

BRIDGWATER, a parish and market town, municipal and parliamentary borough, in the northern division of the hundred of Petherton, in the county of Somerset, 33 miles to the S;W. of Bristol, and 151 miles to the W. of London, by the Great Western railway, on which it is a station: It is situated on the banks of the i Parret, about 10 miles from Bridgwater Bay, in the Bristol Channel, into which the Parret falls. Bridgwater a very ancient place, and is mentioned in the Domesday Survey under the name of Brugie; it consisted of a mill, meadow, and woodlands. Its present name is a corruption of Brugie-Walter, signifying the *Bridge of Walter*;" the place having been given by William the Conqueror to Walter de Dowai, one of his followers.

Early in the reign of king John, William de Briwere, who had obtained a grant of the manor from Henry II., erected a castle here (a stately and magnificent structure), commenced the rebuilding of the bridge over Parret, and founded the Hospital of Sty John for a master, brethren, and 13 poor persons of the order of Augustine. This hospital was munificently endowed, and flourished till the Dissolution, when its revenue amounted to £121. The bridge, a stone structure of three arches, remained unfinished till the reign of Edward I, when Sir Thomas Trivet undertook its completion. The town fell into the hands of the revolted barons in the reign of Henry III. No other historical event is connected with it till the civil war in the reign of Charles I when the inhabitants espoused the cause of the king, and the castle was garrisoned by the royal forces under Colonel Wyndham. Besieged by the parliamentary forces under General Fairfax, the garrison made a brave defence, but was compelled to surrender, and the castle was then (July, 1645) dismantled.

The Duke of Monmouth was warmly received and proclaimed king in this town just before the fatal fight of Sedgmoor, and heavy penalties were inflicted on the inhabitants at the hands of Judge Jeffreys and Col Kirke. Bridgwater is situated in the centre of a level tract of country, fertile and well-wooded, extending from the coast along both sides of the river Parret, between the Mendip hills on the N.E., and the Quantocks S.W. The principal part of the town stands on the W. bank of the Parret, and

is connected with the other called Eastover, by a good iron bridge of one arch. The streets, most of which are wide, are well paved, lighted with gas. The houses are well built, and there is a good supply of water.

There is a townhall, a borough gaol, and a market-house, the last a handsome modern edifice with an Ionic portico, and surmounted by a dome and lantern. The principal business of the place is the manufacture bricks of various lands [*sic* = kinds TW]; especially off those called Bath brick and scouring brick. These are made of the clay and sand from the bed of the river, and are fabrics peculiar to the place. A great number of persons are employed in this trade. The Parret is navigable to Langport for small vessels, and the Taunton canal, constructed in 1825, [*Sic* = 1826. TW] meets the river at Bridgwater.

There is a large and convenient quay below the bridge, accessible by vessels of large size. Great inconvenience is sometimes caused, and damage done to the shipping, by what is called the bore, a sudden rising of the water at springtides, common to several rivers falling into die Bristol Channel. The tide at periods has a total rise of nearly 30 feet. The number of vessels belonging to the port is about 120, of which about 70 are above 50 tons burthen, besides two small steamers. Coomwick, Minehead, and Watchet are subordinate ports to Bridgwater, which has a custom-house. The trade of the port is chiefly coastwise, but vessels are engaged in the colonial and foreign trade; chiefly with Russia, America, and the West The chief articles of import are timber, grain, coals, wine, tallow, &c., and the principal export, Bath and other bricks. Coal is imported from South Wales.

Bridgwater was first incorporated under a charter granted by King John in the year 1200, the provisions of were confirmed and extended by various charters granted by succeeding monarchs. Under the Act in 1835, the borough is divided into two wards, and governed by a mayor, 6 aldermen, and 18 councillors, with the style of the *mayor, aldermen, and burgesses of the borough of Bridgwater*. It has returned two members to parliament since the 23rd of Edward I., when the elective franchise was first, conferred on it. The mayor is returning

officer. The limits of the parliamentary are the same as those of the municipal borough, which comprises, according to the census of 1861, 2,124 inhabited houses, with a population of 11,361, against 10,317 in 1851, showing an increase of 1,044 in the decennial period; The borough has a revenue of about £2,360. Bridgwater is the seat of a Poor-law Union and the head of a County Court district. The summer assizes are held here and at Wells alternately. Quarter and petty sessions are held by the county magistrates, and petty sessions for the borough are held weekly. The town is a polling place for the western division of Somersetshire. Here is a coastguard station.

The living is a vicarage\* united with the rectory of Chilton, in the diocese of Bath and Wells, of the value of £325, in the patronage of the lord chancellor. The church, dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, is a large and structure, with a good tower at the west end, surmounted by a spire about 170 feet high. It has a beautiful porch in the decorated style, and for the altar-piece a fine painting of the Descent from the Cross, taken from a French vessel during the revolutionary war. There are two chapels of ease, dedicated to the Holy Trinity and St. John the Baptist; the latter is situated at Eastover. The livings are perpetual curacies\*, each £160, the former in the gift of the vicar of the parish, the latter in the alternate gift of the crown and the of the diocese. There are chapels belonging to the Baptists, Independents, Quakers, Wesleyans, and Unitarians.

The free grammar school, which was founded in 1561, has a small endowment, worth about £28 a year, are 7 free pupils. The master is appointed by the bishop. The free school, founded and endowed by John Morgan in 1723, has a revenue of £140 per annum. The scholars are 140 in number, 30 of them being clothed from the charity. The school-room and master's house were built by the managers in 1816. There are in the town an infirmary, established in 1813, almshouses endowed by Major Ingram, a savings-bank, and on poorhouse. Bridgwater was the birthplace (1599) [*Sic* 1598, TW], of Admiral Blake, who also received his early on at the grammar school here. The weekly newspaper called the *Bridgwater Times*, formerly published in the town, is

at present discontinued. The Egerton family took the titles of duke, marquis, and earl from this place. Wednesday is the market day, chiefly for corn, cattle, and provisions; but markets are also held on Tuesday and Saturday. Cheese, made in the neighbourhood, is sold in large quantities. Fairs take place the first Monday in Lent, the 24th June, the Wednesday after Michaelmas Day and two following days and the 27th December. The most important is the Michaelmas fair, which is held under royal charter.

DUNWEAR, a hamlet in the parish of Bridgwater, in the county of Somerset, close to Bridgwater.

EAST BOWER, (and West Bower) hamlets in the parish of Bridgwater, hundred of North Petherton, in the county of Somerset, not far from Bridgwater.

EASTOVER, a village in the parish of Bridgwater, in the northern division of the hundred of Pederton, in county of Somerset; The living is a curacy in' the diocese of Bath and Wells, value £150, in the patronage crown and bishop. The church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

Hamp a hamlet in the parish of Bridgwater, county Somerset, 2 miles from Bridgwater.

HAY-GROVE, a hamlet in the parish of Bridgwater, county Somerset, 2 miles from Bridgwater.

HORSEY, a hamlet in the parish of Bridgwater, county Somerset, 2 miles N.E. of Bridgwater. It is sit near the river Parrett.

### **Acknowledgement**

We are grateful to Julian Taylor for the copy of docement edited here.

Edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich, 23/02/2020