

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
1

WITHIN these pages will be found a number of letters addressed by Charles James Fox, and one by S. T. Coleridge, to John Chubb of Bridgwater, to whose facile pencil we owe the portraits of his contemporaries which are here reproduced. To his descendant, Mr. J. B. Chubb, I wish here to record my gratitude for his most kind permission to publish these.

Sir W. Gurney Benham I also wish to thank for his ready help in tracing Thornton's subsequent political career, at Colchester.

I have presupposed somewhat the reader's acquaintance with Mrs. Sandford's *Tom Poole and his Friends*. The reference to Hazlitt and the excerpt from De Quincey are probably well known. The *Memoirs and Correspondence of C. J. Fox* are the source of many of my facts; I am indebted to Mr. David Ogg's *England in the reign of Charles II* for the note on the recordership in English boroughs, and to Mr. H. B. Irving's *Judge Jeffreys* for the facts of Rosewell's trial. The *Annual Register* is a quarry of information. The Bridgwater petition against the slave trade is recorded in Conplant's *Wilberforce*.

T. B. D

Editorial note

This was published as No 6 in the Bridgwater Booklets series, 1937.

The original letters are with the Chubb MSS in the archive of the Somerset and Dorset Heritage Centre, Taunton.

Dilks illustrated this booklet with a series of monochrome prints of Chubb portraits. The frontispiece was a portrait by Chubb of Charles James Fox from a private collection, which has not been located. A further eight were from the collection of Chubb's great-grandson J. B. Chubb. This collection was subsequently purchased for the Blake Museum. All are reproduced after the text with images from the Blake Museum's Chubb collection, with a different portrait by Chubb of C. J. Fox

Edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich, 12/10/2019

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SOME time in a summer month of the year 1807, Coleridge was staying in the house of a friend in one of the main streets of Bridgwater. And wherever Coleridge might be, he exercised an invisible and inescapable power of drawing to himself young men of vision and of dreams. Not many years before, William Hazlitt, attracted by that strange magnetism, had come down into Somerset to seek out Coleridge who at that time was living at Nether Stowey, eight miles to the west of Bridgwater. He had already met the poet in Shropshire, so that he was able now to approach him in more leisurely fashion, yet fearing lest he should by some means be late, came to the town two days before the time appointed, spending them in wandering along the banks of the Parret and reading *Camilla* in his room at the inn.

And now had come another young man, one Thomas de Quincey, a dreamer among dreamers. He had received some directions to find the house where Coleridge was staying, and when he saw standing beneath an archway a man lost in reverie, he felt sure that this was he whom he was seeking. He approached him, made himself known to him and was at once warmly welcomed and brought into the friendly shelter of the poet's temporary abode.

"The hospitable family with whom he was domesticated" writes De Quincey, "were distinguished for their amiable manners, and enlightened understandings: they were descendants from Chubb, the philosophic writer, and bore the same name. For Coleridge they all testified deep affection and esteem — sentiments in which the whole town of Bridgewater seemed to share; for in the evening, when the heat of the day had declined, I walked out with him; and rarely, perhaps never, have I seen a person so much interrupted in one hour's space as

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by

T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.

1937

2

Coleridge, on this occasion, by the courteous attentions of young and old."

Coleridge's host and friend, John Chubb, was at this time a man of sixty-one years of age, one of the city fathers, a merchant of position and influence. He was the son of Jonathan Chubb, who likewise had been a prominent merchant in the town. When De Quincey speaks of their descent from "Chubb, the philosophic writer," he may be referring to Thomas Chubb, the distinguished writer of the previous century on Deism, but the link has not so far been established.

John seems as a child to have shown an unusual precocity, for in a common-place book which his father kept at that time there is a record on the eve of the boy's . fifth birthday that he could already translate the *Eclogues*, of Vergil tolerably well. If this early acquaintance with the classics was increased and maintained through life, it is easy to imagine him bandying Latin and Greek tags with Charles James Fox when he met him at Piper's Inn or in South Street or at the races.

Another talent he certainly developed to a high degree. He had not only the gift of sketching the buildings and streets of his native town, but also a pretty knack of knocking off a true portrait, often with a touch or rather more than a touch of caricature.

Posterity is indebted to him for a series of pictures which make the eighteenth century town live again before our eyes and but for which our conception of its distinctive features would to-day be mere guesswork. The river-port crowded below the bridge with coastal and foreign-going shipping ; the fourteenth century bridge itself, triple-arched, with projecting refuges and cut-waters ; the " island " in the middle of High Street which lingered till the middle of the nineteenth century ; the picturesque market cross which sheltered from rain and heat the chaffering purveyors of butter and eggs ; the surviving arch of one of the four medieval town gates ; the ruins of the house of the

constable of Brewer's mighty castle, dismantled by the parliamentarians after its fall in 1645 ; boats under full sail making their way up the meandering river — all these live for us to-day through the pencil of John Chubb. Copies of these by engraving, by lithography, by photography and by still later processes of reproduction have been made and multiplied and widely distributed.

The gallery of portraits of his contemporaries has not had an equal publicity. In days before a mechanical and inventive age had applied its newly discovered methods to the art of portraiture, this gifted amateur turned out scores of pictures of his fellow townsmen and others which have happily been preserved, and which enable us to look on the features of the men whom we should have met in the streets of Bridgwater in the latter part of the eighteenth century. These sketches are so evidently living portraits and not mere faces. Kindliness and shrewdness, humour and phlegm, intellect and dissoluteness are stamped on these countenances. Mostly, too, they are full-length portraits and we can picture exactly, form and colour, how these men looked as they crossed the Bridge, sauntered along the quays or gathered round the London coach when it halted on the Cornhill and brought the latest tidings of Pitt and Fox, of Boston tea-chests or of the horrors of the guillotine.

Here we see Mr. Benjamin Allen, member of Parliament for the borough in an attitude no doubt characteristic — that of doffing his three - cornered hat to a passing constituent. Here his colleague in the representation, the Hon. Anne Poulett, a younger son of the Tory patron of the borough. It is he who gave to the corporation the great picture of the Descent from the Cross which hangs above the high altar of the parish church. Here again is the sturdy figure of the Rev. John Coles, vicar of the parish for over forty years, carrying his blackthorn behind his back. John Hicks, a swarthy rascal in tattered coat seems to furnish a sufficient

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by

T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.

1937

3

reason for such a weapon of defence in the parson's hands. Then there are George Cass, printer and bookbinder, plying his trade ; the aristocratic features of Lord Egmont of the neighbouring castle of Enmore; Sir Thomas Gunstone, the sheriff; Dr. Dunning, physician and founder of the hospital ; " Pussy " Woodham, the barber with the Cheshire-catlike grin ; " Little Johnny Roberts," the dwarf decorator with paintpot and brush; Atwell, the tide-waiter, in silhouette. These are a few only of the portraits from Chubb's brush which a good fortune has preserved.

A man then of considerable intellectual endowment was this friend of Coleridge presiding over the serene family circle and comfortable domesticity which welcomed young De Quincey.

Yet John Chubb had qualities deeper and loftier than mere intellectuality. There burned within him a profound hatred of all manner of tyranny and an intense love of liberty. We may safely guess that his hand engineered the petition against the slave trade which the inhabitants of Bridgwater sent to Parliament in 1785, the earliest on the subject excepting only that from the Society of Friends.

" I have, uniformly, through a long course of years, and through various changes of men and measures combated tyranny and oppression, and struggled on every occasion to defend and preserve (alas to how little effect !) the freedom and beauty of the true English Constitution against the constant encroachments of arbitrary power and corruption." Little wonder that there was a mutual regard between this comparatively obscure man and two great men who were his friends and correspondents.

This booklet contains the surviving letters which he received from Charles James Fox and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. All those from Fox are personal communications with the exception of a reply to a group of Bridgwater electors. The single letter from Coleridge is placed among these in its proper, chronological order.

The Fox correspondence begins in the year 1780, a year important not only in the affairs of the nation but also in Fox's individual career. Ever since his accession the well-meaning but obstinate king, had tried to govern through ministers who were known as " the king's friends " and whom he expected to carry out his own wishes and directions. The result had been a failure. The ministers themselves knew it was a failure and the country was showing signs of restlessness. In the House of Commons the friends of the system could only argue " that bad as the Ministry were, it was not certain that the nation would be at all bettered by taking their opponents ". The king indeed was willing to leaven his government by taking into it some members of the opposition. But his advances met with a blank refusal. " All or none " was the answer.

The movement in the country was begun by the county of York where a most influential meeting was held on the last day but one of 1779. A petition was forwarded from it to the House of Commons calling for reform in the national expenditure and for the curtailment of sinecures " whence the crown has acquired a great unconstitutional influence, which, if not timely checked, may soon prove fatal to the liberties of this country."

Middlesex quickly followed the example of Yorkshire, and petitions were presented and committees formed in more than half the counties of England. The cities of London, Westminster, York, Bristol, Gloucester and Hereford, with the towns of Bridgwater, Cambridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham and Reading took similar steps to urge reform.

Fox at this time, though only thirty years of age, had been in parliament ever since his father had bought the pocket borough of Midhurst for him when he was a boy of nineteen. By his fluent and vehement oratory he had become a great influence in politics, and though a free lance, he was now among the foremost

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
4

leaders of the opposition. Distinct from the Whigs he may be said to have founded the policy of nineteenth century liberalism.

A good idea of his commanding position at this time may be gained from Horace Walpole's picture of the meeting at which the city of Westminster, largest of the borough constituencies, resolved on its petition and formed its committee. It was February 2nd, a month after the Yorkshire meeting. "Meeting for a petition in Westminster Hall," notes Walpole.

... "About 3,000 persons met, headed by Duke of Portland, the Cavendishes, Charles Fox, Richard Fitzpatrick, Wilkes, Sawbridge, Lord Temple, and the Grenvilles, General Burgoyne, Burke, Townshends, etc. Charles Fox was placed in the chair. Sawbridge moved the petition, and was seconded by Wilkes; and a petition similar to that of York voted, and a committee of Lords and others chosen. Charles Fox then made a fine and warm speech Dr. Jebb proposed Mr. Fox for the future candidate for Westminster, which was received with universal applause." "It was curious," he adds, "to see Charles Fox, lately so unpopular a character, become the idol of the people."

It is evident from the following letter that the Whigs of Bridgwater had sent their petition through the hands of John Chubb and possibly at his instance, and that Fox is here acknowledging its receipt and writing to encourage his supporters.

From Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Sir,

In compliance with the prayer of the several Petitions Sir George Savile yesterday moved for a list of the Pensions. Lord North moved an amendment to confine the motion solely to such pensions as are paid at the Exchequer, "which make a very trifling part of the enormous list. The house after a long debate divided, and there appeared for Lord North's amendment 188, against it 186, so that this important question was lost only by two votes. Sir George Savile, Mr. Dunning, Mr. Townshend, Mr. Burke, Col. Barre and

some other Gentlemen exerted themselves with great ability upon the occasion, but the great and uncommon division against - the Minister must be attributed to the spirit which has appeared in the people at large. If such are the effects of your Exertions, even in the first instance, I need not say, how sure you are of success, if you persevere with steadiness in what you have begun with so much propriety.

I am, Sir, With great respect,

Your most obedient and most humble
Servt.

C. J. Fox,

Chairman of the Westmr. Comee.

ST. JAMES'S STREET,

Feb. 22nd, 1780,

The subject of the petitions which rained on the Commons from all parts of the country was taken up in a bill for the Reformation of the Public Expenditure introduced by Burke. The speech referred to in Fox's next letter is probably one made in connection with this measure. That in which he made his plan known on February 11 was remarkable for its ability.

In answer to Chubb's enquiry regarding the parliamentary conduct of the sitting members for his borough, Fox is able to give him information which was probably as satisfactory as he had reason to expect.

The Hon. Anne Poulett was the fourth son of Earl Poulett of Hinton St. George, and had been so named by Queen Anne, his godmother. He first represented the borough in 1768 and with Benjamin Allen as his colleague had continued to do so to the present year; nor did this connection with the constituency cease till his death in 1785. The story of his purchase of the great picture of the *Descent from the Cross* which to-day hangs over the high altar in the parish church has often been told. One day he is said to have been in Plymouth when war booty was being disposed of and this picture, brought from we know not where, he bought for £700 and gave to the corporation of Bridgwater. The name

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
5

of the painter is still unknown and the problem of its origin remains unsolved.

Benjamin Allen, the Hon. Anne's colleague, was a Bridgwater man and a member of the Borough Council. He was the son of John Allen, M.D., who practised in the town as a physician, and won some reputation as an inventor. His most important invention was an improvement of Savory and Newcomen's atmospheric steam engine whereby it could be used on a ship and by forcing water out of the stern could effect propulsion in calm weather.

In other words he appears to have invented the first form of steamship. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1716 and died in 1741.

" Those three glorious Resolutions " against which the Tory member for Bridgwater had spoken and voted are historic, the first of the three more especially. This was moved by John Dunning, the member for Calne, and declared " That the influence of the crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished."

From Charles, James Fox to John Chubb.

ST. JAMES'S STREET,
April 8, 1780.
Sir,

I send you inclosed a complete copy of Mr. Burke's Speech, and am sorry for the mistake by which the former one was incomplete.

I ought to make you many excuses for not having done this before, but was out of town when I received your letter, and since my return here the business of the H. of Commons and of the Westminster Committee has scarcely left me a moment's leisure. As you seem to me. to be anxious to know something about the parliamentary conduct of your Representatives, I think it my duty to let you know that Mr. Allen has attended and supported the cause of the People with the most unremitting diligence, and that Mr. Poulett has as constantly with two exceptions only (and these upon the least important Points)

supported the Minister; and particularly upon Thursday last when he spoke and voted against those three glorious Resolutions which were carried in favour of the Petitioners against the influence or the crown.

I have the honour to be,
Sir, your most obedt.
and most humble sert.

C. J. Fox.

From Charles James Fox in reply to an invitation to become a Parliamentary candidate for Bridgwater.

Gentlemen,

I have just received your very obliging Invitation to represent the very respectable town of Bridgewater ; and can not delay, one moment expressing the gratitude I feel for so flattering a testimony of Approbation of my public conduct.

The very important Businesses now depending in Parliament make my attendance here *now* indispensable ; but as soon as they are disposed of I shall be eager to give my warmest thanks in Person to those who have so highly honoured me, and to obey any commands they may think fit to lay upon me.

I have the honour to be with the
greatest respect and gratitude,

Gentlemen,

Your most obedt. humble Servant,

C. J. Fox,

ST JAMES'S STREET
April 30, 1780.
[Endorsed]

To Mr. James [*sic*] Chubb
and the other
Gentlemen who signed the Invisatio
to me from Bridgewater.

From Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have letters from London which say there is reason to suspect an immediate Dissolution of Parlit. I let you have the earliest notice of this Report that you may

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.

1937

6

be upon your Guard, tho' I can not help thinking there are circumstances which make it improbable. If it should happen you must be sensible that my first Business will be to appear at Westminster where the Election will come on immediately; but I should hope it may be contrived so that this may be no hurt to the Cause at Bridgewater. If this Alarm should prove a false one, I shall certainly have the pleasure of seeing you at the Races.

I am, Sir, your

most obedt. humble Sert.

C. J. Fox.

Bath, July 29, 1780

Parliament was dissolved on September 1, 1780, and on the 7th the electors of the city of Westminster —or some of them — met in the portico of Covent Garden church to elect. "two proper persons" to represent them in the ensuing parliament. Three candidates were nominated —the Rt. Hon. Lord Lincoln, Sir Geo. Brydges Rodney, bart., and the Hon. Charles Fox. The majority of hands was declared in favour of the first two and a poll was demanded for Mr. Fox. The poll was closed on the 22nd, and Rodney with 5,298 votes and Fox with 4,878 were declared elected. Lincoln polled 4,157.

Meanwhile on the 11th, the polling at Bridgwater had taken place with a very different result for Fox. He seems to have taken no personal part in the election, for had he appeared in the borough it does not seem likely that so great a personality would have been at the bottom of the poll.

There were four candidates —the two former members, who offered themselves for re-election, John Acland and Fox. The poll numbered 254 voters. Fox secured 83 only, of which one was a plumper and 82 were shared with Allen.

The Hon Anne Poulett	157
Benjamin Allen	133
John Ackland	127
Charles Jas. Fox	82

The analysis of Allen's votes points to local influence which brought him

plumpers and split Tory votes. But at the end of the list of voters which has come down to us and which was issued by the Tory party, there is a short list of "Votes rejected by the Mayor," with a sinister significance, for of the 21 votes which his worship disallowed two were split, three were Whig and 16 were Tory! "No comment on the Mayor's conduct" we are ironically informed, "seems necessary; all who attended the Poll must have had ample proof of his impartiality; nor could any thing more fully evince his disinterested conduct than the many Friendly Whispers that pass'd between Mr. Allen, the Town Clerk and Himself during the Poll, and his manner of voting at the close of it."

It does not need more than a superficial knowledge of the manner in which elections were conducted in those days and long afterwards to understand how Allen's majority of six over Acland was obtained. No surprise need be felt that a parliamentary enquiry was held in the next year and that Allen was unseated and his place filled by the candidate next in order on the list.

The Town Clerk's name was William . Alexander. He not only voted for Fox and Allen but is marked as one of those who were "more than commonly rude and insolent to Mr. Poulett or his Friends."

In Fox's next letter it is presumably to the Town Clerk that he refers, though how he had offended at the enquiry cannot be explained. He appears to have fallen on evil days.

From Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I enclose you a letter for Mr. Alexander which his distress and your interception have prevailed upon me to write. Without these motives I can not say that I should have been much inclined to countenance him after his very equivocal behaviour at the time of the hearing of the Bridgewater Election.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
7

I do assure you that I shall always be happy with every opportunity of shewing how much I am,

dear Sir,
your obliged and obedt. humble sert;
C. J. Fox.

St. JAMES'S, 22 April, 1783.

A political patron's life is not altogether a happy one. Who the Streets were, father and sons, is not known. The name does not appear in the voting lists.

From Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I send you in confidence a letter I have received from young Street. He has always expressed himself so much obliged to me that I can not doubt what he says ; and I have had a letter from his father full also of professions, and asking something for another Son. You will be so good as to return me the letter.

I am, dear Sir, yours ever,
C. J. Fox.

ST. JAMES'S, 7 May, 1783.

The vacancy in the representation of the borough on which John Chubb had written to Fox was due to the death of the Hon. Anne. Poulett. Something has gone wrong among the Whigs on the Borough Council and Benjamin Allen, who had lost his seat four years before this, is evidently disgruntled. Fox is too, and now that he is asked to find a candidate is not disposed to give himself any further trouble about Bridgwater. He can count but few who would be willing " to go down upon an adventure of this sort."

Thomas Pyke, who is reputed to have been somewhat difficult and morosely obstinate, seems to have gone over to an opposition and is moreover worrying Fox for the early payment of his annual subsidy as Whig patron. Later we shall find him voting for the Tory candidates. But for Chubb and William Tuckett, whose benign and engaging features his friend has recorded for us, Fox preserves an undiminished regard.

The lady who is mentioned in the last paragraph is doubtless Mrs. Armistead (Elizabeth Bridget Cane) to whom Fox was passionately attached and whom he subsequently married. This connection entirely altered his private life. His unsatisfactory gaming propensities and addiction to the London clubs gave way before , the milder attractions of a refined domesticity and the charms of country pursuits at St. Anne's Hill.

From Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I hope you do not take it ill of me that I did not sooner answer your letters with respect to the Vacancy at Bridgwater. The Truth is that your first letter was far from being my only motive for not interfering. Allen came to me of his own accord and told me in direct terms that he considered my behaviour in not interfering in the disputes among our friends [at Bridgwater *deleted*] in the Corporation in such a light that he had actually written to his friends, to desire their support even to any Poulett Candidate in preference to any one who should be supported by our friends. This had passed before I received your first letter and you will not wonder that your letter confirmed me under these circumstances in a resolution of giving myself no further trouble about the Business. However when your last letter came I concluded that, either Allen had not done as he said or that his ill humour had had no material effect, and did immediately apply to the only Persons whom I thought likely to go down upon an adventure of this sort. The time was too short for many applications; and those I did make were unsuccessful. I did not apply to Mr. Lionel Darner because I understood from good authority that he had engagements elsewhere. The time as you know was short in itself, but it was still shorter to me as I had been out of town and did not receive your letter till some hours after it had arrived. If a good occasion has been lost, I am sorry for it, but it has not been my fault.

You will easily conceive that after all that has past I am not very sanguine about

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
8

any future expectations at Bridgewater nor am very desirous of continuing any connection with it, but am determined to act in the business as Mr. Tuckett and you shall advise. The Expence to me has certainly been very small, and it is only by a comparison with my means of supporting it that it can be thought at all considerable. I owe Pike at present for part of it, and I may tell you in confidence that he is not a little pressing for it. I can and will pay him very shortly what is now due, and if my honour is engaged, as I fear it is, to the continuation of the annuity, I will contrive one way or other to pay it on. If we had chosen a friend, I never had the least idea of his paying any past expences, but I should not have thought it unreasonable that he should have been answerable for any to come. That prospect appears now to be vanished, the absurdity and heat of some of our friends make me very dispondent with respect to any future success. I really wish you and depend upon you to advise me as a friend fairly whether I ought not wholly to have done with Bridgewater, as far I mean as my engagements will permit. I do assure you that it is no small compensation for the trouble and disappointments I have experienced from this Business that it has been the means of making me acquainted with so many zealous and valuable friends to the good cause, and particularly that it has procured to me the pleasure of your acquaintance. I am sure you will speak your mind openly and I will, guide myself by your advice.

I shall in the course of next month be making a tour in the West, but as I shall have a Lady with me, I shall as well for that as many other reasons avoid Bridgwater ; but perhaps if I were to let you know in time on what day I am likely to be at Piper's Inn or Taunton or some other near place, you may be so good as to come and take a dinner with us. If you do, I shall be very happy to see you. Pray remember me to Mr. Tuckett and other friends. I trust I need not remind you that this letter is written in confidence.

I am very sincerely, dear Sir,
Yours ever,
C. J. Fox.

ST. ANNE'S HILL,
31 July, 85.

Direct still in St. James's Street.

Piper's Inn was a well known house about ten miles from the Cornhill of Bridgwater on the road to Bath. It stood, indeed the building still stands, in a declivity of the Polden Hills at the fork where the direct road from Taunton to Bath joins the Bridgwater road. Macaulay is said to have stayed there when he came to survey the field of Sedgemoor.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

It is my intention to be at Piper's Inn to dinner next Sunday where I shall be very happy to see you. We shall dine at about three. There was certainly nothing secret in Allen's conversation with me. If any thing should prevent my being at Piper's Inn as I intend, I will let you know as soon as I can.

Yours ever,
C. J. Fox

Plymouth Dock, 18 Aug.

George Rose was secretary to the Treasury at this time under Pitt, and had occupied the same office under Shelburne's administration.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

LONDON, Friday.

Dear Sir,

I have but this instant received your letter and the Postman is at the door, so that I have just time to say that with respect to the *Consolidation* &c. it appears to me that the proper thing to do would be to approve the Plan so far as it tends merely to consolidate, and disapprove it in as much as it tends to augment the duties. If there is any difficulty in this distinction, a general disapprobation is safest, for you may depend upon it that is meant which you suspect, and Pitt and Rose never had their equals for wresting to a complete acquiescence and approbation any words they can lay hold of.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist, S.

1937

9

I have instances of this without end. I will write to you very , soon on the other parts of your letter.

Yours ever.

[1785?] C. J. Fox.

An agreement has now been reached by the two factions in the Borough Council. Is it to extend beyond local affairs and to include the: representation in parliament ? Fox, as Whig patron, is anxious for an interview with Lord Hinton, the Poulett heir. Then comes a curious reference to the recordership of the borough. For the sake of an understanding, Fox is willing to waive his claim to the office, and to make way for Lord Hinton, but he bears in mind some incident in Lord Poulett's exercise of the recordership which he does not wish to see repeated by his successor. The Pouletts had held the office for forty years.

How is it that at this time we find local magnates occupying the office of recorder, an office which in earlier days had been held only by men suitably qualified and learned in the law ? It was owing to the steps taken in the reign of Charles II to " purge " the boroughs of all elements obnoxious to the administration, one of which was to " put in " local magnates as mayors and recorders, in order that the weight of their authority might crush local political thought and freedom. This system still obtained and was not altered until the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 required among its provisions that a recorder, nominated by the Crown was to be appointed to any borough ready to provide him with a suitable salary. He was to be a barrister of at least five years standing. Such is still the law.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have received your letter and I entirely approve the plan you have pursued, but I own I could have wished that you had been more particular with respect to the part asked by Individuals especially Pyke; as the security of this new Coalition must depend in a great measure upon the strength we bring to it. If the Coalition is to go further

than corporation matters, it is surely fit that it should be explained as soon as possible and that Lord Hinton and I should see one another upon the subject. After such an Interview and not till then shall we be able to judge what measures to take with respect to the Recordership. If the Coalition is really a fair one it is the best system of all both for Lord Hinton and for us; and you will easily believe that I can have no objection to wave [*sic*] my pretensions to the Recordership ; but if the Coalition is understood to be a mere temporary agreement, or if there should appear to be any reason for suspecting Lord Hinton of acting like his Uncle it would be very dangerous to trust him with the Recorder-ship and it might be best to make our stand upon a point where so many are engaged to us. Of all this however you can judge better than I, the only point I am clear of is that there should be a thorough explanation either by Lord Hinton himself (which is best) or by somebody who will undertake for him. It so happens that I have no acquaintance with him nor do I know him much even by character. I have heard indeed that Lady Hinton is inclined to our politicks and it is therefore possible that he may be so too. If this be so, he is more likely both to approve of this junction and to adhere to it. The material point is to have an explanation and if we fairly agree I have very little doubt but that each Party may bring in a Member each with very little expence if any. I take it for granted that Pyke knows the draught was paid; it was done soon after I saw you.

I am, my dear Sir,

very sincerely, yours ever,

C. J. Fox

ST. ANNE'S HILL,

18 Novr. [1785?]

We have read already in a previous letter of Fox's hope to meet Chubb at the races. These were a conspicuous part of the " Bridgwater Amusements " which were held annually in August. The two main events were races for a " Silver Cup of the real value of twenty pounds " given by the gentlemen of the town and

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
10

neighbourhood, and for a similar cup of the same value given by those of the town and neighbourhood of Taunton. Fox, who was a steward, would here be in his element, for it is said that he was far more successful at Newmarket than he was at the gambling-tables at Brookes', where bad luck — or was it sharpers ? — led to financial ruin.

Mr. Bryant is probably the attorney of that name who was a virtuoso in violin playing, if we may so judge from Chubb's portrait of him.

Lord Perceval was the eldest son of the Earl of Egmont, and nephew of that ill-fated Spencer Perceval, who was prime minister from 1809 till his assassination in 1812.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have this day a letter from Mr. Bryant acquainting me that the subscription for the Races amount to 60£ only and desiring me to send the money requisite (without stating the amount) to any Person I may choose to employ. By your letter of the 30th of last month I had understood that the subscriptions including those of the Members for the County, Town, &c. was likely to amount to near 100£.

May I trouble you to inquire into this business for me and to let me know what I am to pay ? If you could without inconvenience pay it for me I should be obliged to you, and I will lodge the amount in your name in any Banker's hands you will be pleased to appoint, as soon as I know what it is. I would certainly send the money immediately in answer to Mr. Bryant's letter if he had let me know how much is wanted.

If it is not too late I wish you would wait upon Lord Percival for me, and tell him I should be much obliged to his Lordship if he would officiate for me as Steward, you will understand however that I by no means mean in money matters.

I am dear Sir,

Yours ever,

BRIGHTHELMSTONE. C. J. FOX.

Tuesday.

[Sealed, and
Endorsed]

.Brighton Aug. twenty fifth 1789.

JOHN CHUBB ESQ.,

Bridgwater.

C. J. Fox

During the past three years Henry Beaufoy had brought to the attention of Parliament the civil and political disabilities under which dissenters from the Church of England had been laid for the last hundred years. In the previous May he had again moved for a committee to enquire into their grievance and had received Fox's warm support, but North and Pitt strongly opposed any interference with the existing laws and the motion was lost by 122 to 102 votes.

Robert Thornton had represented Bridgwater since Anne Poulett's death in 1785. If he looked forward to a cheaper seat at Colchester he must have been bitterly disappointed, for his six contests there are said to have nearly ruined him. He succeeded in this general election of 1790 in ousting George Tierney, who is probably the "friend of mine" to whom Fox refers.

At Bridgwater the Hon. Vere Poulett and John Langston were returned on June 18 by considerable majorities over Lord Perceval, the Earl of Egmont's heir. John Chubb, as we should expect, plumped for Perceval, but Jefferys, son of Benjamin Allen, voted Tory.

In July, when the poll at Westminster was closed, Fox was found to be easily at its head.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Thornton your present Member is a Candidate for Colchester where the Dissenters are very powerful and he has told them that his reasons for not supporting Mr. Beaufoy's motion last year were the

Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
11

peremptory instructions he had on the other side from his Constituents at Bridgwater.

Now as it may be material to a friend of mine to know how far this assertion is true, I should be obliged to you if you would acquaint me with what you know about it.

I am dear Sir.,

Yours ever,

C. J. Fox.

ST. JAMES'S STREET,
Saturday.

[1790]

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I received yesterday your very obliging letter for which I beg you accept my hearty thanks.

I can not conceive how it has happened that Reports in some places of my Illness and in others of my death have been so generally spread as I never enjoyed more perfect health than I now do.

The account which you give me is certainly very flattering ; for though I hope, nothing will ever deter me from doing my duty, yet it is not a little discouraging to find as I have sometimes done, that one is liable to the most obloquy at the very moments when one is making the greatest sacrifices to public duty.

However though I confess myself pleased with the favourable testimony of political Enemies, yet I do assure you the greatest satisfaction I receive is from the consideration that I have preserved the esteem of Persons like yourself whose [sentiments *deleted*] principles — have at all times been those to which I have always intended and I hope successfully to conform my conduct.

I am very truly, dear Sir,

Yours ever,

ST. ANNE'S HILL, C. J. Fox
17 Novr., '93.

The parliament of 1790 is approaching its dissolution and Chubb, finding himself

in London whither he has possibly gone for this very purpose, is naturally called upon to consult with his Whig chief on the subject of the candidates to be run at the forthcoming election for the borough.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have not heard a word respecting Bridgwater either from Mr. Adam or Mr. Barclay. I should be very glad to know the state of the business there and what chance you think there is of success as well as what may be the probable expence of the undertaking. I do not know Mr. Glenfell, but I am perswaded Lord Egmont would give his support to any Gentleman who would take up the business where he has left it. If you can call here at any time to-day before four, or tomorrow at any time between eleven and four I shall be very happy to see you.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours ever,

Saturday, SOUTH STREET, C. J. Fox.
Ap. 21, 1796.

[Endorsed and sealed]

John Chubb Esqr.,
Bates Hotel,
Adelphi.

Mrs. Robinson has call'd and will be at home to morrow evening, Sunday.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

Mr. Bligh who will deliver you this is a Gentleman of character and fortune, and will I believe offer himself as a Candidate for Bridgewater, if you continue to be of the same opinion in regard to the probability of success which you stated to me last week, I know I need not caution you against being too sanguine in your representations, as I am sure it would give you as much concern as myself, to be the means of leading a Gentleman into trouble and expence which should not be attended with success.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
12

I am dear Sir, yours ever,

C. J. Fox.

South Street, 7 May [1796?]

[Sealed and Endorsed]

John Chubb Esqre.,
Bridgwater.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

My dear Sir,

Since I saw you I have learned from Harcourt that Pike is as eager to support any Candidate proposed by our friends, as we could wish. How far this is to be depended upon I do not know, but I take for granted you will do every thing in your power to conciliate and bring together all those who are likely to support Mr. Bligh and I suppose if Pike's sentiments are really such as they are represented there may be others besides him on the list against us who may give us at least one vote.

If it should be necessary to set up Candidates, either from seeing any chance of carrying two or for the purpose of counteracting the operation of split votes against us, Harcourt who is a very steady member of Parliament and who has connections in trade with Pike will offer himself and I hope whatever may be your situation in borough Politicks in relation to Pike you will give Harcourt your second votes ; always however considering Bligh as the first object.

Yours ever,

ST. ANNE'S HILL, C. J. Fox

16 May, 96.

[Sealed and endorsed]

John Chubb Esqre.,
Bridgwater.

Those readers who remember the early days of the Russian revolutionary terror will be able to form some idea of the atmosphere of fear and suspicion, multiplied a hundredfold, which the French terror so much nearer to England, produced in this island. In 1793 the Scotch judiciary visited persons accused of treason and sedition with most severe penalties. Fox, writing about this time to

his nephew, says " it is evident that those who execute the supposed law in Scotland must *wish* it were law here too, and such are the times that what they wish they may easily obtain if they have the courage to ask it. You will easily believe I shall not acquiesce in this tyranny without an effort, but I am far from sanguine as to success. We live in times of violence and of extremes, and all those who are for creating, or even for retaining checks upon power are considered as enemies to order."

Fox must have felt somewhat relieved of his apprehensions when in the following year the London trials had a far different issue from those in Edinburgh. The first prisoner to be tried was a shoemaker named Hardy. He was acquitted after a brilliant defence by Erskine. Horne Tooke defended himself with a like result, and after John Thelwall had received a verdict of innocence, the Government refrained from any further prosecutions.

Thelwall arrived at Stowey in the middle of July 1797. He came as Coleridge's guest and found the society of his host and William and Dorothy Wordsworth fully congenial. Differing in their views on religion, philosophy and politics, these three men, all thinkers, were able none the less to discuss without loss of love or respect for each other, matters on which their opinions were widely separate.

When Thelwall had left Somerset, he had a strong desire to return and settle there. He wished to give up his public lecturing with its attendant incidents of confinement in Old Bailey and the Tower, and to lead a quiet life in the country. He had written to Coleridge asking him if Tom Poole could find him a house in the neighbourhood. Coleridge was unwilling to increase the odium into which Poole had fallen by his friendship with the two poets, whose politics were regarded by his circle as dangerous. Hence this letter to John Chubb. We have not the text of the reply, but Mrs. Sandford gives us the

Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.

1937

13

substance of it in Coleridge's subsequent letter to Thelwall. "I have received an answer from Chubb, intimating that he would undertake the office of procuring you a cottage, provided it was thought right that you should settle *here*. But this (*i.e.*; the whole difficulty) he left for me and T. Poole to settle." John Chubb's wisdom is manifest in this guarded acceptance of an undertaking charitable to one man, but undoubtedly detrimental to another, as Coleridge proceeds to explain.

Thelwall was indeed an outcast and even in the remote village in Brecknockshire to which he took his family he found it impossible to outlive the consequences of his political career.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge to John Chubb.

[Undated].

Dear Sir,

I write to you on the subject of Thelwall. He has found by experience that neither his own health nor that of his wife and children can be preserved in London; and were it otherwise, — yet his income is inadequate to maintain him there. He is therefore under the necessity of fixing his residence in the country. But by his particular exertions in the propagation of those principles, which we hold sacred and of the highest importance, he has become, as you well know, particularly unpopular thro' every part of the kingdom. Therefore some odium and inconvenience must be incurred by those who should be instrumental in procuring him a cottage there. But are Truth and Liberty of so little importance that we owe no sacrifices to them? And because with talents very great and disinterestedness undoubted, he has evinced himself in activity and courage superior to any other patriot, must his country *for this* be made a wilderness of waters to him? There are many reasons for his preferring this to any other part of the kingdom. He will here find the society of men equal to himself in talents, and probably superior in acquired knowledge—of men, who differ from each other very widely in many very important opinions, yet unite in the one great duty of unbounded

tolerance. If the day of darkness and tempest should come, it is most probable that the influence of T. would be very great on the lower classes. It may therefore prove of no mean utility to the cause of Truth and Humanity that he had spent some years in a society, where his natural impetuosity had been disciplined into patience, and salutary scepticism, and the slow energies of a *calculating* spirit. But who shall get him a cottage here? I have *no power*, and T. Poole is precluded from it by the dreadful state of his poor Mother's health and by his connection with the Benefit Club, the utilities of which he estimates very high and these, he thinks, would be materially affected by any activity in favor of T. Besides, has he not already taken his share of odium? Has he not already almost alienated, certainly very much cooled, the affections of some of his relations, by his exertions on *my* account? And why should *one* man do *all*?

But it must be left to every man's private mind to determine whether or no his *particular* circumstances do or do not justify him in keeping aloof from all interference in such subjects. J.T. is now at Swansea, and expects an answer from me respecting the possibility of his settling here. He requested me to write to you—I have done it—and you will be so kind (if in your power, *to-day*) to give me one or two lines, briefly informing me whether or no *your* particular circumstances enable you to exert yourself in taking a cottage for him *any where* 5 or 6 miles round Stowey. He means to live in perfect retirement, neither taking pupils or any thing else. It is painful to ask that of a person which he may find it equally distressing to grant or deny. But I do not ask any thing; but simply lay before you the calculations on *one* side of the subject. Your own mind will immediately suggest those on the other side, and I doubt not you will decide according the preponderance.

Believe me with respect &c.,

S. T. COLERIDGE.

Once more a favour is asked from the Whig patron! This time it is Mr. Boys. In

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.

1937

14

the voting list for the election of 1802 is the name of William Boys, an attorney, who votes for both the Whig candidates.

Admiral John Jervis, the hero of St. Vincent (1795) had been created earl, deriving his title from the place of his victory. In 1800 he had been appointed to the command of the Channel fleet, but was now presiding over the Admiralty. Fox's unwillingness may be well understood.

The postscript to the following letter introduces us to another phase of Fox's activities. Five years earlier he had publicly announced his intention of devoting " a greater portion of his time to his private pursuits:" He was fond of gardening, he was devoted to Euripides, he was thoroughly conversant with French and Italian literature. And yet what stronger appeal could be made to a statesman with his intimate knowledge of the English constitution and what work could he accomplish which might be of more benefit to posterity than a study in the history of his own country ? Naturally the revolution of 1688 would afford him the best field for a survey of the principles of constitutional freedom to which his own public labours had been so ardently devoted. When once he had determined on his subject he found that to begin with the Revolution itself was impossible, if abruptness was to be avoided, and that he must first trace at least the more immediate causes leading to the great movement which determined the form of our modern constitution.

On this historical work Fox bent his energies. He had something in him of the modern historical spirit and was determined to take nothing for granted, but to " verify, his references." To this end he journeyed to Paris and with the help of friends made laborious transcripts from French archives. Death however overtook him before he had finished what he had set himself to perform, and it was left to his nephew Vassell Fox, Lord Holland, to issue so much as was ready for the press as a posthumous work. In 1808 appeared a quarto volume entitled *A History of the*

Early Part, of the Reign of James the Second; with an Introductory Chapter. It ends abruptly after the death of Monmouth.

In the next year appeared another quarto volume in criticism of Fox's work. This contained *Observations on The Historical Work of the Late Right Honourable Charles James Fox* and was written by the Right Hon. George Rose, with whom we have already met in this series of letters.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have this moment received yours of the 19th and should be very happy to comply with any request of yours and especially in favour of Mr. Boys. But I confess I feel an unconquerable repugnance to applying to any Minister, even Lord St. Vincent, for a favour in the present state of things. It is true that I have asked and received favours from his Lordship, the latter indeed since he has been first Lord of the Admiralty, but then the application was made by me when he was in a different Situation. Besides, between ourselves, I apprehend the weight of any application from me to him at a time when he had not taken his party in Politicks, was very different from what it would be now.

I am most truly, my dear Sir,
yours ever,

St. Anne's Hill. C. J. Fox.

Friday.

P.S. Can you inform me what degree of Credit is supposed to belong to the historical part of Toulmin's account of Taunton ? My reason for asking is that I am engaged in a work where I shall have occasion to give an account of Monmouth's Invasion, Jefferies, Kirk &c., and if your residence in the country which was the Scene of these transactions should enable you to furnish me with any authentick Anecdote or probable Tradition relative to them you will much oblige me by communicating them. —C.J.F.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
15

[Endorsed]

CHERTSEY. Jany twenty two 1802.
John Chubb Esqre Bridgewater.
C. J. Fox.

Joshua Toulmin published the first edition of *The History of the Town of Taunton in the county of Somerset* in 1791, a volume in quarto. In 1822 an edition in octavo, "greatly enlarged and brought down to the present time," was issued by James Savage, and this is still the standard history of the borough.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have just received yours of the 21st and beg you will convey my thanks to Dr. Toulmin for his very obliging offer, which, unless I can get the Western Martyrology myself, I will certainly avail myself of. Though Rosewell's Trial is not so necessary to me I should have some curiosity to see it; especially as the Trial printed in the State Trials makes Jefferies behave rather well; and to judge from what we see there, it is to his (*Jefferies*) taking up a point of Law in favour of Rosewell and which R. himself did not know, how to argue that his escape seems to be owing.

I am, dear Sir, yours ever,
ST. ANNE'S HILL, C. J. Fox.
Wednesday.

[Endorsed]

CHERTSEY Feby. twenty four 1802
John Chubb Esqre
Bridgewater.
C. J. Fox.

The fact that Fox thought he had detected in Jeffreys' treatment of Thomas Rosewell a streak of humanity is of current interest, for to-day there is a strong desire to look beyond the biassed evidence of contemporary nonconformity for a just appreciation of the judge's character. It is true notwithstanding that on Jeffreys' summing up the jury brought in their verdict of high treason and the prisoner was put back to come up for judgment, and that meant a traitor's death. Thomas Rosewell was an eminent nonconformist

divine, a scholar and a gentleman. The evidence had been of the flimsiest. Sir John Talbot went straight to Whitehall and laid the matter before the king, "Sir" said he, "if your Majesty suffers this man to die, we are none of us safe in our houses!" Rosewell was pardoned and his escape was owing not to any clemency of his judge but to a sense of justice in King Charles.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I understand that a vacancy for the county of Somerset is almost immediately expected by the death of Mr. Dickenson. If it should happen, I shall be much obliged to you if you will give your vote and interest to Mr. Ackland whom I do not know but who, I understand, is to stand against Mr. Dickenson Junr. If besides, your own vote you can do any thing for Mr. A. or point me out any channel through which I can be useful to him I will thank you very much, for tho' Dn. may be a very good Man he is one of the very worst Politicians in the whole House.

I am, dear Sir, yours ever,

C. J. Fox.

ST. ANNE'S HILL,
Tuesday.

turn over.

P.S. There are strong reports of approaching Dissolution. I do not credit them, but it is as well to be prepared, and I should therefore be much obliged to you if you would let me know what your notions are about B. Water, whether one or both Members might be attacked [and if one only *deleted*] with reasonable hope of success, and if only one, which of the two is weakest. Huddleston is the less determined Ministerialist of the two.

[Endorsed]

CHERTSEY Sepr Seventeen 1803 John
Chubb Esqre
Bridgewater.
C. J. Fox.

On Mr. Dickinson's death, three candidates came forward to fill the vacancy in the county representation. His

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
16

son, William, of whose politics Fox had formed so poor an opinion, had previously sat for the Cornish borough of Loswithiel, a pocket borough of the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, scheduled for extinction in 1831 when it had 94 electors. He had held office as a Lord of the Admiralty.

If we may rely on a contemporary anonymous pamphlet, Acland, Fox's choice, was considered likely to be returned, but he withdrew from the struggle, overawed by the long purse of Lethbridge, son of the wealthy baronet. Dickinson also left the field, and Lethbridge remained unopposed and was duly returned.

Charles. James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I hear Allen is to take a place incompatible with a seat in Parliament and consequently that a vacancy will ensue. If you have not any body ready I will look out for a Candidate and in the mean time perhaps there ought to be a hand bill stating that a respectable Candidate will make his appearance. I can answer for the M. of Buckingham and the Grenville interest going with us on this occasion which would I should suppose give you a majority, the numbers being so even before.

Yours ever,

C. J. Fox.

H. OF COMS. Wednesday,

My address is Arlington Street.

The Hon. General Vere Poulet was unsuccessful in the 1807 election. The polling took place on May 5th. Among his 140 supporters was of course John Chubb. The Pykes, father and son, also voted in his favour—a point to be noted with interest. . Thomas Pyke had returned to the fold.

Charles James Fox to John Chubb.

Dear Sir,

I have received an application from the M. of Buckingham in favour, of Gen. Poulett as a future member for Bridgewater in opposition to Ld. Poulett's interest. I have scarcely seen Howarth since he

returned from B. Water and therefore do not know whether he has any further thoughts of the Borough; but, if he has not, I should like very much to forward Gen. Poulett's interest as I understand his Politicks may be relied on. I understand he means to be at your next Mayor's Day.

I am very truly, dear Sir,

Yours ever,

C. J. Fox

ST. ANNE'S HILL,
Sunday.

[Sealed and Endorsed]

CHERTSEY Sepr. sixteen, 1804.
John Chubb Esqre
Bridgwater.

C. J. Fox.

This is the last letter written by Fox in the correspondence which he maintained with. John Chubb for well nigh a quarter of a century. The great man died two years later.

“It was in the common course of nature” wrote Chubb to his children, “that (from our respective ages) I should have left behind me this my testimony of gratitude,” referring to what he had written at an earlier date, “to the great and good man, who is the subject of it—but it has pleased heaven to remove him first, and to leave me to lament his death which happened on the 13th. of Sepr. last at a time when, Clamour and Calumny against him having ceased, and when the whole nation felt him to be the sole person who could be confided in, who was called in the most arduous times to the most arduous task of Minister for Foreign Affairs, and at the moment when he was meditating and negotiating *Peace* which was always the first wish of his heart.

His last letters to me (you will see) shew that I was with him but a very short time before his dissolution, at which time he shewed to me the same marked attention and kindness that he had ever in whatever situation invariably done before.

I have felt heavy and grievous losses, and amongst them that of many a dear

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
17

friend—but never was private and public misfortune conjoined ever so lamented by me. This day was he consigned to his grave. 8th October, 1806. John Chubb.”

John Chubb survived his friend for more than a decade. He died in 1818 at the age of 71 years. Some five years before his death he had the satisfaction of sharing in the initiation of the Bridgwater Hospital, of which he was the first treasurer, while his son, Morley, was the first honorary secretary. He had already fulfilled the office of mayor as long before as 1788. But his public interests, as will have been gathered from these pages, had a wider field than his immediate neighbourhood, and he is worthy to be remembered among the borough's most distinguished sons.

Fox—Coleridge—Chubb—the statesman, the poet-philosopher and the citizen, were, all united in an undying love of liberty. They were ever its staunch upholders, the third no less than the two pre-eminent leaders, the one in action, the other in thought, with whom he is here associated.

The portraits

From the Blake Museum collection



Portrait of Charles James Fox.

The Latin translates as:

Genius, who has a soul of a diviner, and a greatness of expression, give the honor to the name of this man??



Lord Anne Poulett, M. P. for Bridgwater,
1768-1785.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
18



John (or "Pussy") Woodham, barber-chirurgeon.



The Rev. John Coles, Vicar of Bridgwater,
1742-1785.



Benjamin Allen, M. P. for Bridgwater,
1768-1780.



John Hicks, whose occupation is unknown,
but may be surmised.

**Charles James Fox
and the
Borough of Bridgwater**

by
T. Bruce Dilks, B. A., F. R. Hist. S.
1937
19



William Tuckett, Mayor of Bridgwater, 1785.



Thomas Pyke, Mayor of Bridgwater, 1791



Mr Came, senior, The Builder,
who restored the spire.