

## The death of Charles Stothard at Bere Ferrers, May 28th 1821 and some of its ramifications

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St. Andrew's church at Bere Ferrers, beside the Tavy estuary, is encircled by its graveyard. Many of the tombstones bear legends that are engraved in hard-wearing slate, so are still easy to read, despite the encroachment of healthy lichen. They record the lives and passing of generations of local people, and in some cases the melancholy details of their fates. Yet the memorial to the most remarkable accident victim buried at Bere Ferrers is now virtually illegible.

Attached to the outside wall of the chancel, just below the east window, a pale stone stares blankly out to the ebb and flow of the estuary. It is now so worn as to be scarcely legible. When it was installed, its non-local sandstone or limestone material may have been regarded as superior amid all the dark slate, a fitting tribute to the man buried nearby.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, the full inscription on the memorial was recorded at the time, as set out below.

Sacred to the memory (dear to every friend who knew him) of CHARLES STOTHARD, Historical Draughtsman, and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries; eldest surviving son of Thomas Stothard, esq. R. A. While pursuing his professional researches in the adjoining church, he was unfortunately killed by a fall, on the 28th of May, in the year of our Lord 1821, in the 34th year of his age. As a laborious investigator of the Antient Sepulchral Monuments, and other Historical Vestiges of this Kingdom, which he illustrated by his faithful and elegant pencil, he was pre-eminent; as a man, though gifted with the most solid ability, he was humble, modest, unostentatious; an example of benevolence and simplicity of heart; a Christian by faith, as he proved by that essential demonstration his works. Thus awfully bereft of such a partner, what words shall describe the deep, the bitter sorrow of his widow, who stood not by to pay him the last sad offices; but while he perished thus untimely, expected his return, and shortly to bless him with a first child.

She with her brother, Alfred John Kempe (his bosom friend), has erected this poor monument to his memory; a living one exists in their hearts; in the hearts of his and their aged parents, of his relatives and friends. Reader, profit by this sad, but doubtless, in the wisdom of God, salutary and merciful lesson; for it is better that the virtuous should be thus suddenly cut off than the wicked.



Figs. 1 and 2 *Charles Stothard's memorial below the east window of St. Andrew's church (pale stone in centre), and part of the stone as it appeared c.1978.*

The memorial stone was set up to commemorate the burial nearby of the eminent artist and antiquary, Charles Alfred Stothard. He was killed by a fall in St. Andrew's church on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1821, while carrying out a detailed drawing of the 14<sup>th</sup> century stained glass in the church's east window. To mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021 of

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the inscription was relatively visible in the mid-1970s, which suggests that its erosion may have accelerated during the past 45 years.

Stothard's demise, this article explores this tragic event and its contexts and implications. There is a relatively detailed account here of Stothard's career and significance as an antiquarian artist, to reinforce what was lost by his premature death. This background is followed by an outline of his fatal encounter with Bere Ferrers and its aftermath. Of particular importance is the impact on the life and career of his widow Eliza, who remarried to become the well-known Tavistock resident and prolific author, Mrs Bray<sup>2</sup>. However, this long and rich part of her life is referred to only briefly in this article.



Fig.3 Charles Stothard, from *'Memoirs of the Late Charles Stothard, 1823.*

Charles Stothard was born in London in 1786. His family background gave him a favourable underpinning for a career as an artist, for his father was Thomas Stothard, a member of the Royal Academy<sup>3</sup>. He was responsible for an immense output of paintings, engravings, designs for decorative silverware and other artwork. Thomas was especially renowned for his work as an illustrator of books; it is said that he produced over 5,000 such designs during his career. The market for historical images was substantial by the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, driven by widespread curiosity about the past, especially among those with the time and money to indulge their interests.

In 1802 Thomas Stothard undertook a commission to paint a set of large murals for the newly elevated Marquess of Exeter. Stothard's task was to decorate the walls of a grand staircase in the marquess's huge mansion, Burghley House near Stamford<sup>4</sup>, and he took Charles with him. While his father was at work, Charles visited nearby churches to draw monuments. This opportunity was important in stimulating a fascination for medieval church fittings that was to become Charles' passion. In tandem with an emerging artistic talent, he became absorbed by historical themes over the next decade. After a period of painting historical scenes, he determined to devote himself to recording church monuments.

What made Stothard both pioneering and eminent was his commitment to accuracy and detail in his drawings. Such concern for authenticity led Stothard into often arduous and sometimes hazardous pursuit of his artistic subjects. There is a record of him slipping from a ladder when drawing an effigy in the undercroft of Canterbury Cathedral by candlelight.<sup>5</sup>

Stothard was not only highly regarded as an artist, but also as an antiquarian. He was outstanding for his concern to integrate meticulous image-making with authentic explanatory historical background – a guiding principle in his great work, the *'Monumental Effigies of Great Britain'*<sup>6</sup>. He began this project in 1811 and produced nine complete sets before his death. A central intention of the work was 'to afford the historical painter a complete knowledge of the costume adopted in England, from an early period of history, to the reign of Henry VIII; to illustrate history and biography; and lastly, to assist the stage in

<sup>2</sup> 'Mrs. Bray' was initially Anna Eliza Kempe, before becoming Mrs. Stothard, and then Mrs Bray. She is normally referred to by her second Christian name, Eliza.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, A.C. Coxhead, *Thomas Stothard, R.A.: an illustrated monograph*, A.H.Bullen, London, 1906.

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Rachel Rhine, *What lies before Hell: Stothard's Hell Staircase paintings and the Burghley House collection*, Home Subjects website, [www.homesubjects.org/2017/09/04/what-lies-before-hell-stothards-hell-staircase-paintings-and-the-burghley-house-collection/](http://www.homesubjects.org/2017/09/04/what-lies-before-hell-stothards-hell-staircase-paintings-and-the-burghley-house-collection/). Also: <https://virtualltour.burghley.co.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Richard Knowles, 'An enterprising antiquary: Charles Alfred Stothard (1786–1821)', *Country Life*, 5 January 1978, pp.42–43 and Mrs Charles Stothard (Anna Eliza Bray), *'Memoirs of the Late Charles Alfred Stothard, F.S.A.*, 1823, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, London.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Alfred Stothard (completed by Alfred Kempe), *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, John Murray, London 1832 (complete edition). Among academic publications on the work is Rachel Dressler, "Those effigies which belonged to the English nation": antiquarianism, nationalism and Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, *Studies in Medievalism*, XIV, 2005.

selecting its costume with propriety, for the plays of our great dramatic Bard.’<sup>7</sup> Stothard’s passion for authenticity coincided with a lucrative market for it among painters and in the theatre, where accurate period costumes (including armour) were becoming a priority.

Although there had been determined practitioners since at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ‘antiquarianism’ became very popular in the Georgian period, spearheaded by the Society of Antiquaries of London, which was formed in 1750 for ‘the encouragement, advancement and furtherance of the study and knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other countries’.<sup>8</sup> Stothard was appointed ‘historical draughtsman’ to the Society in 1815. This honour was negotiated by Samuel Lysons, who employed Stothard to travel through the North of England to make drawings for the ambitious ‘Magna Britannia’ project he had begun with his brother Daniel.

The same year, Britain emerged victorious from the long wars with France. Very soon after Waterloo, the pent-up desire for exploration of the European Continent was unleashed. The Society of Antiquaries sent Stothard to Normandy to undertake a major project to record faithfully the whole of the Bayeux tapestry. However, he first travelled further south to the Loire Valley. Here he visited the abbey at Fontevraud (then used as a prison) and rediscovered there the effigies of Richard 1 (‘Lionheart’), Eleanor of Aquitaine and other members of the medieval Plantagenet dynasty. Although he failed in an attempt to get them transferred to England, he drew the monuments and probably saved them from destruction<sup>9</sup>.

Stothard made three trips to draw the Bayeux Tapestry; the work was a formidable achievement, which included hand-colouring etchings that had been made from his original drawings. The finished product was published by the Society of Antiquaries between 1821 and 1823, allowing the wealthier public to see the tapestry in colour for the first time, and thereby entrenching ‘1066’ as a crucial waymark in British history<sup>10</sup>.



When Charles set off on his third and final trip to Normandy and Brittany, he was not alone. In February 1818, he had married Anna Eliza Kempe<sup>11</sup>, the sister of Alfred Kempe, a close friend and fellow antiquarian. Although born in London, her family had roots in Cornwall. Foreshadowing a long life of enthusiastic historical research and writing, she became a devoted supporter of her husband’s work, while also emerging as a prolific author in her own right. During the visit to France (her first), she wrote detailed letters to her mother, which were subsequently combined and published in 1820<sup>12</sup>. The resulting book, adorned with illustrations by Charles, is full of keen observation and energetic commentary. It opened her long writing career.

Fig.4 Anna Eliza Bray (Stothard), in *Autobiography of Anna Eliza Bray*

In April 1821, Stothard was commissioned by Daniel Lysons to travel to Devon. He was tasked with making drawings of medieval monuments in certain churches in the county. These images would be included in the

<sup>7</sup> Charles Stothard Esq. F.A.S. – obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1821, p.645.

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia, ‘Society of Antiquaries’.

<sup>9</sup> The effigies are now installed in the Abbey Church at Fontevraud, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fontevraud\\_Abbey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fontevraud_Abbey)). On his return Stothard’s drawings were published, with a dedication to the Prince Regent.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of Stothard’s Bayeux Tapestry output can be seen at [www.fulltable.com/vts/b/bayeux/bayeux.htm](http://www.fulltable.com/vts/b/bayeux/bayeux.htm).

<sup>11</sup> She tended to use the name ‘Eliza’.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Eliza Stothard (later ‘Mrs. Bray’) *Letters written during a tour through Normandy, Brittany and other parts of France in 1818*, London, 1820 – published only four months after her husband’s death.,

Devon volume of *Magna Britannia*, the ambitious project that had been started by his late brother Samuel<sup>13</sup>. He travelled alone, for by this time his wife was heavily pregnant. Eliza claimed, in her 'Memoirs of the late Charles Alfred Stothard',<sup>14</sup> how she felt a sense of foreboding before Charles left, and gave him 'Notes for the observance of my beloved husband during his journey', which included the warning: 'take care not to fall from high places'.

Charles left London on May 16, 1821. He posted his last letter to Eliza during his journey, giving details of his route. He first travelled to Lysons' home at Rodmarton, Gloucestershire, where he was 'most kindly received'. Lysons asked Charles to visit Bere Ferrers, to draw the stained glass images of William de Ferrers and his wife Matilda in the superb east window in St. Andrew's church. The next day he took the Bristol Mail as far as Bath. His route to the West then passed through Wells, Glastonbury and Bridgwater and on through western Somerset. Here he travelled mainly on foot, inspecting church fittings in villages he passed. His letter confirms his enthusiasm for costume detail: a '...knight with the bows to fasten his gorget behind.' Given he would have been carrying a pack containing his artist's materials as well as other belongings, there is only the briefest mention of what must have been challenging terrain as he went on via Porlock, Lynton, Combe Martin and Ilfracombe (Exmoor is dismissed rather curtly as 'melancholy scenery'). He entered Barnstaple '...extremely fatigued, having that day walked 30 miles and the day before 20'<sup>15</sup>. Turning south at last, Stothard aimed for Atherington, where he records '...one of the most elaborately carved rood lofts in the county', although the main pretext for the visit was to draw the medieval effigies in the church. What proved to be almost his final recorded comment concerned Dolton church. After so many glowing descriptions through his antiquarian career, this was an acerbic judgement: 'The font in the church of Dolton, from its style, I should take to be Saxon; but the barbarians had so boxed it up with pews, that of its four sides but one could be seen, and that buried in white-wash.'<sup>16</sup> The letter to Eliza was probably posted in Hatherleigh, for there Charles' travel account ends.

It is unclear if Stothard then walked the whole way from Hatherleigh to Bere Ferrers or travelled on horseback or with a carrier. He left on Saturday May 26<sup>th</sup> and was in Bere Ferrers on Sunday May 27<sup>th</sup>. The church and its setting would have looked different compared with today's village. Samuel Rowe describes an excursion up the Tavy estuary that same year<sup>17</sup>: '...its neat looking church and white-washed tower, rising among a groupe (sic) of picturesque trees on the margin'. In other respects, perhaps less has changed: 'The land adjoining is richly cultivated, and the different dwellings present the most pleasing appearance of comfort and independence.'

The significance of the 14<sup>th</sup> century stained glass in the east window in St. Andrew's church must already have been appreciated in antiquarian circles, hence Daniel Lysons' request to Stothard to portray it. How did Lysons become aware of the glass? Had other antiquaries visited and even drawn it previously?

The glass is considered to be the oldest such material in Devon, apart from some pieces in Exeter Cathedral. The window was commissioned by William de Ferrers II, probably to celebrate the establishment of an archpresbytery at Bere Ferrers (which William funded)<sup>18</sup>. This unusual foundation was approved by Bishop Grandisson of Exeter in 1334. From the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, Exeter Cathedral had invested in high-quality glass, much of it bought from Rouen in France. The glass in St. Andrew's has much in common with that installed at

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<sup>13</sup> Rev. Daniel Lysons and Samuel Lysons *Magna Britannia; being a concise topographical account of the Several Counties of Great Britain. Volume the Sixth Containing Devonshire*, published by Thomas Cadell, London, 1822. This volume proved to be the last of the series, which had been intended to follow an alphabetical sequence of counties.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs Charles Stothard (later Mrs Bray) *Memoirs, including Original Journals, Letters, Papers and Antiquarian Tracts of the Late Charles Alfred Stothard, F.S.A.*, London, 1823.

<sup>15</sup> Op.cit. p.463.

<sup>16</sup> The rare Saxon font in St. Edmund's church at Dolton is now much better presented. The church also has some 15<sup>th</sup> century stained glass. See [www.leshaigh.co.uk/notesstories/doltonpage.html](http://www.leshaigh.co.uk/notesstories/doltonpage.html).

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Rowe, *The panorama of Plymouth, or Tourist's Guide to the Principal Objects of Interest in the Towns and Vicinity of Plymouth, Dock and Stonehouse, Plymouth*, 1821.

<sup>18</sup> The Archpresbytery was approved by Grandisson, in return for annual payment of 20 shillings 'for the chorister boys of Exeter Cathedral'.

Exeter. Possibly, William de Ferrers used his relationship with Bishop Grandisson to acquire both the materials and the skilled labour for the window at Bere Ferrers. Could there have been some ‘leftovers’ once the Exeter contract had been completed?<sup>19</sup>



Figs 5 and 6. *Two elements of the east window in St. Andrew's church, representing Matilda de Ferrers and Christ in Majesty. Both images have been partially reconstructed, using fragments, possibly in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

The glass has survived removal and replacement at least three times (in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), albeit at the cost of significant damage<sup>20</sup>. The window was restored in 1871, the glass having been ‘carefully preserved (in a box) for the past 40 years in the church’.<sup>21</sup> The glass was again removed for safe-keeping during the Second World War<sup>22</sup>. Thus the appearance of the window now differs from the version seen by Charles Stothard. Although many sections comprise imaginatively re-assembled fragments, some principal elements are still distinct and impressive. Notable among these are William de Ferrers, his wife Matilda, Christ in Majesty, and a figure of a pilgrim – assumed to be St. James or possibly William himself, who is thought to have travelled to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain<sup>23</sup>.

The crucial focus of this article is the tragic accident that befell Charles Stothard as he was tracing the main figures in the window. An account of the accident appears in a letter written by the Rev. Henry Hobart to Thomas Cadell, the London publisher and bookseller<sup>24</sup>, postmarked May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1821. It was one of several that Hobart sent to London announcing the tragic death of Stothard immediately after the event, noting that ‘having seen your signature to a letter on his [Stothard's] person I have thought it right to address a few lines to you’. Hobart describes how Stothard ‘...introduced himself on Sunday as coming from Mr. Lysons & requested permission to sketch a window in my church over the Communion Table. Being satisfied with the account he gave of himself as well as pleased with his manner I gave him an invitation to stay at my House as long as he

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Barber ‘A jigsaw in stained glass’, *Western Morning News*, 18 October 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Arthur Beddows, ‘A History of Bere Ferrers Parish’, revised 6<sup>th</sup> edition by Ann Parsons, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Reopening of Bere Ferrers Church’, *Tavistock Gazette*, 8 September 1871.

<sup>22</sup> A thanksgiving service to mark the restoration of the window was held on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946. The work was carried out by Osborne & Phillips of Plymouth; their bill came to £46 10s 0d.

<sup>23</sup> It is thought that ships carrying pilgrims bound for Santiago may have departed from Landulph on the Cornwall side of the Tamar.

<sup>24</sup> This Thomas Cadell was the son of Thomas Cadell the elder, a well-known London publisher and bookseller in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, publishing work by Burns, Samuel Johnson, Adam Smith and Tobias Smollett among many others. Thomas Cadell the younger published ‘Magna Britannia, Volume 6, Devon’ in 1822 – i.e. the publication for which Stothard was intending to produce illustrations during his ill-fated visit to Devon.

inclined to stay<sup>25</sup>. He dined & slept here on Sunday, & after breakfast on Monday about 10 o'clock proceeded to execute his design. A Gentleman who was with me accompanied him to the church, left him there & called upon him again at Two by which time he had about half finished the sketch. A medical gentleman<sup>26</sup> called on me about five whom I requested as he was going by the church to call in and tell Mr. Stothard I was waiting dinner – you may judge the nature of his feelings when he found him lying on the Pavement & expiring: indeed he was a corpse within three minutes after. Upon examination it was found that he had fractured his skull: a Coroner's inquest has just been held & of course returned a verdict of 'accidental death'. The accident is to be attributed to the breaking of one of the bars of the ladder on which he stood, the height of which was about ten feet.'

Eliza Stothard's 'Memoirs of Charles Alfred Stothard' adds further detail, including: 'Upon the next morning, Monday the 28th of May, the rector, accompanied by Mr. Servante (his amiable and kind-hearted curate) conducted my husband round his gardens. [Charles] mentioned his intention of going to Plymouth, and of returning through Totness (sic) to London. By his own desire, a ladder was procured and carried into the church. The owner of it was a gardener, a man much heavier than himself, who had this ladder in constant use. No suspicion, therefore, could be entertained of its being decayed.

At eleven o'clock my beloved Charles ascended the ladder, and both commenced and finished the tracing of the glass, representing the founder's lady<sup>27</sup>. Mr. Servante was repeatedly in the church during the morning. At half-past two, my husband removed the ladder to the north side of the altar. He then stood about ten feet from the ground, immediately above the tablets containing the creed and the commandments. The communion-table below was on the right-hand side to the left, a very narrow passage ... came between the communion-table and the wall. Under a low Gothic arch, within a recess of the wall, elevated about three feet above the ground, reclined the monumental effigies of a knight and his lady. The moulding of the stone slab upon which these figures rested, projected about two inches beyond the tomb'.

The melancholy exchange with London that produced these accounts confirms how communications with the Plymouth area were relatively speedy by 1821, reflecting the relatively good quality of the toll road network and stagecoach services. Stothard's wife and father received the terrible news by May 31<sup>st</sup>. Charles' father Thomas then set off for Devon, accompanied by a friend, Henry Brooke. The letter to Thomas Cadell also includes advice on the preferred way to reach Bere Ferrers: 'As I presume some friend of the deceased will come down the shortest & best road will be straight to Plymouth Dock & from there up the river *Tavey* to *Beer Church Town* – from which the Parsonage is a very short distance...'. It is unclear whether the travellers followed this suggestion., but they must have arrived in Bere Ferrers by June 3<sup>rd</sup>, for '...on the 4th of June, the venerable and sorrowing father followed to an untimely grave the remains of that son, who in life had been the pride, the ornament, the honour of his name'<sup>28</sup>.

Eliza Stothard was shortly to suffer further tragedy. A month after Charles' death, she gave birth to a daughter, Blanch – the only child she bore. Sadly, the infant became ill early in 1822 and died on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Yet despite the grief of double bereavement, as conveyed so pitifully in the 'Memoirs', Eliza soon displayed the vigour and determination that marked the rest of her long life. She rationalised this positive path: '...I should not perhaps have retained my reason unshaken, had I not been so plunged into incessant toil. The very pressure and variety of employment were salutary. I endeavoured to live for those who loved me, and whom I loved'<sup>29</sup>.

Aided by her brother Alfred Kempe, she poured herself into securing the legacy of her late husband. Responding to calls for Stothard's unfinished work to be continued, she oversaw further printing of his images,

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<sup>25</sup> In 1821, the Rev. Hobart was still living at the old Parsonage outside the village. Hobart later commissioned a large new Rectory, sited near the present Bere Ferrers railway station.

<sup>26</sup> He is named in Eliza's 'Memoires of Charles Stothard' as a 'Mr Honey, of Beer Alston... then going to Plymouth' (perhaps via the ferry across the Tavy to Blaxton).

<sup>27</sup> Matilda de Ferrers.

<sup>28</sup> Memoirs, op cit.

<sup>29</sup> [John A. Kempe \(ed.\), \*Autobiography of Anna Eliza Bray\*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1884.](#)

including plates of the Plantagenet monuments he had drawn in France. She also ‘...collected, arranged, classified, and copied in a regular manner every scrap of written paper of any value left by poor Charles’, while also determining ‘...as a further tribute of respect to his memory, that I would write the *Memoirs of his Life*’<sup>30</sup>. A notable achievement was the completion of the ‘Monumental Effigies’ project, although the work was not published until 1832<sup>31</sup>. Its remaining sections were etched from Stothard’s drawings by other artists, while most of the text was written by Alfred Kempe.<sup>32</sup>

What transpired in Bere Ferrers in the period shortly after Charles Stothard’s funeral? The record is unfortunately thin, yet the connections with Stothard’s family were certainly sustained. Alfred Kempe is likely to have visited; he wrote the inscription on the memorial stone to Charles Stothard outside the east window of the church, and presumably organised its installation. Charles’ brother Robert Thomas appears also to have travelled to Devon, for he produced the images of the William and Matilda de Ferrers stained glass portraits in the Devon volume of Lysons’ *Magna Britannica*, which his late brother had been tracing when he fell to his death. However, there is a frustrating silence surrounding Eliza’s coming to West Devon<sup>33</sup> – yet her presence led to what was perhaps the most significant outcome of her husband’s demise.

A proper sense of the excitement and turmoil in Eliza’s life in the months following her husband’s death must depend partly on our imagination. Her writings convey her loss, and her deep appreciation of Charles, as in the *Memoirs*: ‘... I cannot recollect a single instance of unkindness, either in word or deed. But his conduct was not negative; it was generous, good, affectionate, and tender. He made me the constant companion of all his pursuits. He did nothing without consulting me; and far from assuming that superiority or command the title of husband confers upon its possessor, it was ever his wish that I should consult my own inclinations’. Yet by 1823, Eliza had married the charismatic vicar of Tavistock, Edward Atkyns Bray, who was 12 years her senior. Gerry Woodcock describes Bray as ‘...an impressive figure, physically and intellectually. Handsome and cultured, his style was lofty, his discourse learned, and his interests scholarly...’<sup>34</sup>

It is impossible to do any justice here to the remarkable lives of the Brays in Tavistock, nor to Eliza’s exuberant and copious writing career over her long life<sup>35</sup>. They lived in the newly-built vicarage in Plymouth Road, Tavistock. From this base, the Brays combined a vigorous and sometimes controversial ministry in Tavistock with energetic, imaginative exploration and documentation, physical and mythological, of the local area - not least, Dartmoor. Edward Bray died in 1857, and soon afterwards his widow moved to London, where she maintained her curiosity and writing into very old age. She died in January 1883, aged 93.

Here, two commentaries separated by 128 years must suffice as summaries of Eliza’s legacy. Her obituary in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* of 1883<sup>36</sup> concludes: ‘...she leaves behind her a name which will live long in the memory, by reason of her thorough acquaintance with every relic of a bygone age, be they preserved in monuments of stone, or in the warm hearts of the people, which can be found among the cleaves and tors of the borderland of Cornwall and Devon, and for the skill with which she imparted both her knowledge and enthusiasm’. Reflecting a continuing interest in Mrs. Bray, a PhD thesis presented in 2011 suggests: ‘one of Bray’s primary reasons for writing was to memorialise her life, her county and country.

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<sup>30</sup> [Op.cit.](#)

<sup>31</sup> Basic details in the Royal Academy’s record number 13/2328 [www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/book/the-monumental-effigies-of-great-britain-selected-from-our-cathedrals-and](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/book/the-monumental-effigies-of-great-britain-selected-from-our-cathedrals-and)

<sup>32</sup> Phillip Lindley, ‘Stothard’s Monumental Effigies’, in *Ethics and Medievalism*, edited by Karl Fugelso, D.S.Brewer, Studies in Medievalism XXIII, Cambridge, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> An obituary written after Eliza’s death in 1883 claims that ‘Having numerous friends and relations in the two western-most counties, Mrs. Stothard made frequent visits to the West of England’, *Obituary Notices (Mrs. Bray)*, Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association, 1883.

<sup>34</sup> Gerry Woodcock, *Homage to St. Eustachius’s: a History Of Tavistock Parish Church*, Phillimore, Andover, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> For a short list, see Lexi Stuckey, *Anna Eliza Bray: a biography*, The Victorian Web, 2008, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/bray/bio.html>

<sup>36</sup> *Obituary Notices*, 1883 op.cit.

In her locality at least, her name is still remembered, not for her romances, but for *The Border of the Tamar and the Tavy*<sup>37</sup>, a topographical work on Dartmoor which was compiled from her letters to Robert Southey. Her name has been kept alive, in Devon at least, because of her writings about the local area'.

This unexpected orientation of Eliza Bray's career to the South West must be the most striking result of the frailty of a gardener's ladder rung on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1821. Also, morbid fascination with the fate it inflicted on Charles Stothard has possibly helped to sustain an interest in his achievements as an artist and antiquarian, and perhaps also those of his father and brothers (they were also eminent artists). Finally, it is tempting to indulge in dubious 'what if' speculation. If Stothard had not died at Bere Ferrers, might he have become a truly illustrious figure in the world of 19<sup>th</sup> century art, surpassing his father, Thomas? Without the wrench of her widowhood, would a London-based Eliza have been able to develop as substantial a literary career as she achieved from Tavistock as 'Mrs. Bray'? Might she have formed a powerful antiquarian partnership with her husband? While such musings must remain mere conjecture, the premature death of Charles Stothard at Bere Ferrers has given rise to many fascinating stories and connections.

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<sup>37</sup> Anna Eliza Bray, *A Description of the part of Devonshire bordering on the Tamar and Tavy*, John Murray, London, 1836.