

A SKETCH OF BRIDGWATER
AND ITS
NEIGHBOURHOOD.
BY G. PARKER, ESQ.

TO WHICH NOTES ARE ADDED CONTAINING A HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF THE TOWN BY FAIRFAX, AND
ALSO THE BATTLE OF SEDGMOOR

PUBLISHED BY T. H. BODLEY, TIMES OFFICE, MARY STREET.

1854

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This account of the town is in rhyming couplets, and was produced for sale at the Fund-raising exhibition at the Town Hall in June 1854, to help reduce the debt remaining on the cost of re-ordering St. Mary' Church. It is concluded with a series of notes on the history of the town: these are the earliest printed accounts of the history of the town known, but its history was sometimes touched upon briefly in a number of guide books to the county published earlier.

The author included a seven-page Appendix with accounts of the Siege of Bridgwater (1645) and the Battle of Sedgemoor (1685) These were based largely on John Oldmixon, *A History of England during the reigns of the Royal House of Stuart* (1730). The Appendix has been omitted here.

A number of foot notes * and † were included; these have been collected on p 8.

The verse describes the topography of the town, with vignettes of topics such as the launch of a ship on the Parrett, the railway station and the iron foundry in Eastover, the Workhouse, schools, churches, even shopping in the town centre. There are accounts of nearby villages.

Digitised and edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich,
21/03/2020

This Poem, entitled a SKETCH of BRIDGWATER AND its NEIGHBOURHOOD, is respectfully dedicated to the Committee for the management of the Exhibition in aid of St. Mary's Church Restoration Fund.

The Author will feel highly gratified if his humble efforts should, in any degree, tend to the advancement of the cause they have so laudably undertaken.

A SKETCH

of
BRIDGWATER AND ITS
NEIGHBOURHOOD

WOULD I could write as some have ably done,
Whose beams of learning, as the radiant sun
Have scattered light around — few can attain
Perfection's height, few can expect to gain
The Poet's wreath — but few can upward bound
And reach the envied seat, till laurel-crowned
They've gained their honours, and their days may
spend,

Fame's numbered fav'rites, until time shall end;
Still I will write, regardless of renown,
My theme shall be my native Borough Town,
If you, indulgent reader will attend,
And ramble with me as a list'ning friend,
We'll travel here and there, as Fancy finds
Allurements, or attractions for our minds ;
The leading features of the town I'll show,
And make a few short comments as we go.

If any theme can raise Poetic fire,
If any thoughts the fancy can inspire,
Home with its blessings — Home those thoughts will
raise;

The charm is ever sweet — of early days,
When school boy sports, in all their cheerful glee,
With kindred spirits circled merrily,
Running at prison bars with eager might,
Or holding steadily the flying kite,
On holidays escaping private bounds,
Racing through neighbouring fields at hare and hounds,
Home's circle, where domestic comforts twined,
With almost sacred pleasure round the mind.
When manhood comes with all its wants and cares,
And life's responsibility declares:
Such stores as these are like a genial spring,
From which the memory delight can bring;
Those days are past — the thoughts of them are set
Deep in my memory — I shall ne'er forget
What in my boyhood days were stamp'd in truth,
Those deep impressions made in early youth.
Yes, I will freely write — and tho' my theme
May seem but strange — yet it may raise a dream
In other minds, where scenes alike have past,
And equally its pleasing halo cast,
Of home. Come Muse, thy useful succour send,
As on thy aid will my success depend,
Bridgwater with its neighbourhood I'll rehearse,

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And sketch its history in humble verse.

'Tis bosom'd in a vale with verdant rills
Between the Polden and the Quantock Hills.
Its changing fortunes have propitious proved
Or otherwise, as Time's events have moved ;
In days of yore, against the rising tide
Of democratic power—it took the side
Of Royalty, firmly withstood the balls
Which Fairfax levelled at it's castle walls ;
Closed were its iron gates against his course,
Until compelled by overwhelming force,
Its blazing streets told the unwelcome tale,
That martial force and fury must prevail ;
Nor did it slumber in the royal shade,
When dark Oppression threaten'd to invade
The people's liberties, amongst the brave
That dared oppose the power that would enslave
His subjects—Blake, all honoured be his name,
Stands nobly forward in the scroll of fame;
His name immortalized will ever be,
Of freedom's sons, the foremost of the free ;
His patriot valour, like the swelling wave
That bore him on—the bravest of the brave,
Touched other shores ; the foes of England found
His fame reported from the cannon's sound,
The British flag, he floated in the breeze
Until it triumphed, mistress of the seas;
To shield his country's honor was his pride,—
Upon the ocean's briny wave he died.
Around his head Fame weaved her garland crown,
Still lives his memory in his native town*
Bridgwater,——peace surround his bed
Until the silent grave yields up its dead.
The days of Blake had passed, years fled away,
The town was mingled in a mighty fray
Of stern religious freedom, Monmouth came,
Misfortune cast its mantle o'er his name : †
Hark the loud bells in merry music ring,
As he in form is welcom'd as the king ;
The Mayor and Corporation led the van,
Whilst hundreds to the ancient Cornhill ran
To hear the proclamation, which the storm
That quickly followed made an empty form.
Sedgmoor he fought, Might held its royal laws,
Braver he struggled for the sacred cause;
The day he lost, was conquered, and enchained—
The day was lost, the principle was gained.
The ill-armed troops, if troops they could be called,
With nothing really but the name installed,

The sturdy peasants of the neighbourhood,
For many hours, experienced troops withstood,
Onward with ardent feelings were impelled
With bravery that never was excelled ;
In close determined ranks they took their course
With foot to foot—and hand to hand their force
Intrepid moved—their enemies alarmed,
Tho' with the loud and thundering cannon armed,
Retreated wildly—bloody was the fray,
Certain had been the fortunes of the day,
But traitorous Grey, when called upon to charge,
Forsook the field—his followers at large
Pursued his track—in vain did Monmouth cheer,
His foes, recovering, broke upon his rear,
Fierce was the shock, 'gainst numbers on they prest
Till close encounter brought them breast to breast;
In vain they struggled—till in deep dismay
Brave Monmouth vanquished, yielded up the day;
The scenes that followed are of that dark dye,
That marks ferocious inhumanity—
When Jeffreys, bloody Jeffreys stained his name
With merciless, imperishable fame,
From which stern Justice on her seat recoils,
At which the blood of every Briton boils.
With fierce revenge on poor Bridgwater fell
Its heaviest blow—here many records tell
The sanguinary edicts that were pass'd,——
Men, women, children, pinioned and class'd
In one sad, powerless, suffering, trembling band—
In hope to strike a terror through the land.
But when this discord had itself consumed,
And peaceful occupations were resumed,
When the determined course of moral right
Had overcome the force of haughty might,
The town's inhabitants, contented, free,
Followed the paths of honest industry,
Repaired the breaches savage war had made
And steadily advanced in useful trade.
As rude Invasion on their homesteads ceased
Progressively in numbers they increased ;
The last accounts nearly twelve thousand give
Which of all ages in the parish live.

In later times, altho' no Blakes appear,
Still we can boast our men of talent here.
Bowen, self-taught, was cradled with the poor,
Yet in our annals will his name endure
As having struggled for the poor man's right,
When modern legislation in its might
Pour'd forth its edicts with resistless sway,

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To sponge at once the old poor-laws away:
Anstice and Baker too my willing pen
Enrolls as skilful scientific men,
Amongst the learned a first class they held,
In antiquarian knowledge they excelled,
A combination increased powers beget,
The value heightens, as the gem is set,
Their separate talents of superior kind,
Shone with more lustre, thro' a virtuous mind.

'Tis pleasant, when the summer breezes play
Along the Parret's winding banks to stray,
To meet the vessels with their flowing sails
Bearing their cargoes from the coast of Wales,
And when the sweeping tide is running high,
When towards their moorings they are hastening nigh,
To see the active energy that's made —
Sailors, and landsmen each bestowing aid,
With emulation which shall lend a hand
To keep the floating vessel from the land:
Some enter in the docks, where they may ride
Safe from the threaten'd dangers of the tide—
And warehouses where safety is insured,
Receive the foreign cargoes—well secured
There they remain, until some future day
The loaded waggons bear the freight away.
Some coasters, fearless of the ebbing tide,
Cling closely to the winding river's side,
Where the industrious porter watchful stays,
To bear their various cargoes to the quays.
A bounteous gift, peculiar to the place,
Nature supplies—from its rich stores we trace
Part of the town's prosperity—the land
Along the banks is lined with mud and sand,
So happily 'tis mingled by the tide,
A ready-form'd material is supplied,
From which white bricks so good and rare are made,
They form a staple article of trade ;
Their cleansing qualities so well are known,
To other lands their useful fame hath flown,
So that we hold a sort of patent prize,
Which can be sold as foreign merchandise.
Both bricks, and tiles, are manufactured here
To some extent, at seasons of the year
Hundreds of labourers employment find :
The goods they make are famous of their kind,
No neighbourhood, superior, can display
From the acknowledged richness of the clay.

Observe a building yard, where on the blocks
A spacious vessel rises from her stocks
With stern inclined, as purposely to glide
With easy movement on the flowing tide :
When in the town the morning hour is known
The waters are to claim the ship their own,
Spectators line the banks, eager to view
The vessel launching with her joyous crew ;
When almost to its height the water flows,
The air resounds with noise of heavy blows,
The powerful wedge is driven up with ease,
Whilst showy flags are floating in the breeze ;
The busy preparations once begun,
The watchful crowd await the signal gun,
At length 'tis heard, a silence reigns around,
A moment's silence, till she breaks the ground ;
With steady look the anxious crowd survey,
Until in majesty she moves away,
Then cheers resound, " that's good" they cry,
"that's brave,"

As steadily she dips into the wave.
When fairly borne upon the spacious tide
'Mid noisy glee they rock from side to side,
A parting gun reports that all is right,
And crowds disperse delighted with the sight.
Near is a yard where piles of deal are laid
Sterling reporters of a foreign trade,
And here and there with a small space between,
Furnished with elm and oak, are others seen,
Both kinds of timber we profusely get
From the well wooded soil of Somerset.
The spreading elm we claim our own—indeed
It springs from every hedge row as a weed,
So rapidly it grows in height and size,
It annually yields a landlord's prize.
As down the Parret's banks the eye surveys,
Surprising richness every field displays.
When March hath passed, and April shed her tears,
When happy May, and genial June appears,
This level vale a lovely sight bestows,
The butter-cup so plentifully grows,
As at some distance the broad fields are seen,
A golden mantle seems to clothe the green.
So many flocks and herds in union move,
The owner's wealth they evidently prove,
Insuring a return of welcome rent,
And ought to give the farmer's mind content.
But where, on what extraordinary ground
Is true content unmixed, un murmuring, found?
Can real unmingled happiness be known?

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Seek from the humble cottage to the throne,
Search the world through, enquire from age to age,
Ask the wild savage, or the learned sage,
That man should live without a want or fear,
Was never known, nor ever will be, here.
Still if position can the charm beget
Men ought to be content in Somerset;
Our markets, well supplied, present a heap
Of agricultural produce, good and cheap,
Where those, whose incomes are not overstored,
May many comforts to themselves afford,
Which increased value from a short supply
Would prompt domestic prudence to deny.

Places of worship suiting various minds,
Of different religions views and kinds,
Can here be found, established churches three,
St. Mary's, and St. John's, and Trinity;
The first named is the Parish Church, and there
Three times on Sundays, people flock for prayer;
So of the rest ; St Mary's has of late
Been renovated as in early date,
Galleries removed, seats as they ought to be
Open and regular, with hundreds free,
So that the boast which formerly was heard
Is carried out in deed, as well as word—
The christian boast, that ever should endure,
That England's church is open to the poor;
The fine oak roof along the nave is new,
Which brings the centre's noble height to view ;
Their slender forms the graceful pillars rear ;
The rounded arches openly appear ;
From some obstructions being swept away,
The chancel does its length once more display ;
From the entire removal of the screen
Its handsome structure from the church is seen ;
The altar piece requires some notice here,
Its many beauties at a glance appear,
With works of art it takes the highest ground
As scarce in Europe can its match be found;
The Saviour dead—the prostrate Virgin faint—
Weeping St. John—the Marys, whate'er paint
Could possibly effect, to picture form,
Display the passions, life-like, speaking, warm,
Is here accomplished, such a gem of art
Must strike the fancy, and must reach the heart.
As from the altar's steps we look around,
To view the building from this hallowed ground,
A holy grandeur creeps upon the mind
Which may be felt, but cannot be defined.

The church-yard now we'll visit, but when there
Its reminiscence brings a cloud of care,
There lie the bodies in their dark abode,
Of those dear friends for whom my tears have flowed—
Departed, not forgotten, there they lie,
Carved are their virtues on my memory;
Here have the mourners stood in suffering grief,
Until the gushing tear hath brought relief,
Forced from the cavern of the eye to start,
A timely succour to an aching heart,
Connected with the springs that are entwined
Beneath the surface of a troubled mind.
The square old tower our notice must engage,
It evidently bears the marks of age ;
There Monmouth stood, and with his glass surveyed
Approaching ranks in martial force arrayed.
On the old tower the steeple proudly stands,
Marked for its height from the surrounding lands ;
'When on its form with earnestness I gaze,
It carries back my mind to boyhood days,
When by a ladder'd rope I dared ascend,
And on its giddy top some minutes spend.
(It had been by a skilful man repaired,)
Rash was the frolic—some the danger dared
Who, like myself, supposed t'would be in vain
If it were missed to find the chance again.
Bodies no longer here will buried be,
We will pass on, and view the Cemet'ry—
It is not far—already are the dead
Lying interred within its peaceful bed;
With some degree of skill, the ground is laid
The shrubs are planted, and the paths are made ;
And right it is,—spots of this hallowed kind,
Should never be repugnant to the mind;
Erected with some taste, a Chapel too,
Standing in simple neatness, meets our view,
Near to the turnpike road, where many pass
Whose worldly, wandering, thoughtless minds, alas !
Turn with displeasure from this sacred place,
To shun reflections, which they fear to face.
And now awhile to serious thoughts adieu,
Like children we must pass to something new,
Vary the subject, and the charm destroy,
As other objects must my Muse employ.

How quickly oft we think night follows day,
Short the transition is from grave to gay,
As the scene shifts, whatever be its kind,
So do associations move the mind;
Fresh views arise, th' impressions that they make

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Subjects unthought of, frequently awake,
Their novelties such pleasing interest cast,
It weakens the remembrance of the past;
But a short distance, from this spot concealed,
Stands, where I oft have rambled, Matthew's field,
One of the walks that in our suburbs lie,
That jocund health, and cheerful thoughts supply.
Here as along its upward bed we range
We shall enjoy a pleasurable change,
Invigorating air its freshness yields,
As it sweeps over grassy meadow fields.
A few good houses here and there are seen,
Prettily stationed, casting o'er the scene '
Welcome variety; along its side
A brook meanders with its crystal tide,
Where spotted trout in quiet pastime play,
And sportive leap, beneath the sun's bright ray.
This is a chartered field, no landlords dare
Infringe upon the rights of Matthew's fair;
When harvest past, and Autumn leaves are shed,
And chilly old October rears his head,
Cattle are driven from the country round,
And sold to dealers on this spacious ground;
The first day past, the following two display
Some curious scenes of rustic holiday,
Where friends meet friends, released from Labour's
chain,
With undissembled pleasure in their train,
Despising rain, thro' mud they often wade
To laugh at wonders that are there displayed:
The sights they see, the witty jokes they learn,
To neighbours are described on their return.

We must not tarry, onward as we stray
We shall find ample subjects on our way
For our remark. We have our public schools,
Where children, trained in happy Wisdom's rules,
Advance by Learning's powerful aid, to scan
Their proper duties towards God, and Man.
First Doctor Morgan at some distant date
Endowed a school—he left a small estate
For its support—and by his will ordained
As Churchmen that the scholars should be trained.
He was a wise and charitable man—
Trustees he named to carry out his plan—
On their responsibility, the end,
Designed by the testator, must depend.
On the right planting of a small bequest,
What future consequences often rest;
The good results which follow in its train

Will often-times from age to age remain;
Parents made happy to behold their child,
Snatch'd from companions ignorant and wild;
Guided by rules of necessary sway,
Wiser and better growing day by day—
Their bold impetuosity inclined
To the attainment of a furnished mind:
Their rude unpolished manners changed to take
The courteous bend which discipline will make;
Forbid loose language, or deceitful lie,
Ungoverned passions, or the envious eye;
By reason taught to curb the stubborn will,
And trained for stations which they hope to fill.
'Tis by such means alone that we shall find
The certain way to renovate mankind;
Cultivate youth, if you would wish to see
The good results of Christianity;
Trust not alone to secular success,
Religion leads the mind to happiness.
Steps of gradation never will surprise,
Class above class in due succession rise;
Through Nature's plan it ever was the same.
Another public school hath earned a fame
Where children of a higher range repair,
To study classic literature there;
Its founder was King James, famed must it be,
Sheltered beneath the wing of royalty:
Where such establishments obtain renown,
They tend to the advantage of a town.

Let us again our onward course pursue,
The stately Union House appears in view,
Wide areas, with divided space it blends,
Its use to forty parishes extends.
Oh! that the poor would, as in times of yore,
With resolution, spurn the poor-house door,
In days of youth and strength, strive to lay by
Some savings, as a shield from poverty,
To keep a home, when health and strength are past,
This home is but a splendid jail at last,
Where sober men are mingled with the rude,
And virtuous females tainted by the lewd
Where aged couples sep'ately are sent
To different rooms, to brood o'er discontent.
In days, when thrift and industry combined
Gave to the poor an independent mind,
Firm to their Church, they felt God's holy fear
Check in their breasts wild passion's mad career,
Then, understood a blessing from above,
Followed the duteous course of filial love;

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With self denial did the children press,
To help their aged parents in distress;
Their bosoms were with emulation fired,
Which a deep sense of gratitude inspired;
They strengthened by their help the feeble knee,
Round which they tottered in their infancy,
With resolution propp'd the parent stem,
Succoured the arms that once had succoured them.
In those past days, the alms-house lent its aid
When childless widows, in misfortune's shade,
Were hapless cast — that was their last abode
In earthly mansions — then the affluent shew'd
In quiet Charity, without pretence,
An exercise of true benevolence ;
Round suffering poverty their blessings cast
And soothed their rugged trials to the last.

This spot we leave, the iron bridge pass o'er,
Where an old stone one stood in days of yore;
Its noble arch and tasteful form present
A union of strength and ornament.
Before us now, an edifice appears,
Prepared to stay the writhing sufferer's tears,
The boast, the noble boast of modern times,
Unknown in ancient years, or heathen climes
A meed of honor to his generous mind,
Who, thoughtfully, infirmaries designed;
In one united concord all agree,
Here is a scope for true philanthropy: ,
Here is devised the admirable plan,
As pictured by the good Samaritan,
Where streams of charity may safely flow —
Where gathered wealth a blessing may bestow,
Which a return of satisfaction leaves
Alike to him who gives, and who receives.

Now Institutions of a different kind,
For different purposes, are brought to mind,
By various bodies, under various rules,
We have a list of charitable schools.
Motives and actions, here, are understood,
Each emulating others, to do good ;
Pursuing different paths, their efforts tend
To one result, in one great centre, end.
To all the churches are there some attach'd,
Each in the race of useful learning match'd,
Where boys and girls imbibe religious truth,
From the mere infant to the sturdy youth.
The Sabbath schools, all thoughtful men agree,
For sterling worth stand in the first degree;

How can the sacred hours be better spent,
Than giving to those schools encouragement?
Clergy and Laity earnestly should try,
By every means — in strictest unity,
To aid a cause, which tho' its root be small,
Extends its branches greater than them all.
We will proceed to famed St John's repair,
And muse upon the ancient relics there;
Many, its early chronicles can tell,
Stirring events, that on its plain befel.

Its bounds adjoin to Castle-field, the site,
Where Monmouth pitched his tents before the fight
Of Sedgmoor — where blind Fortune's dice were thrown,
As chance might give a scaffold or a throne.
Mounds once were seen, which plainly seemed to say
These are the monuments of bloody fray,
Where man to man in furious wrath was found,
Disputing firmly every step of ground,
In savage contest, but where now we find
A contest, happily of other kind —
Inhabitants well housed, contented, free,
Struggling in paths of honest industry.
Here stands a Church as in a handsome nest,
And representing happiness and rest;
Remarkable for architectural taste
Without, within 'tis elegant and chaste,
Recalling sacred feelings to the mind;
It is esteemed a model of its kind.
The school, the parsonage house, gardens, and field,
Viewed as a whole, a pleasing object yield,
Characteristic of that English style,
Which is peculiar to the British Isle.

From Castle-field to Burnham's utmost bounds
Is stretched a line of famous grazing grounds, —
Famed Pawlett Hams is known amongst the rest,
Equal to any, some suppose, the best,
Where numerous sheep lie scattered, fat and full,
Renowned for yielding coarse, tho' valued wool.
The London Christmas Market, from its plains,
Its fattest, and its heaviest oxen, gains;
And there still past'ring on its fertile green,
Is the attractive, powerful, dray horse seen.
Close to St. John's the Railroad Station lies,
Which a new subject for my Muse supplies.
From Exeter to London, night and day
Unceasingly the puffing engines play,
Dragging with eagle swiftness and command
The highest, or the lowest in the land

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In carriages which either may prefer,
As suits the pocket of the passenger ;
Onward they're driven, by scientific laws,
Braving the dread which fears of danger cause.

Observe that smoke which hangs upon the air,
It curtains o'er an iron-foundry there,
Connected with the rail — Hark ! what resound
Of numerous blows from the large hammers sound;
View the extended buildings how they spread —
The busy labourers, from shed to shed,
Bearing their heavy weights — Mechanic skill
Here shapes the yielding iron to its will ;
With practised eye, they forge the forms desired
In tubes, or chains, or rails, as are required.
Such works as these are pleasing to behold,
'Tis there that man turns labour into gold;
Cheerful he works, and cheerfully returns
To spend the money he so ably earns.
In famed St. John's there was one noted day
Above the rest — the twenty-ninth of May —
Once in its precincts a tall May-pole stood,
Garlands of flowers were woven round the wood,
When ancient English games were freely played;
Tis pity that such customs be decayed.
Such annual pastimes serve as a relief
For weary labour or domestic grief;
When once the merry frolics are begun
Cold gravity is melted into fun;
What magic joy, the gathered numbers feel,
Is testified by Laughter's hearty peal.
Each, more or less, in the delights engage,
Youth's freaks exciting energy in age.

In the town's centre, where the castle stood,
The streets are spacious and the buildings good;
And on the well known Cornhill as we go,
Shop after shop appears in even row,
Where goods of all descriptions meet the eye,
In well dressed windows, crying "come and buy ;"
Superb cut glass, and ornamental ware,
Which every envious competition dare;
Some pretty print shops, where the idlers stay
Enjoying the attractions they display;
And linen drap'ry, placed in winning style,
On which, as they survey, the ladies smile.
And I may here of public buildings tell,
The Market House, the Court House, the Hotel,
Where multitudes on various business throng,
While carriage after carriage moves along.

And you may mark the difference, as folks pass,
Between a country town, and city mass;
Where they move on, not having time to waste,
In rapid, anxious, energetic haste,
As tho' upon an errand each was sent,
On its fulfilment eagerly intent,
Taught to keep on in one continual track,
The business over, told to hasten back.
Here, as they walk deliberately the street,
As neighbours meeting neighbours, neighbours greet,
A general sociability appears,
Which e'en a stranger's contemplation cheers.

Within an easy drive, the Quantocks lie,
Famed for diversity of scenery;
Its wooded dells, where on some favorite spray
The feathered songsters warble out the day;
Its gushing rills meand'ring as they go,
Its verdant sides where heaths luxuriant grow,
Where oft the fox in quiet ambush lies,
Or with a rush the timid black-cock flies;
Its wild and spacious cliffs, where lofty trees
With spreading branches, catch the healthful
breeze;
Its mountain top, from whence around is seen,
A picturesque and panoramic scene.
Far as the eye can reach the landscape yields,
A map of green and cultivated fields —
Parks, Mansions, Churches, Villages appear
Without a dusky cloud to interfere : —
A chain of the Welsh mountains, as a bed
Along the horizon, is distinctly spread,
Whilst a long line of sea, with rising spray,
Appears extended to Bridgwater Bay.
The rocky Mendips we can well define,
With Cheddar Cliffs indented in the line;
To Glastonbury Tor, the eye is led,
Which o'er its abbey's ruins lifts its head.
The Monument of Wellington is seen,
With the well wooded plain of Taunton Dean:
Whichever way the wandering eye may choose,
Its sight may revel in delightful views.

The Park at Halswell too, a pretty spot,
In my descriptions must not be forgot;
Its hospitable mansion, wooded round,
With splendid timber branching to the ground;
Its gardens, groves, and exquisite retreats,
Its lakes, its shrubberies, and sequestered seats,
Produce upon the fancy such a spell,

A SKETCH OF BRIDGWATER
AND ITS
NEIGHBOURHOOD.

BY G. PARKER, ESQ.

TO WHICH NOTES ARE ADDED CONTAINING A HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF THE TOWN BY FAIRFAX, AND
ALSO THE BATTLE OF SEDGMOOR

PUBLISHED BY T. H. BODLEY, TIMES OFFICE, MARY STREET.

1854

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Long on its beauties must the memory dwell.
where shall I end? attractions still abound
Of various kinds, in every village round.

At Athelney some traces are display'd
Where mighty Alfred in seclusion stay'd,
When Danish power possessed its tyrant sway,
Till England's heroes wiped the stain away.
To mark this spot, from whence he conquering went,
To chronicle the fame of the event,
He founded here an abbey, long effaced,
Of which no vestige can at all be traced.
In some Museum* is a golden spear
Which, with some relics, were discovered here;
An antique amulet with golden ring,
Presented to the Abbey by the king,
In gratitude to HIM, whose ruling powers,
Guarded the monarch in misfortune's hours.

At Cothelstone, whose lofty hill commands
A full perspective of surrounding lands,
Forms of encampment in the ancient bed
Tell that Rome's legions over England spread.

St. Audries, and its neighb'rhod, beauties boast,
Its park and mansion skirted by the coast,
With rocks of rugged firmness interlaced,
Near which a marine forest can be traced.
Exploring Science may instruction find
That would amuse and elevate the mind,
By a close survey of some spots around
Where guides to nat'ral hist'ry may be found.*

To Burnham should the invalid repair,
Who seeks invigorating, bracing, air;
Its beach is good, where you may walk or ride,
and thus enjoy the beauties of the tide,
Which, when the summer breezes o'er it play,
Washes the shores in light and easy spray,
But when the Western gales disturb the deep,
Rolls its salt waves with a majestic sweep.

But ere I take my leave, or end my rhymes,
A passing thought of the *Bridgwater Times*
Reminds me of an Exhibition near,
Where wonders upon wonders will appear
To lure the stranger, and I hope will tend
To both a pleasing and a useful end.
A church has been restored, a debt unpaid
Still hovers round to cast it in the shade.

This plan has been devised—it is well meant,
Give it, kind reader, your encouragement.
Come, with a ready will, your offering bring
To Him who gave to you the offering;
Bestow your mite to set the building free,
A blessing rests on liberality.
The hour may come for cheering self applause,
That you have aided in so good a cause;
Let genuine Christianity prevail,
The meal will waste not nor the cruse will fail.

A hasty sketch I've made, and now farewell!
Evening is come—Hark! to the Curfew bell,
Its loud appeals used to command respect,
From every grade, from every age and sect:
Sweet be your slumbers—pleasures wait on you,
Till next we meet once more I bid adieu.

FOOTNOTES TO THE VERSE

p2 * The writer of this poem owns the House where it is
said he was born.

ibid † See an account of Sedgemoor battle—by
Oldmixon—in the Appendix.

P 7 * The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

P8 * Many curious Madrepores have been found on this
coast.

NOTES.

Bridgwater was constituted a free Borough
in 1200, by King John, and is governed under
a charter of Incorporation granted by that
Monarch, but subsequently modified and
enlarged by Edward 4th, Elizabeth, and
Charles 2nd. Henry the 8th created it a
County, a distinction which has not been
claimed, but which confers on the Burgesses
exemption from the Authority of the Sheriff of
the County, and the freedom of all English
and Irish Ports, with the exception of those of
Dublin and London. A Court for the Trial of
Offences is held here, resided over by a
Recorder. It has returned two members to
Parliament since the 23rd of Edward the 1st,
the Mayor is the returning Officer. The name
of Bridgwater appears in ancient records to
have been formerly spelt Burgh Walter, or
Bruge Walter, of which this modern appell-
ation is a corruption, and which is thought to
imply that it was the de Burgh of Walter de
Douay, or Dowai, a follower of William the

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Conqueror. In the reign of Henry the 2nd it reverted to William De Briwere, who built a Castle of great size and strength here about the year 1202. He also obtained for the Town a Grant of a Market and Fair, constructed a Harbour, and began the erection of a Bridge over the River Parret, which was completed by Sir Thomas Trivet. The Egerton family takes the title of Earl from Bridgwater. The Arms of the Corporation are Gules—a Castle, surmounted by two others, placed pyramidically, and embattled, standing on a Gothic Bridge with water underneath: on each side the first Castle a domed Tower, surmounted with a Ball, and the Gate in the centre Portcullised. The Castle and Borough were sometime held by Queens of England, and in this right they had a share of the patronage of the Hospital of St. John in Bridgwater, which in 1524 was divided into three parts, one of which belonged to Catherine Queen of England, and the other two to Henry Lord D'Aubney. On the foundation of St. John's Hospital by William Briwere the tithes of this parish were appropriated to that Institution, and the Master and Brethren thereof had the advowson of the Vicarage, which in 1292 was valued at eight marks. The Church had before been given by Fulke Paganel, to the foreign Abbey of St. Martin Marmonsier, the possessions of which in England were seized into the King's hands during the war with France.

The river Parret runs in a circuitous course, a distance of about fourteen miles from the sea, to Bridgwater. At spring tides the Head or Bore, as it is called, rushes up with peculiar power with a wave of 5 or 6 feet; after a brisk wind from the westward, very much beyond that height, so that often heavy vessels are at once floated. A steam tug is kept to assist vessels up and down the river, which is sometimes performed by men, who call themselves Hoblers, by means of a long rope with loops over their breasts. The distance vessels want assistance is about 2 miles. The steam tug often takes them all the way to Burnham. When they come up it is necessary they should be put in berths, and moored

quickly, as the tide ebbs very fast, and the banks are rather steep.

The Docks have been built within a few years, are very compact, and capable of holding a large fleet of vessels. The Warehouses are good. There is a considerable trade, both Coasting and Foreign, at the Port.

The White or Scouring Bricks, or, as in some places they are called, the Bath Bricks, are peculiar to Bridgwater. The accumulation of the material from which they are made is confined to within one mile either below or above the Town. The proper mixture of sand and mud, through the action of the tide leaving the sediment of proper consistency within those distances. The Bricks are of a soft and gritty nature, and much valued for cleaning articles of brass, iron, or steel; they are easily crushed into a powder.

Bridgwater is well situated for building vessels, which trade may be increased. Quantities of oak timber are shipped off from the port to Government Yards, and a plentiful supply of elm timber and iron can always be easily and cheaply procured. Labourers are numerous.

The Places of Worship consist of three belonging to the Established Church, a Wesleyan Chapel, also one for the Society of Friends, an Independent, a Mariners', a Baptist, also a Unitarian. St. Mary's is the old Parish Church; St. John's and Trinity Churches have been recently built, the first named by a gentleman who was then a clergyman of the Church of England, since become a Roman Catholic, but being a married man could not take Priest's orders, so that it was a pecuniary sacrifice to him; he superintended the building, and brought from the Continent a quantity of very beautiful stained glass, sufficient for all the windows. The whole building displays excellent taste, as do the appendages to the Church. A school has since been built by a gentleman of the town. St. Mary's Church has been lately restored. It is a Gothic structure, both ancient and elegant. Its tower is about 80, and its steeple or spire about 120 feet in height.

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The Altar Piece is a painting of very considerable value. It was presented to the town by one of the Poulett family, and was found in a vessel taken as a prize during a war with France. The subject is the Descent from the Cross. Sir Joshua Reynolds, Haydon, and others who have been to view it, believe it to be the production of one of the first class Italian artists, but the fact has never been clearly established.

The Cemetery has been formed within a few years. It lies a short distance from the Town, and is tastefully laid out. A portion is divided off for the use of Dissenters. Some pretty small villas are built in the approach to it on the Wembdon Road.

A Fair is held in St. Matthew's Field, according to charter, for three days, commencing on the 2nd October, unless that day happens on a Sunday, when the fair commences on the Monday. Large quantities of cattle of every description are bought and sold there on the first day, and on the two succeeding days it becomes a Pleasure Fair. Formerly the west country cloth was sold in great quantities at this fair. Shoes, boots, and many other articles of clothing, &c, are still sold there.

Dr. John Morgan founded a school about the year 1723, for thirty scholars, who are educated free, and annually a new suit of clothes is given them. They are selected from the poor children who attend the general daily school, which is held in the same school room, which is very capacious. This general school is capable of being much increased. Dr. Morgan left the income of an estate under the management of the Vicar and other Trustees, to carry out his charitable bequest.

King James' Grammar School has but a small endowment, four boys are educated free: but it is the foundation of a large establishment.

The Union House is a large building, with a Hospital attached. It is for the use of 40 parishes, with a population of 33,477; number of acres 85,539. The Old Alms House is still standing, but in a dilapidated state.

The Bridgwater Infirmary, situate in Salmon Lane close by the river side, was established in the year 1813. It is of great value both to the Town and Neighbourhood.

The Churches of this establishment and most of the Chapels have schools attached to them, the Wesleyan a very considerable one. Many Sabbath Schools are held. Still, with all these advantages, many parents neglect the golden opportunity of assisting their children.

Within fifty years the Arch at the entrance of Eastover was standing, as also the one at the west and south entrance, of the Town. The one at the north entrance, also a short time before that period. They were built very massive. The iron hooks imbedded in the stone from which the Gates were hung betokened the weight they had to carry. A short distance from the Eastern Gate were fields, with very high mounds, indications of the preparations during the Siege. Many curious Implements of War have from time to time been dug up there, and are still preserved in the Town and Neighbourhood. The ground is now built over, and leads to the Railway Station. Oldmixon speaks of a high Fortification, where once stood the Hospital of St John; it lay, I believe, somewhere between the end of Eastover and the present Turnpike Gate on the Bristol and Bath Roads. William Briwere founded and endowed to the honor of St John the Baptist an Hospital of the order of St. Augustin for a Prior, Master, and Brethren, who were to superintend and maintain thirteen poor and infirm persons, besides religious and pilgrims. This Institution was confirmed by Joceline, Bishop of Bath, AD. 1219. They were to see the Parish Church of Bridgwater served by some one or other of their Society, and by another Curate, and to perform mass every day in the Chapel of the Castle. Considerable Landed Property was appropriated to this Hospital in Bridgwater, North Petherton, Chilton, &c.

The part of the Town where the Castle stood is now called King's Square. It is contiguous to Castle, otherwise Chandos Street, having been built by the Duke of Chandos. Within fifty years the Ground on

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which King's Square is built was surrounded by wood palings, and was a Play Ground for Boys of the Grammar School, then held in Chandos Street. Many fragments of the Castle were then to be seen there. Imbedded in a wall leading into little Chandos Street are still to be seen remains of the Castle Wall near Mr. Sealy's Bank, and also in the bonded Cellars behind the Custom House, many curious traces of the Castle are perceivable.

On the Cornhill, Monmouth was proclaimed as King, Alexander Popham, Esq., having been then the Mayor. At this spot also Judge Jeffreys, also Colonel Kirk, had lodgings, and witnessed with pleasure from their windows the execution of many of the inhabitants, which took place after the battle of Sedgmoor. A handsome cross once stood on the Cornhill. Between it and the Bridge stands the old Jail, over which is a clock; some years since the hours were struck by two large antiquated wood figures on two excellent bells. They held in their hands a sort of battle axe, and their arms were moved by means of springs. When the old Town Hall which stood there was removed, and the building became altered, these figures were taken down and sold by order of the authorities, which is to be regretted. I have heard, at some Election freak, a platform was made at night upon the Cornhill, and those two figures craftily removed there; where, in the morning, they appeared dressed and representing two of the Candidates.

Tradition says the celebrated Admiral Blake was born in a House in Dampiet Ward—report says in a House now occupied as a Ladies' School in Mill Street. When Dickson [*Sic*, Hepworth Dixon, TW] was preparing matter in order to publish the *Life of Blake*, he and the late Mr. Baker examined some deeds in my possession of that property. The perusal of them, coupled with some information obtained in Devonshire, confirmed the report. A new front has been built within a few years.

Since writing the notes to this work, I accidentally met with a curious and interesting anecdote by Southey in his

Common Place Book.

"At the White Hart, Eastover," he says, "a fox was kept, which from a cub had been trained as a turnspit and became clever at his work. One day master Reynard giving way to a touch of nature decamped, and at Sedgmoor played havoc wit both ducks and geese. He was found by Mr Portman's hounds near Alfred's Stump, at Athelney. Away he went in gallant style to the Quantocks, where, for a time, he entrenched himself. Again discovered, he dashed away to Enmore, from thence to North Petherton, below which parish he crossed the river Parret and made for Bridgwater, on reaching which he found his way into the Garden of his old mistress, Mrs Francis, and on entering the house, immediately leapt into the Turnspit Cage, where he was safely housed on the arrival of the disappointed pack.