

New Bench to Commemorate Pioneering Local Author

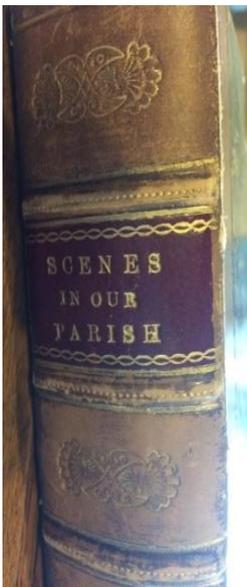
A commemorative bench and plaque have recently been installed on Troopers Hill in St George to honour the once renowned local author, Elizabeth Emra.



The [Friends of Troopers Hill](#), a local community interest group based in East Bristol, launched an appeal for funds in 2016 to replace the previous wooden bench which had rotted away.

Rob Acton-Campbell, a member of the Friends of Troopers Hill who has researched Elizabeth Emra extensively said, “The Friends of Troopers Hill are very excited to be erecting this bench, which will provide a place where local people and visitors can learn about this unique female author”.

Emra was born in November 1804, as the fifth daughter of John Emra, the Vicar of St George Church between 1809 and 1842.



She published two collections of short stories during her lifetime, both set in St George, East Bristol.

Emra’s first collection of short stories entitled *Scenes in Our Parish* was originally published in two parts in 1830 and 1832. It is positioned as a series of memoirs detailing life in St George in the early 1800s, and contains many references to local landmarks, including Troopers Hill itself.

The second collection *Realities of Life* was published in 1838, and mentions St George throughout.



Descriptions of Troopers Hill in St George feature throughout *Scenes*.

Her stories provide an intimate picture of the lives of the parishioners in the area, repeatedly highlighting the plight of the poor living in East Bristol at the time.

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Emra herself had first-hand experience of such social issues, through her role serving the local community as a vicar's daughter and then neighbour.

"She seems to have been the kind of woman who was not content to sit at home all day" according to Acton-Campbell, but "wanted to improve the lives of those around her".

"If she had been alive today she might well have taken on the role of a councillor".

Dr Madge Dresser, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the University of West England, points out that publishing such stories was very unusual for women at the time Emra was writing.

She explains that whilst women were rising to positions of status within the home in the early 1800s, they were

“East Bristol doesn’t get enough recognition as having an important history in its own right.”

expected to stay there within very particular boundaries of middle-class notions of respectability.

This included "not being open to or engaging with the rumbustious nature of the world" according to Dresser.

Although women were prolific writers, Dresser highlights that "to publish your work, was to flaunt yourself". Emra therefore "must have been a bit of a pioneer" through her writing.



Tithe Map showing St George in 1840s. [Click to view](#) Bristol City Council mapping system.

Emra rose to “local prominence” as an author according to local historian W.T. Sanigar in his book *Houses and People of Old St George* (1936). *Scenes* was so popular it was even published in America in 1833.



The site of St George church and churchyard which feature in *Scenes* now contains a residential housing development.

Emra also contributed to the well-known British journal [Forget-Me-Not](#) in 1830, published by Rudolph Ackermann and edited by Frederic Shoberl. Other notable authors whose work featured in the journal include [Sir Walter Scott](#) and [Mary Wollstonecraft](#).

For Acton-Campbell “East Bristol doesn’t get enough recognition as having an important history in its own right. Today it appears to be just a place that has been built on”.

Emra’s writing, “provides a real insight into what life was like back then and how hard life was. It shows how far things have changed now”.

The new commemorative bench on Troopers Hill will “help keep this history talked about”.



“...the barren and quarried hill, with its yellow spots of gorse and broom, and its purple shade of heath, raising itself above the dark heaps of dross on our own side; and then the river, the beautiful, soft flowing river that we have all loved so well”.

Elizabeth Emra describing Troopers Hill. ‘The Strawberry Feast’, *Scenes of our Parish* (1833).

The Photograph of the site of St George Church is reproduced with the kind permission of [Church Crawler](#).

A shorter version of this article originally appeared on [The Bristol Cable](#) website.