty shillings to each of them and to lay out one hundred and twenty pounds more thereof in the binding out of children of poor reputable parents of the town or parish of Topsham to be apprentices at sea or to some trade....”.

In addition to the above, Samuel bequeathed £400 to his Executors for them to invest in money for the Presbyterian Minister to prepare and give two sermons per year on the benefits of education and for the purpose of teaching the poor children of Topsham in reading and writing without respect of religious denominations or parties of the children’s parents. To this effect **Elliot’s Charity School, Topsham** was established.³

In addition to Samuel being such a benevolent individual with regard to his monetary wealth, Samuel owned properties and land on the outskirts of Topsham. His Will and newspaper reports show that he owned properties and over 80 acres of land in the parish of Rockbear (sic). The areas are named as Southwood, Marsh Bawden and Roods. The properties were tenanted out at the time of his death but were left, in the Will, to Abel Kentisbear, a Topsham Shipwright whom Samuel described as his “kinsman”, and Stephen Woolcot who was a Joiner also of Topsham.

There is evidence that Samuel Elliot lived in the Strand in Topsham. The following advertisement appeared in the *Sherborne Mercury* on 22nd May 1769, “*To be SOLD: by Messrs Nicholas Peters, and Abel Thomas, Trustees, named in the last Will and Testament of Mr. S. Elliot, deceased, The Fee Simple and Inheritance of all, that Messuage and Tenement, Pleasantly situated on the Strand in Topsham wherein Mr Elliot lately dwelt, with the Courtlage, Garden, Cellars and Offices thereto belonging. Also a Messuage and Tenement in Chapter Street, in Topsham, now rented by Mrs Spicer, with the Courtlage, Garden, and Appurtances thereto belonging. Which houses are in very good repair, and to be sold separate....”.*

In 1775, Abel Thomas of Topsham was declared bankrupt⁴ but the Elliot Charity School lived on!

References

1. Will of Samuel Elliot, Gentleman of Topsham, Devon (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)
2. England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975 (www.findmypast.co.uk)
3. Topsham Unitarian Chapel (www.search.prequest.com)
4. Derby Mercury 24th November 1775 (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)

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Note added 24/2/25. On 2nd November 1709 a Henry Marsh married a Joan Kentisbeare at Topsham (Ancestry), so it is conceivable that Samuel Elliot’s mother was a Kentisbeare given the statements that both Joan Marsh and Abel Kentisbear were kinsfolk.