

Memorials 5 and 35

SARAH BRETLAND died April 14th 1784
JOSEPH BRETLAND died October 29th 1791

SARAH BRETLAND died May 1804
Rev. JOSEPH BRETLAND died July 8th 1819
ELIZABETH BOWDEN died June 21st 1824 *
THOMAS BOWDEN died March 23rd 1813
JAMES BOWDEN died January 31st 1848

The two memorial stones are somewhat confusing as the first two names, Sarah and Joseph Bretland, above are commemorated on both stones.

The inscription on headstone 35, reads '*Here lieth Sarah Bretland who died April 14th 1784 in the 82nd year of her age Also Joseph Bretland husband of the above who died October 29th 1791 in his 86th year.*' This stone is described as 'floating' and therefore not in its original position. Was it moved after the later burials and replaced with headstone 5? This might explain the repetition of the two names on the second headstone.

The cave underneath headstone 5 originally belonged to a Mr Toms. There were two burials in this cave, Mrs Toms and probably Mr Toms himself. The 'cave' was dug sometime between 1756 and 1758 for Mrs Toms for which the graveyard account book records '*Received of Mr Toms for a cave for his wife, 15/-*'. Mr Toms was buried there in 1762. In 1759 a Thomas Toms subscribed to the building of the new George's Meeting House in South Street, Exeter. It is possible that this was the Mr Toms buried three years later. On April 22nd 1784 when they buried Mrs Bretland the account book shows that they '*Rec'd for opening Mr Toms cave for Mrs Bretland, 10/-*'. It is therefore assumed that Mr and Mrs Toms were also interred within the Bretland cave. By the time Joseph was buried on the 4th November 1791, it was known as the Bretland cave.

Sarah Bretland née Mills (c.1702-1784) was the mother of the Rev. Joseph Bretland. She was described in a biography of her son as "*the daughter of Mr Mills of Somersetshire*".¹ She was baptised on 15th October 1702 in St. Mary's church, Bridgwater, the daughter of John and Mary Mills. She had one brother that we know of, and it is through this brother she was Aunt to Mary his daughter who married Matthew Towgood the son of the Reverend Micaiah Towgood.²

Sarah married Joseph Bretland (1706-1791) at St. Mary's Bridgwater on 19th June 1735. A month before, on 27th March, Matthew Lee an eminent merchant living in Woodbury at the time, noted in his journal that as treasurer of the 'Thursday's Lecture' at George's Meeting he had '*Recd of Jos. Bretland for marriage money, 10/-*'.³ What exactly was this money for?

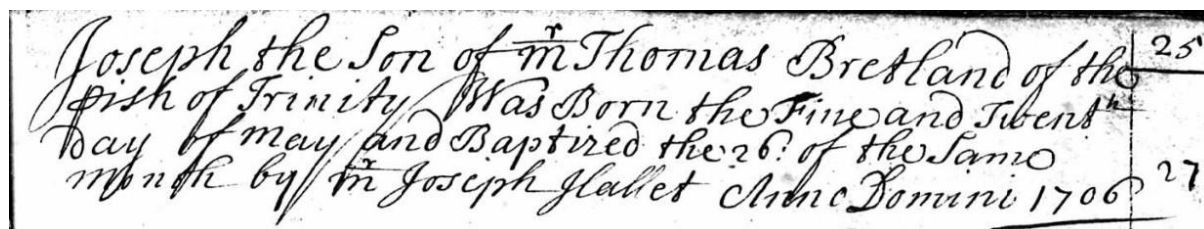
* See separate biography for the Bowdens – <https://edgt.org.uk/social-history.html>.

¹ 'A history of the Presbyterian and general Baptist churches in the West of England, with memoirs of some of their pastors' Jerom Murch 1835.

² See Towgood biography www.edgt.org.uk

³ Diary and account book of Matthew Lee of Ebford (2889Z/F1), South West Heritage Trust (SWHT). The Thursday evening lectures were held weekly at George's Meeting House on South Street.

Joseph Bretland (1706-1791) was born on 25th May in 1706 and baptised the day after at Bow Meeting by the Reverend Joseph Hallet.⁴ He was the son of a Thomas Bretland of which there were a few in Exeter at that time. There is mention in the accounts book of one Mr. Bretland (1704-1773) and his wife Margaret née Powell (d.1786) who it is believed are Joseph's brother and sister-in-law.⁵



Joseph the Son of m^r Thomas Bretland of the 25th
 parish of Trinity Was Born the Five and Twentth
 Day of may and Baptized the 26th of the Same
 month by m^r Joseph Hallet Cleric Domini 1706 27

Joseph, a tradesman in Exeter, was a periwig maker.⁶ A Joseph Bretland gained his freedom of the City of Exon on 6th May 1734 having been an apprentice of one William Laskey, barber, and wigmaker.⁷ At that period a barber might shave a man, cut his hair, perform surgery and extract teeth as well as making wigs, called periwigs or perukes.

Initially Joseph and Sarah appear to have lived in Crediton as there is evidence of a Joseph Bretland of Crediton, Barber taking on an apprentice Joseph Hooker in 1741. However, it is not known whether this was 'our' Joseph Bretland.

Joseph and Sarah had four children. Joseph their youngest and only surviving child was born on 22nd May in 1742. No definitive baptism record has been found for him or any of his siblings. There are however three burial notices relating to children of Joseph Bretland/Britland within the relevant years shortly after their marriage. Thomas – 6th March 1737 at Holy Trinity, Exeter, Ann - 4th December 1741 in St. Mary Major and Sarah - 14th October 1742 at Holy Trinity. Whether these are relevant or not needs further investigation.

An indenture dated December 1742 shows that Joseph and Sarah leased from Benjamin Ivie a merchant in Exeter, *'All that tenement or dwelling house with the appurtenances scituate lying and being in the parish of St. Mary Major in the said City of Exon late in the possession of Thomas Leigh Gentleman afterwards of Elizabeth White widow since of Thomasin Bidwell widow since of Richard Spiller ironmonger and now in the possession of the said Joseph Bretland.'*⁸

Sun Fire Insurance records from 1789 indicate that the Reverend Joseph Bretland insured *'his printed books, in the now dwelling house only of Joseph Bretland Senior private, situate in Southgate Street in the Parish of St. Mary Major,'* for £200. Other records indicate that this brick-built house may have been in Rocks Lane just off Southgate (South) Street.⁹ In the same year he insured the contents of his own dwelling house in Bartholomew Yard which included wearing apparel, plate, books, prints and maps.

⁴ Bow meeting register, 1687-1823 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

⁵ See separate biography www.edgt.org.uk

⁶ Mr Ivie to Mr Bretland, Counterpart Lease, 10th December 1742 (DD/AH 41/3/24) Somerset Heritage Centre.

⁷ Exeter Freeman 1266-1967, Ed. Margery M. Rowe and Andrew M Jackson, 1973, Devon and Cornwall Record Society.

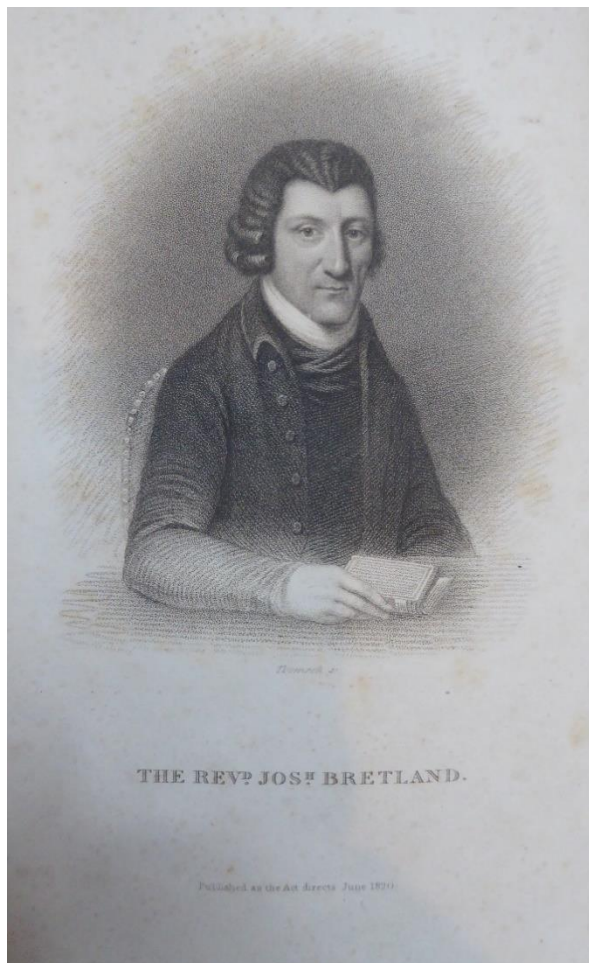
⁸ As note 6.

⁹ Sun Fire Insurance Records, MS 11936/352/545043, MS 11936/364/563233, MS 11936/375/578883, MS 11936/384/595130, London Metropolitan Archives.

Sarah and Joseph both lived long lives. She died on April 14th 1784 at the age of 82 and Joseph died several years later, on October 29th 1791 aged 86. *'Each of these events affected Mr Bretland deeply, and it was long before he recovered his wonted cheerfulness. His greatest pleasure appeared to consist in relating any anecdotes respecting his parents.'*¹⁰

The Reverend Joseph Bretland

The picture of Joseph shows him wearing the clothing of a typical clergyman of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One would like to think that the clerical wig he is wearing was made by his father.



Various biographies of Joseph have been written. The first, published in 1820 by William Benjamin Kennaway, Joseph's friend and executor, was from an autobiographical memoir.¹¹ Much of the following biography has been sourced from this original document unless otherwise referenced.

It appears that when Joseph was born, he *'was of a weak and delicate constitution, and his mother, who, on account of her own tender state of health, had been prevailed on to entrust the care of her former children to other nurses, resolved to suckle this infant herself, and probably preserved his life by so doing.'*

He was schooled for a number of years at Exeter Grammar School but at the age of fifteen he was sent to the *'counting House of Mr Mourgue'*. This probably relates to Daniel Mourgue a naturalized cloth merchant from Strasbourg trading in Exeter. Daniel traded to Leghorn, Cadiz and Hamburg.¹² There is no evidence of Joseph as an indentured apprentice to Mr Mourgue, but his position only lasted about twelve months.

Engraving of Bretland by James Thomson.

He was then taken under the tutelage of the Reverend Mr William West minister of the Mint congregation probably until West's death in 1760. In the same year he was sent to board at Lymptone where he was taught by the Reverend John Turner who was the minister at Lymptone and Gulliford.¹³ Here he learned Hebrew and furthered his mathematical studies in preparation for his entering the Second Exeter Academy. He started the five years of study there in 1761. According to H. McLachlan it is thought that

¹⁰ Monthly Repository (1806-1838) and Unitarian Chronicle (1832-1833), January 1821, Edition 1 of 1, Page 42, Untitled Article <https://ncse.ac.uk/periodicals/mruc/issues/vm2-ncseproduct2496/page/42/articles/ar04200/?highlight=Bretland&from=search> accessed 07/05/2024.

¹¹ Sermons, by the late Rev. Joseph Bretland. To which are prefixed memoirs of his life in two volumes, 1820, Exeter, Devon and Exeter Institute.

¹² Topsham wharfingers accounts (a2/33), Exeter City Archives, SWHT.

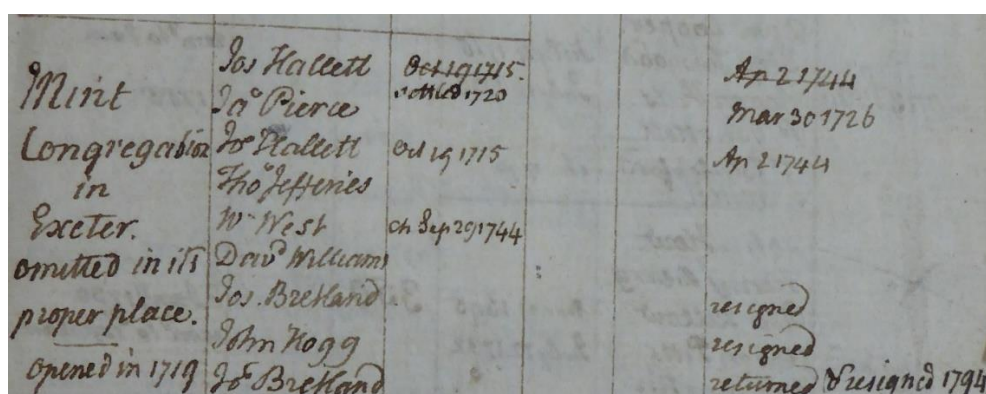
¹³ John Turner was minister at Lymptone until 1769.

'neither theology nor science was neglected, and that the education given was wide in extent and progressive in character.'¹⁴

The certificate he received on completion of his course there on the 1st July 1766, was handwritten by Micaiah Towgood and signed by Micaiah, Samuel Merivale, John Hogg and John Turner. It states that he has gone through a course of academical studies with them and 'wish him the blessing of Heaven and recommend him to the Acceptance of any Part of the Christian Church where his services may be desired.'¹⁵

What Joseph did between 1766 and the next step in his career is not yet known.

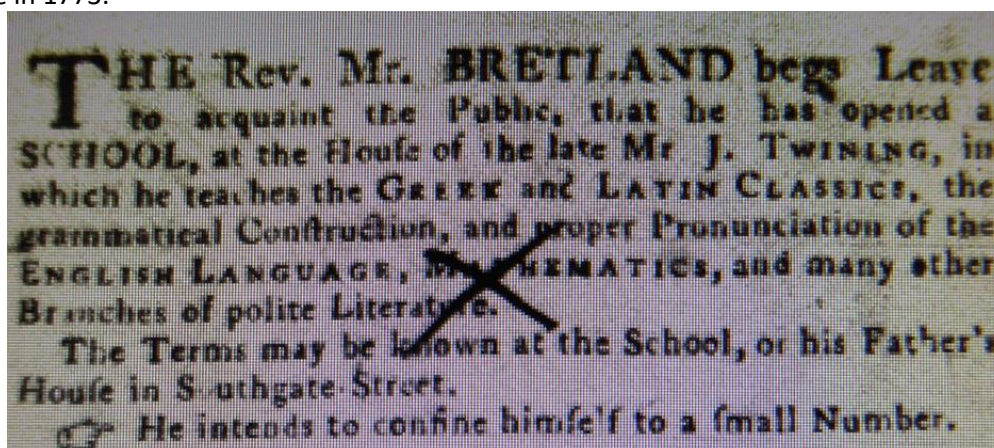
He was invited to be minister of the Mint Meeting in a letter dated Exeter, 25th February 1770.¹⁶ Signed by twenty of the subscribers, it was short and to the point; 'We whose names are underwritten invite the Rev^d. Mr Joseph Britland to be the Minister of this Society.' A note on the reverse in Joseph's handwriting states he 'Accepted March 25th, 1770'. He resigned in 1772.



Mint Congregation in Exeter. omitted in its proper place. opened in 1719	Jos Kalleth	Oct 19 1715	Apr 2 1744
	J ^r Pierce	Oct 16 1720	Mar 30 1726
	Jos Kalleth	Oct 15 1715	Apr 2 1744
	The Jeffries		
	W ^m West	Oct Sep 29 1744	
	David Williams		resigned
	Jos Brekland		resigned
	John Hogg		returned & resigned 1794
	Jos Brekland		

List of Ministers written by James Manning, 1820

At some point Joseph had aided Joseph Twining at his Grammar school before opening his own school sometime in 1773.



Exeter Flying Post July 9-16 1773

¹⁴ 'English education under the test acts, being the history of the nonconformist academies 1662 – 1820', H. McLachlan M.A., D.D. Manchester University press 1931.

¹⁵ The certificate (Misc.3 folio 40a) is held by Manchester Harris College, Oxford. It was given to them by the Reverend George Eyre Evans in 1895 to whom it was given by Mrs Mardon, the widow of the Reverend Benjamin Mardon.

¹⁶ Invitation letter (Misc.3 folio 1-2), Manchester Harris College, Oxford.

The first advertisement appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* in July of that year. It confirms that his parents lived in Southgate Street. So far this is all that has been discovered about Joseph's school and who his pupils were.

He returned to the Mint Meeting in 1784 where records of baptisms by him are shown up until February 1793. In a letter, *'To the whole congregation stately assembling for public worship at the Mint Meeting in Exeter'* dated 12th May 1793, he wrote that, *'For some time past I have had doubts concerning the propriety at least of baptizing infants. These doubts have put me on re-examining the subject of baptism'*. He further stated that, *'the result of my investigation is, that I do not discover any clear warrant from the commission of Christ, the practice of his apostles, or the custom of the church for more than a century from the days of our Saviour, for the use of any sort of baptism beside that of proselytes, and of their families with them at the time of their conversion, if they then chance to have any. Without a proper warrant for a practice of a religious kind, either from the authority or example of Christ or his apostles, I hold myself obliged to refrain from it, lest I should incur the guilt of substituting that may be an offspring of superstition in the place of an appointment of the great Head of the church'*.¹⁷

He resigned shortly after this explaining his reasons over two things, namely the baptism of infants and his objection to certain language in prayer. In an undated letter addressed 'Dear Sir' written sometime after 1797 Joseph says that *'At that time (1793-4) I was meditating a removal from Exeter.'*¹⁸ However, in 1794 he was invited *'by a very great Majority....to supply the vacancy occasioned by the death of the late Revd. Abrm. Tozer as Pastor of the said united Congregations'*.¹⁹ The meeting was held at George's Meeting House on July 27th. A committee consisting of Mr Samuel Milford, Mr W B Kennaway, Mr Robert Kennaway, Mr Patrick Kincaid, Mr William Tucker, Mr Kz Smith, Mr John Shute and Mr Samuel Kingdon were to *'wait on the Revd. Jos Bretland with their Invitation.'*

Joseph's reply was

'To the Contributors belonging to the Two United Congregations of Protestant Dissenters in Exeter, My Christian Friends,

*It has not been without a struggle between serious apprehensions of my Unfitness for the station, to which I am called by a considerable majority of your number and the respect due to their opinion of me, that I have finally determined to accept the invitation handed to me by your Committee. Could I not flatter myself with the hope, that the numerous imperfections, which you will easily discover in my services, will be noticed with candour and indulgence, the idea of entering on the important charge, which I am desired to assume, would be painful indeed; should those imperfections be found greater than you expect to observe, and should that or any other cause produce at any time a general wish, that I would resign my office among you, such wish, on being communicated, shall be readily complied with, and the communication of it will not give me the smallest offense; By keeping me no longer as your minister than while you shall remain content with my services, or shall not think that you have an opportunity of procuring others more to your satisfaction and advantage, you will increase the obligation, under which you have already laid your too much honoured friend and servant. Joseph Bretland Exeter Aug 5. 1794 permit me to defer my entrance on the office you have assigned me till the approaching Michaelmas; and accept my fervent aspirations to the throne of Heaven for your prosperity and happiness both temporal and eternal.'*²⁰

¹⁷ MS Misc 3, fols. 5-7 Bretland's letter to the congregation stating his inability to continue using it without alteration and his objection to baptizing infants, with covering letter, 7 May 1793, Manchester Harris College, Oxford.

¹⁸ MS Misc 3, fols. 20-1 Bretland's account of the whole circumstance, Manchester Harris College, Oxford.

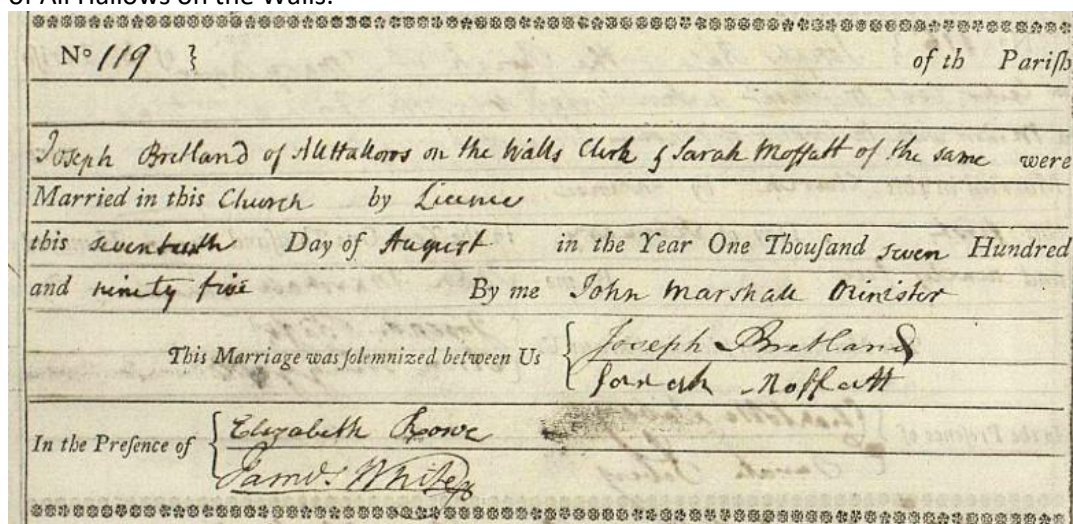
¹⁹ George's Meeting minutes (3693D/M4) SWHT.

²⁰ MS Misc 3, fols. 8-9 Invitation to be minister of 'the Two United Congregations of Protestant Dissenters' in succession to Abraham Tozer, 27 July 1794, with shorthand draft of his reply, Manchester Harris College, Oxford.

Samuel Milford as Chairman was requested to thank 'the Rev^d M^r Joseph Bretland for his readiness in accepting their invitation. And that having accepted the Pastoral office to the two united congregations it is also their request, that in conjunction with the other two ministers he should take part in the religious instruction of the young persons belonging thereto.'²¹

In 1795 Joseph attempted to offer his resignation on the grounds that he was 'the last chosen'. He wrote on 4th July, 'It gives me deep concern to be informed by my worthy colleague M^r Manning that he is about to resign the pastoral office among you,...I have grounds for supposing, that one reason which he will assign for doing it, is the unwillingness he feels to remain in a situation where the three ministers cannot be wanted. If that circumstance afford either of the three, by whom you are at present served, a sufficient reason for resigning, it most of all affords me one. I was the last chosen. The particular connection, into which I have entered with you, has subsisted but for a short time, and may be, therefore, much more easily dissolved than that, which, has so long subsisted between you and your two ministers, I must therefore, earnestly request you to employ every argument you can think of to prevail with Mr Manning to continue among you as your pastor, and to permit me once more to give up an office, which before you honoured me with an invitation to become your minister, I thought, as I have told you from the pulpit, that I had dropped forever.' The minutes of a meeting held on 12th July. 'Resolved that the Chairman do desire M^r Bretland, not by any means to think of resigning his Pastoral office, but to consider himself connected with the Congregation in every respect as he did the same as before he sent said letter – to which he consented, being present.'²²

Joseph did not marry until after his parents had died. At the age of fifty-three, he married Sarah Moffatt the sister of the Reverend John Marks Moffatt of Malmesbury and James Moffatt a merchant in London. She was forty-one. They were married on 17th August 1795 at St. John's church in Exeter by the Reverend John Marshall who had been the master of the Free school in Exeter. They were both listed as from the parish of All Hallows on the Walls.²³



There are two extant letters from Joseph to his wife written while she was away visiting her cousin William Mills at Bishops Hull near Taunton.²⁴ The first, almost a year after their marriage in June 1796 is

²¹ As note 19.

²² As note 19.

²³ St. John's marriage records accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁴ MS Misc 3, fols. 10-13 Two letters of Bretland to his wife, Sarah, 28 June 1796 and 30 August 1800, Manchester Harris College, Oxford.

almost reproachful for her from being away from home. He says he *'shall soon set out on a walk, which, I suppose, will be, as usual, a solitary one. Were your arm locked in mine, I should take it with far greater pleasure'*.

The second written on 30th August 1800, reads more like a sermon, however there are also some insights into the health of various Dissenters in Exeter and news of her brother. He finishes with *'May I be permitted to say, that, if you be as much interested in my comfort and happiness as, I trust, I have shown myself to be in yours, we shall not be separated much longer?'* Joseph finally resigned from George's Meeting in 1797 but returned to teaching when he took up a post teaching mathematics at the newly founded third Exeter Academy in 1799. The Academy was dissolved in 1805 with the death of the Reverend Timothy Kenrick.

Sarah died in the spring of 1804. The newspaper reported that *'Last week died, after a lingering illness sincerely lamented by all her acquaintance, Mrs Bretland, wife of the Rev. Joseph Bretland, of this city.'*²⁵ The Sunday after her death Timothy Kenrick preached a sermon with the concluding passage, *'that the highly valued friend, whose removal from life at a period so little advanced we have occasion to deplore'*.²⁶ Kenrick himself died suddenly just a few months later in August 1804. Sarah was buried on 26th May for which George's *'Rec'd for opening Mr Bretland's cave to bury Mrs Bretland 10/-'*. After her death Joseph was elected a governor of the Devon and Exeter Hospital in 1805 and served until 1807 but gradually retired into private life and increasing infirmity of age.

When Joseph died on 8th July 1819. The Exeter Flying Post reported that, *'The infirmities of age he bore with serenity and cheerfulness and at last was removed from the present scene without a pang, in the confident expectation of future felicity.'*²⁷ His funeral took place on 15th July, with an address by the Reverend James Manning.²⁸

His will written in June 1818, left bequests to the Mills family of Bishops Hull, Sarah's relatives. He also remembered his cousin Elizabeth Parminter the widow of John Vowler Parminter and Sarah's sister-in-law Susanna Moffatt and her daughter Ann Musgrave. Other monetary bequests nearer to home were to James Bowden who was also allowed *'such printed mathematical books as he may choose to accept'*. Mary Loveys his *'faithful servant'* was left a sizeable sum of two thousand five hundred pounds and *'such household goods and ffurniture as she may choose to accept for her long and faithful services'*.²⁹ His sole executor was William Benjamin Kennaway his biographer, who along with Mary Loveys and James Bowden are also buried in the Dissenters Graveyard in Exeter.³⁰

Sarah Bretland (née Mills) and Sarah Bretland (née Moffatt)

Sarah was born in Taunton on 15th February 1753 to James Moffatt and his wife Sarah (née Marks). Sarah was James's second wife. His first wife Elizabeth (née Hill) died in 1747, leaving James with a son named James (1744-1818). James and Sarah went on to have another child, John Marks (1749-1802).

²⁵ Exeter Flying Post 31st of May 1804. Accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁶ As note 11.

²⁷ Exeter Flying Post 15 July 1819. Accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

²⁸ The whole address can be found in Sermons, by the late Rev. Joseph Bretland. To which are prefixed memoirs of his life in two volumes, 1820, Exeter, Devon and Exeter Institute.

²⁹ Joseph Bretland's Will (PROB 11/1618/407) accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk

³⁰ See Memorial 27 www.edgt.org.uk

Sarah the Daughter of James
Moffatt of Taunton St Mary
Magdalene was born Feb 15: 1753
and baptised by Mr Peanshall

Little is known about James and Sarah. There is mention of a James Moffatt of Taunton, a sergemaker becoming bankrupt in 1762 but it is unknown whether this is 'our' James or not.³¹

Sarah's brother John Marks became a dissenting minister. He died intestate in 1802 when he was in the process of completing his history of Malmesbury in Wiltshire. It was subsequently published posthumously in 1805 for the aid of his wife Susanna and their seven children.³² Joseph Bretland ordered four copies; many of Sarah's relatives subscribed including the Mills family of Bishops Hull and James Moffatt, Sarah's older brother. Joseph's mother Sarah, née Mills, and his wife Sarah were related. We know Sarah Mills was Aunt to Mary Towgood née Mills and her brothers John and Thomas and it is known that Sarah, Joseph's wife was a cousin of William Mills of Bishop's Hull near Taunton, however at the present time the link is still ongoing research.³³

S Moss June 2014

Anne Amosford updated June 2024.

Works by Joseph Bretland

Theological papers: Joseph Priestley's *'Theological Repository'*.

Letters: *'Monthly Repository'*.

'A sermon preached before an assembly of protestant dissenting ministers, in Exeter, May 10th, 1786'.

By Joseph Bretland. Published by Request.

'Liturgy for the Use of the Mint Meeting in Exeter', 1792.

'The Christian's victory over sin and death'. A sermon preached at George's Meeting House in Exeter, March the 1st, 1795 by the Rev. Joseph Bretland on the death of Miss F. Kennaway and published at the desire of her family. - Exeter: Printed by S. Woolmer, 1795.

'Rudiments of English Grammar' ed. Joseph Bretland, Joseph Priestley, 1798

'Sermons by the late Rev. Joseph Bretland, to which are prefixed Memoirs of his Life', Wm. Benjamin Kennaway, 1820.

³¹ 1762, 6 February, London gazette accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk

³² The History of the Town of Malmesbury, and of Its Ancient Abbey together with memoirs of eminent natives, John Marks Moffatt, Tetbury 1805.

³³ For information on the Mills Family see <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> accessed 30/06/2024.