

T Bruce Dilks — Obituary and Bibliography

by

Tony Woolrich

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Published obituaries.

(1).

A Bridgwater Historian .

Sudden Death of Mr. T. Bruce Dilks .

Translated Borough Archives .

Three weeks before his 84th birthday, the death occurred suddenly Monday at his home, Eastover of Mr Thomas Bruce Dilks. the well-known Bridgwater historian and archivist. A native of Penrith and son of a Wesleyan minister, Mr. Dilks came to Bridgwater at the age of 20. and was a teacher at Mrs. Alexander's private school in Friarn-street. Later he taught at Queen's College, Taunton, and Wycliffe College, Stonehouse, Glos. Owing to breakdown health he relinquished the scholastic profession, and in February, 1898, entered into partnership with the late Mr. H. W Coombes in printing and stationery and post-office business in Eastover. About two years later Mr. Dilks took over the business and became postmaster. retiring only 18 months ago. He was a member of the Society of Friends and founder the Oldmixon Club, Bridgwater which met at his home. Mr. Dilks was best known as an historian, having devoted his spare time for many years to research into the archives of Bridgwater. All the documents down to the reign of Queen Elizabeth had been translated him, and four volumes had been published by the Somerset Record Society. Mr. Dilks was also a writer of verse, and a published collection was favourably reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*. A keen chess player, he was a member of Bridgwater Chess Club, which held matches at his home., A widower since 1923, Mr. Dilks is survived by two sons and a daughter, the latter, Mrs. Glanville Brown member of the Town Council and the Borough Bench of magistrates. .

MEMORIAL SERVICE .

Tributes to Mr. Dilks' Christian character and his historical research were paid at the largely attended service in the Friends Meeting House, by the Rev. C. E. Seamer (late of Shapwick and former chairman of the Oldmixon Club) Messrs T. S. Cotterell (Winscombe), Harrison Jackson (Weston-super-Mare), Philip Sturdy (Taunton), and Roger Clark (Street). The interment of the ashes in the Garden of Rest, St Mary's Churchyard afterwards, was conducted by Preb. E. H. Hughes-Davies (vicar of Bridgwater) and the Rev. Seamer.

Members of the family present were : —.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Bruce Dilks Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Diiks (sons and daughters-in-law). Mr. and Mrs. Glanville Brown (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. H. Leslie Dilks (nephew). Miss Irene Dilks, Mrs. Capper (nieces) and Mrs. Frances Thompson. .

Past and present members of the staff who attended were : —.

Mr. J Sharman, Mr. and Mrs. T V. Fowler Mr. H. Owens, Misses I. Tucker, .G. Irish. M. Beer and M. Strong and Mrs. E. Milton. .

Friends and acquaintances present included: —.

The Mayor (Ald. R. Washer), Town Clerk (Mr. H. A. Clidero). Mr. Philip Sturdy (representing Mr. H. St George Gray, F.S.A., the Council of Somerset Archaeological Society and the Somerset Record Society) Mr. F. G. McCusker (postmaster). Nurse Gibb-Holmes (secretary), Commander R. D. Graham (Stawell), and Messrs. E. J. Hamlin. E. R. Stagg, J Lawrence, A. E. Manchip and R. Bray (Bridgwater Chess Club), Rev. H. E. Field, Mr. H. S. L. Dewar and Mr. H. Morris (Oldmixon Club) Mr. I. Collis (county archivist), Rev. F. A. Asprey (Congregational), Rev. W. G. Topping (Unitarian), Rev. T D. Watkins (Mariners Congregational), Rev. C. B. Hunt (Chedzoy), Messrs. C. Lane (Bridgwater Chamber of Trade), A. Marriage (Brent Knoll), R. Millett, F. C. L. Fisher (Bridgwater). Harold Milner (Weston-super-Mare), H. F. Scott Stokes (Glastonbury), F. Newman Turner and Derek Randall (Sutton Mallett), F. J. Thompson (Exeter), H. Williams (Cossintton), Mr. and Mrs. E. Wedlake, Mr and Mrs. R. H. Corder, Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Colthurst, Mr. and Mrs H. H. Lewis. Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Berry, Mr and Mrs. G. Bouchier (Bridgwater), Mr. and Mrs. A. P. I.

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Cotterall (Winscombe), Mesdames J. B. Clark and R. Clark (Street). V. C. Burston. S. Phillips. M. Denjiam, J. F. Lawrence, W. Deacon (representing Ald. W. Deacon), M. Pearson (representing Mr F. G. Pearson and Miss Pearson, F A. Pine. Gillard (representing Mr. P. C. S. Gillard), T. J. Sulley, W. H. Tamlyn (Bridgwater), Willett (Woolavington), Lloyd Fox and Julian Fox (Wellington). Misses Kemmett, E. Forden and Thompson (Sidcot), E. M. Thompson. D. T. Impey, M. McCosh, G. Nicholls and Thurnham (Bridgwater), M. M. G. Metford (Winscombe), and M. A. Smith. .

The arrangements were Messrs. J. E. Gilbert & Son, St. John-street. Bridgwater. Obituary from *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser*, Saturday 12 February 1949 .

(2).

THOMAS BRUCE DILKS.

Born 5 iii 1865. Died 7 ii, 1949.

THOMAS BRUCE DILKS was a much loved member of Bridgwater Preparative Meeting, and many both within and outside the Society will give thanks to God for his life. He had that grace within him which answered to like in other people and he seemed to be always searching for that good.

Though illness prevented him from attending the Meeting House in later life, Friends never lost the feeling of his close membership with them and especially in his late middle the Meeting turned to him for help and advice in matters where wisdom and judgment were required.

Born in Penrith in 1865, the son of a Methodist minister, he was brought up in a strict religious atmosphere where God was essentially a personal God. But such a narrow conception was fundamentally alien to his nature and as his carefully kept notebooks and journal testify, he began quite early time search for Truth which characterised his life.

After taking a B. A. Degree from school (New College, Eastbourne) he taught for a while at Wyciffe College : then came one of the turning points of his life. His father was appointed to a church in Bridgwater in 1888 and it was here that T. B. Dilks met the Thompson and Corder families and came into close contact with Quakerism for the first time. Its wider and more genial interpretation of religion as a way of life appealed to him.

Unfortunately his health was delicate, and in 1893 he spent 2 years recuperating in France and Germany. Then after two years on the staff of Queen's College, Taunton, he gave up teaching and became established as a printer and bookseller in Bridgwater.

He was admitted into the Society of Friends in 1898, having grown quite naturally into the faith. Seven years later he and John Morland decided to write down the development of their faith. T. B. Dilks sent his in the form of a letter to his children. God was in him the universal creative spirit reached by the threefold path of Truth, Beauty and Goodness and because he pervaded the whole of His creation there could be sharply drawn distinction between sacred and secular, spiritual and material.

Thomas Bruce Dilks married Agnes Isabel Thompson, a Bridgwater Friend, in 1901 and he often spoke to his contemporaries of the wonderful help and inspiration she was to him. She died in 1923.

Soon after his marriage his nervous disorder developed into agoraphobia. He who loved nature so deeply was confined indoors for the rest of his life, but where many would have been embittered he made the great offering of acceptance and turned it into an imprisonment of the body only. His mind ranged through many fields of knowledge and he kept abreast of what was happening in the world by every possible means.

People of all types valued his friendship — the wealth of knowledge he gained by reading and deep thinking was humbly placed at the service of everyone. The poetry he wrote and published revealed a sensitive and imaginative mind and as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society he was able to do valuable research which greatly benefited the Borough of Bridgwater. One of his great joys was the study of Mysticism in which he was encouraged by Robert Hall, the mystic poet of Clevedon. His collection of first-hand mystical experience

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awaits publication.

The meeting for worship held once a month at his house for many years drew great variety of people, and attendees who would not normally go to a Friends Meeting House clearly appreciated these intimate family gatherings. The essential warmth of our Friend's nature was expressed by his ministry. He divined and spoke to particular needs. At the time of the proposed penal reforms in 1947, when young German Social Workers joined in the meeting for worship, he had inspired emphasis on the individual. But for the most part he made the mystic approach to God and led to realms above all controversies where divine love and serenity prevailed, so his fellow worshippers were invariably enriched with new hope and courage and a wider outlook.

T.B. Dilks always looked at life from the standpoint of Eternity. Death to him was never an ending, but a gate to a further life of the body, where love continued. He expressed this through the following verse in one of his poems.

“ Set free to walk in ways untrod.
To breathe an air unbreathed before,
To enter a new House of God.
And deeper mysteries explore.”

Obituary of 1949 published in an as yet unidentified periodical published by the Society of Friends.

(3).

THOMAS BRUCE DILKS.

Three weeks before his eighty-fourth birthday the death occurred, suddenly, on 7 February 1949, at his home, Eastgate, Bridgwater, of Thomas Bruce Dilks, B.A., F.R.HIST.S. the well-known Bridgwater historian and archivist.

A native of Penrith and son of a Wesleyan minister, Mr, Dilks came to Bridgwater at the age of twenty, and was a teacher at 'Mrs, Alexander's private school. in Friarm Street. Later he taught at Queen's College, Taunton, and Wycliff College, Stonehouse, Glos. Owing to a breakdown in health he relinquished the scholastic profession. He was a member of the Society of Friends, and founder of the. Oldmixon Club, Bridgwater, which met at his house. .

A widower since 1923, Mr.Dilks is survived by two sons and a daughter, the latter, Mrs, M, Granville Brown, a member of the Town Council and the Borough Bench of Magistrates, Mr. Dilks' ashes were deposited in the Garden of Rest, St. Mary's Churchyard.

Mr, Dilks was best known as an historian, having devoted the, greater part of his time for many years to research into the archives of Bridgwater. He was much interested in the work of the English Place Name Society, of which for one time he was the county organizer. Dilks was also a writer of verse, and a published collection was favourably reviewed' in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Me was a keen chess player and a member of the Bridgwater Chess Club, which held matches at his home.

It was always a pleasure to call on Dilks to find him working on and transcribing some ancient document relating to Bridgwater. He was unable to leave his home at all of late years, but many friends and admirers of his scholarly work called on him, not only to keep him in touch with the outside world especially as concerned local history and archaeology, but also to show their deep appreciation. and recognition of his great powers in research with a limited library at his disposal. However, the Somerset Archaeological Society was able to supply him with reference books which would otherwise have been unprocurable in the county. He was generous in the knowledge he conveyed to others, which induced his friends to assist him in such ways as were in their power. Dilks' modesty, genial manners and industry will long be remembered.

H. S. George Gray.

Published in the *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 1948-9, vol 94, pp. 165-6. The obituary concluded with a bibliography of Dilks's writings which has been omitted here.

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THOMAS BRUCE DILKS, B.A., F.R.Hist.S.

Thomas Bruce Dilks died on February 7th, 1949, at the age of 83. He had just finished the transcription of the borough archives of Bridgwater to the death of Queen Elizabeth I. His father was a Wesleyan minister, and as a young man Dilks came from Penrith to Bridgwater to teach at a private school in Friarn Street. He later taught at Queen 's College, Taunton, and at Wycliffe College, Stonehouse. In 1898 he retired from teaching and became first partner and then owner of a printing and stationery business and post office in Eastover, Bridgwater. A number of small monographs on local history were produced by him, and he was founder of the Oldmixon Club, which met at his house.

Dilks devoted the best years of his life to the transcription and editing of the Bridgwater borough archives, of which four volumes, from 1200 to 1468, were published by the Somerset Record Society during his lifetime. His work was performed with loving care and scholarship, and few boroughs have been as well and devotedly served as Bridgwater was by Dilks.

Though it will be by his published works that Dilks will be remembered, those of us who knew him will primarily remember a man of immense kindness, humour and civility. He was a member of the Society of Friends and possessed great spiritual power. He wrote poetry of considerable merit and was also a competent chess player. In his later years he was looked after by his devoted daughter, Mrs. Glanville Brown. He died peacefully in his house at Eastgate, and his ashes were deposited in the Garden of Rest at St. Mary 's churchyard. Thomas Dilks would well say *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*.

T. D. T.

Published by the Somerset Record Society, Vol 50, v, (1971) and written by Thomas D Tremlett, FSA.

Efforts are now being made to trace what became of the unpublished transcripts. It is clear from his articles about the medieval town published in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society* ¹ that he was a very competent historian indeed, had a poet's gift of language, and was a fine Latinist.

As well as the transcriptions of the Borough records ², he published poetry³ and booklets of local history⁴. He was convenor of the Libretto Committee of the Bridgwater Pageant, (1927), and may have written the words of the songs performed there to music specially composed by Percy Whitlock. The year before he had written the words of the Charter Day song to music by Martin Shaw⁵. He was also a contributor of articles to newspapers and reviews to various journals concerned with the teaching of history.⁶

He suffered from Agoraphobia for many years – perhaps the reason why he gave up teaching in 1898. The Friends would sometimes hold their Meeting at his house, and the performers' procession on the last day of the Bridgwater Carnival, 26 June, 1927, passed down Eastover, by

his house, so he could watch it, before going to Sydenham Manor.

In World War 2 he was appointed an inspector of salvaged waste paper for the Borough, with the duty of rescuing historical material, and secured the papers of the Methodist preacher Thomas Charles ('Charles o'r Bala'; 1755-1814) and of David Charles (1812-1878), Calvinistic Methodist minister and grandson of Thomas Charles. In 1837 he established a school which later became Coleg y Bala (Bala Congregational College). The papers are now in the National Library of Wales, GB 0210 MSBWATER. .

The following bibliography will be augmented as more material is discovered. The newspaper entries have been traced though the British Library Digitised newspapers. Unfortunately the Bridgwater newspapers only extend to the end of the C19, so far. It is not known how much of his verse was previously published in literary periodicals.

Tony Woolrich, updated 21/09/2019.

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- 1) Burgesses of Bridgwater in the thirteenth century, *Proc. SANHS*, 63 (1917) pp 30-59.
Bridgwater wills, *Proc. SANHS*, 66(2) (20)pp 78-97.
Bridgwater Insurrection of 1381, *Proc. SANHS*, 73, (1927), pp 57-69.
A lottery in Jacobean Bridgwater *Proc. SANHS*, 79, (1943), pp 79-83.
'Bridgwater Castle and desmesne', in *Proc. SANHS*, Vol. 86 (2), 1940 pp.86-113.
Obituary of Dilks by H. St George Grey *Proc. SANHS*, Vol 94 (2) 1948-9 pp.165-166.
- 2) *Bridgwater Borough Archives* Vols I to IV.
Also published as Somerset Record Society.
1200-1377 Vol 48 1933.
1377-1400 Vol 53 1938.
Collectanea III, Vol. 57. 1942 'A Calendar of some Medieval MSS. in the Custody of the Bridgwater Corporation – Brymore and Steyning MSS'.
1400-1445 Vol 58 1943.
1445-1468 Vol 60 1945.
[1468-1485 Vol 70 1971 posthumously].
- 3) Poetry collections, published by the East Gate Press.
The Adamantine Island 1902.
A Village Muse 1905.
The Collected Verse of T. Bruce Dilks 1932.
Twelve Sonnets 1938.
T Bruce Dilks was advertised as the author of vol 31 of Harrap's Life and Poetry series — *Herrick and his Poetry*, c1918. But this was never published and the reasons are not now known. The series ran from 1911-1940 in 37 volumes of some 150 pages each. They included collections of poetry and biographical information and were aimed at the educational market. It is possible Dilks was commissioned to write the book following the publication of his well received verse *To Herrick in Temple Bar* 1893.
- 4) Bridgwater Booklet No. 1 — *Pilgrims in Old Bridgwater* by T Bruce Dilks.
Bridgwater Booklet No. 2 — *Bridgwater in Brief* by T Bruce Dilks.
Bridgwater Booklet No. 3 — *The Siege of Bridgwater* by C Trenchard.
Bridgwater Booklet No. 4— *The Battle of Sedgemoor* by M Page.
Bridgwater Booklet No. 5— *Robert Blake, General-at-Sea* by Rev. J R Powell.
Bridgwater Booklet No. 6 — *Charles James Fox and the Borough of Bridgwater* by T. Bruce Dilks; .
The Story of Bridgwater Parish Church 1940.
'The Hospital of St John the Baptist', pp 46-76 of *The parish of S. John Baptist, Bridgwater, 1846-1946, with some notes on the ancient hospital.*, H Eardley Field and T Bruce Dilks 1946.
- 5) T B Dilks, *The Bridgwater Charter Day Song* : London: J B Cramer & Co. 1926.
- 6) 'Town gates outside London'. T. Bruce Dilks. *Notes and Queries*, 9th ser-V, Issue 117, 24 March 1900, Page 228.
"Doctor" a Christian name'. T . Bruce Dilks. *Notes and Queries*, 9th ser-V, Issue 121, 21 April 1900, Page 324.
Reviewed Work: *John Pym* by C. E. Wade, Review by: T. Bruce Dilks, *History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January-March, 1914), pp. 33-36.
Reviewed Work: *A History of Europe* by A. J. Grant, Review by: T. Bruce Dilks, *History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April-June, 1914), pp. 96-98.
'The Treaty of Ghent', T. Bruce Dilks, *History* Vol. 3, No. 3 (July-September, 1914), pp. 115-128.
Reviewed Work: *The Place of the Reign of Edward II. in English History* by T. F. Tout, Review by: T. Bruce Dilks. *History*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (October-December, 1914), pp. 224-228.
'The conquest of Canada', T. Bruce Dilks, *History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January-March, 1915), pp. 48-50.
'A Note on the Campaign of 1815 and His Majesty's Opposition', T. Bruce Dilks, *History*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (July-September, 1915), pp. 113-115.
'The Lord Keepership', T. Bruce Dilks, *History*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October-December, 1915), pp. 165-167.
'Some Documentary Oddments' *Notes Queries Somerset Dorset* Sept 1918 15(123) pp 100-103, and Jan 1919 16 (142) pp. 141-142.
Medieval Bridgwater in *History Teachers' Miscellany*, Vol 3 (7-10), Jul-Oct 1925, pp.97-, 122-,136-,154. I *The Bridge*, II *St Mary's chantry*, III, *The Law Courts*, IV *The religious houses*.

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'The Hody family' in *Notes Queries Somerset Dorset*, Vol 24, 1946 pp.22-25.

NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES.

The People's University: National Home Student Union – Dilks was involved with it: *Cardiff Times*, Saturday 04 June 1892.

Dilks's poem *To Herrick*, published in *Temple Bar: The Weekly Telegraph*, 7 March, 1893.

Advertisement that Dilks was to contribute a special article on Bridgwater castle and bridge to the *Bristol Observer* 12 April 1902. *Western Daily Press* -Friday 11 April 1902.

Dilks's poem, *To Herrick* in *The Cornhill*, January 1911.

Dilks and the English Place Names Society: *Western Daily Press* - Tuesday 08 May 1923.

Letter BURKE'S METHOD, by Dilks, noting he had been reading in the MS Journal of Thomas Clark [11Mo 24, 1823] that Clark had been at John Bowen's, when the latter was assisting the Bishop of Rochester in editing the Works of Edmund Burke, *The Times*, 11 June, 1931.

Article by Dilks on the Bridgwater Carol: *Western Gazette* - Friday 25 December 1936.

Review by Dilks of Rev. J. R. Powell's Navy Record Society book of Blake letters: *Western Gazette*, Friday 26 March 1937.

Review by Dilks of Rev J. R. Powell's *The Letters of Robert Blake* in *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 27 March, 1937.

Report of the 160th meeting of the Oldmixon club [Dilks was vice-chairman]. It was a lecture by H. J., Channon, of Queens' College, Taunton in the Labuchere family of Quantock Lodge: *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 12 March, 1938.

Letter, THE CUSTODY OF MANUSCRIPTS, from Dilks about the sale of medieval MS by public libraries. *The Times*, 3 July, 1939.

A follow-up by Dilks. Evidently it was Penance Library; *The Times*, 12 July, 1939.

Report of a Friendly Society badge of 'The Ancient Order of Shepherds', found in Birmingham. It was presented by the Bridgwater Lodge to Bro. David Smith. Dilks was consulted and the newspaper reported his findings fully. The badge to be presented to Blake Museum: *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 07 March 1942, 1942.

Letter by Dilks about the discovery of C18 letters relating to the evangelical movement,

Newton, Cowper, the Wesleys, etc: *The Times*, 11 December, 1943.

Letter: The Wesleys and others: letters found in salvage (T. Bruce Dilks) – *Times Literary Supplement*, December 11 1943.p 600,. Reply from T. Bruce Dilks, January 8 1944, p 19.

A query about the Suffragan Bishop of Bridgwater, 1535. Refers to a note in S&D N&Q, March 1920 by Dilks: *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 6 March 1944.

Report of a request by Dilks to the Borough Council for financial support (£100) the publication of the fourth volume of the Borough Archives series. Some hostile comment by councillors, so rejected.: *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 08 March 1947.

Report of the discovery by Dilks that Sir Frances Drake dined with the Mayor of Bridgwater in the autumn of 1584: *Taunton Courier & Western Advertiser*, 4 December 1948.

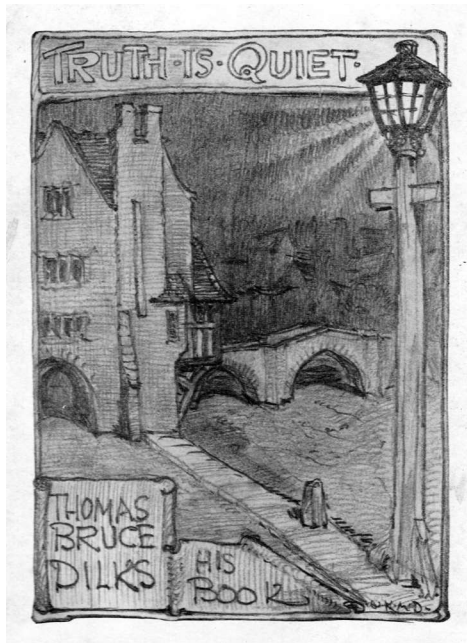
Obituary: *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser* - Saturday 12 February 1949.

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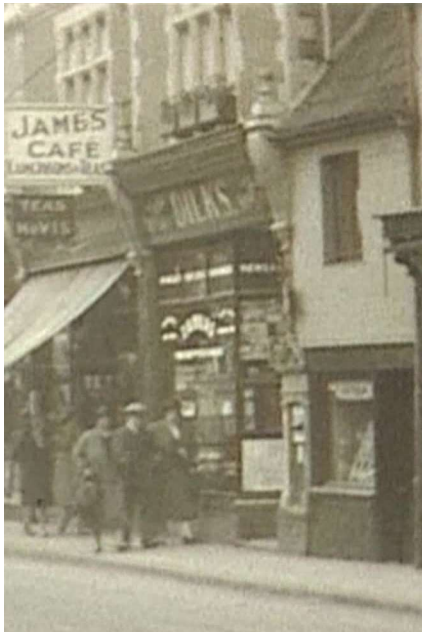
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After an illustration of Bridgwater's Langport Quay.

By John Chubb (1746-1818).



Dilks's shop on Eastover *circa* mid 1930s.

A frame from a home-movie of Bridgwater.

Blake Museum collection.

Photograph by Mike Searle.