

Elizabeth Holmes (née Emra)

The Holmes Family



Elizabeth Emra, or 'Little Elizabeth', was the author of "Scenes in our Parish" the first part of which was published in 1830. Her father was Rev John Emra, vicar at St George Church from 1809-1842.

Scenes in our Parish, written under the pseudonym of 'A Country Parsons Daughter' describes life in the St George area of Bristol in the 1830s.

A Bristol Civic Society Blue Plaque to commemorate Elizabeth Holmes (née Emra) was unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Bristol on 14th January 2026.

The plaque can be seen in Harveys Lane BS5 8HP, which runs between the site of the now demolished Vicarage and the site of Elizabeth's home, after her marriage, at Homefield.

Elizabeth married the artist Marcus Henry Holmes on 12th July 1833 and after their marriage Elizabeth moved from St George Vicarage where she had lived since the age of four, to live with her husband in 'Homefield Cottage' just the other side of Harveys Lane. They were tenants of the Phillips family who lived in nearby Clouds Hill House.

Elizabeth's mother died on 24th April 1837 and this was followed by the death of her father, who was still serving as Vicar of St George after 33 years, at the age of 73 on 19th September 1842.

Following her father's death, Elizabeth and her growing family no longer had access to the vicarage and its garden next to their house. In December 1842, Elizabeth, Marcus and their family of six children (one child had died as an infant) moved to Westbury Hill (Redland/Westbury-on-Trym), 'within a short walk of her sisters' new residence'.

Within a year of the move, on 10th October 1843, Elizabeth died just a few days after the birth of her own 'little Elizabeth' her eighth child.

When Elizabeth died, Marcus Holmes was left with seven children under the age of ten, so no doubt he was pleased to have Elizabeth's sisters living nearby.

Marcus Holmes, continued to live in Westbury with their children; at the time of the census in 1851 Marcus was living at 3, Exeter Buildings in Westbury with Annie (16), Agnes (13), Herbert (10), Marion (8), and Elizabeth (7) there were also two servants.



Marcus died in January 1854, at Minehead (though his will written in September 1853 has his residence as Westbury). After their father's death the youngest children continued to live in Westbury with Elizabeth's sisters.

Read more about Elizabeth, the Emra family and her work at troopers-hill.org.uk/emra

Below is a brief description of the lives of other members of the Holmes family, their children, Marcus, his father George Holmes and his half-sister Mary Holmes. The information is taken from findagrave.com, ancestry.co.uk or other sources mentioned in the text.

Children of Marcus and Elizabeth Holmes

Ann (or Annie) Emra Holmes

Born 6th July 1834 at St George. Died 26th April 1897 at Haywards Heath.

Not married. 'Sister Mary Clare'

Marcus and Elizabeth named their first two children, Anne and Henry, after two of Elizabeth's siblings that had died prior to her marriage, Anne Emra had died in 1814, aged 16-years, Henry Emra died in a boating accident at Oxford in 1829, aged 18-years. Elizabeth's parents also had two sons that had died as infants, but this was before Elizabeth was born.

As the daughter of a vicar of the Anglican faith Elizabeth was a firm believer in the role of established church. In her second book 'Realities of Life' Elizabeth writes:

"Will the sin of 1829 and the consequent punishments following so awfully and so soon, ever be blotted from the history of my unhappy country's downfall?"

She is most likely referring to the historical context surrounding the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which, while granting emancipation to Catholics, was seen by some as a sin or an attack on the Protestant establishment.

So it may seem strange that her oldest daughter, Ann or Annie, became a Catholic.

Annie Emra Holmes was professed as *Sister Mary Clare* on June 21, 1856 (just over two years after the death of her father) and she joined the 'English Convent' in Bruges.

Her order, the English Regular Canonesses of the Order of St. Augustine, then founded a convent at Haywards Heath - the Priory of our Lady of Good Counsel.

Annie, Sister Mary Clare, was elected prioress there on February 10, 1886, and left Bruges to return to England on July 5, 1886. According to the 1891 census, she was a history teacher at the school attached to the convent at Haywards Heath. She died on April 26, 1897, in Haywards Heath.

Sister Mary Clare is mentioned in the archive of Father Guido Gezelle in Brugge, who was the chaplain to the English Convent. It holds letters between Mary Louisa Buckler (née Farbrother) and Father Gezelle.

Mary Louisa wrote:

“My newly converted sister-in-law accompanied us as far as Dover, and proceeded by the Ostend boat. She is going to stay at Bruges for several weeks. She has a cousin at the English Convent, (Sister Mary Clare) who has engaged apartments for her”

The Sister-in-law is Lucy Grey Earle, daughter of Charles John Earle (half-brother of Rev John Emra) she married John Farbrother headmaster at Shepton Mallet School who died in 1871 and was a brother of Mary Louisa. Another of Mary Louisa's brothers married Arabella Emra, daughter of John Emra of Redlynch, Elizabeth's brother.

Henry Marcus Holmes

Born 9th December 1835 St George. Died 17th August 1895, Mason County, Texas

Married Lucia Sheldon

Elizabeth's oldest son travelled to Texas in 1850 at the age of only 15-years; this explains his absence from the 1851 UK census.

At the outbreak of the American Civil War, Henry headed north and joined the Union army. During the conflict he participated in battles at Valverde, New Mexico (1862 February 20-21), and Fredericksburg, Virginia (1862 December 11-15). Taken prisoner at the battle of the Wilderness (1864 May 5-7), Holmes was exchanged in 1864 August and returned to the army.

After the war he continued his military career and was briefly stationed in Rhode Island where he met Lucia Sheldon who he married in 1865. When his army enlistment expired in 1868, Holmes re-enlisted and was stationed in Texas. In 1871 he was honourably discharged.

Following his honourable discharge from the army Holmes established a land and law practice with Charles Bierschwale. He and his wife remained in Menard County, where he was elected Justice of the Peace in 1872.

Relocating to neighbouring Mason County with Lucia and an adopted daughter, May, a couple of years later, Henry Holmes played a prominent role as a prosecuting attorney during the "Hoo Doo War." His wife wrote a diary of their experiences "The Lucia Holmes Diary, 1875-1876: the Hoo Doo War years".

Henry and Lucia are mentioned in an online walking tour of Mason, which says they lived at 211 San Antonio Street, now a wine bar. Cherokee Rose Antiques at 421 Ft. McKavitt now occupy the sandstone building, constructed around 1883, which was the Holmes and Bierschwale Law and Land Office.

Henry and Lucia spent four years in Austin, Texas from 1887 when Henry served as private secretary to Lawrence Sullivan ("Sul") Ross, who was elected Governor of Texas in 1887; they returned to Mason when Ross's term ended. Henry had become friends with Sul Ross when he first arrived in Texas in 1850.

Henry Holmes died in Mason County on 1895 August 17. His wife Lucia left Texas to return to the east coast; she died in Augusta, Maine, on 1918 November 26. Henry and Lucia are buried in the Gooch Cemetery in Mason, Texas.

[Henry Marcus Holmes grave on Find a Grave](#)

Agnes Elizabeth Holmes

Born 1837, St George. Died 17th April 1904, Buttermere, Wilshire

Married Rev William Esdaile **Burkitt**

Agnes married Rev William Esdaile Burkitt in 1859 at Alderbury, Wilshire. William Esdaile Burkitt was born at Little Mapelstead, Essex in 1831. He was the son of Rev. William Burkitt and Susanna Esdaile Burkitt (Nee Wyatt).

William had been Curate of Caldicot, Monmouthshire from 1856-59. In 1859 he was appointed Curate and then Vicar of Charlton, Wiltshire where he served until 1869. He was also made Chaplain to Earl Nelson 1859. Earl Nelson's estate at Trafalgar Park was within the Parish of Downton where Elizabeth's brother John (Agnes's uncle) was Perpetual Curate living at Redlynch Parsonage. This may have been how they met.

William was then appointed Rector of the small village of Buttermere, near Hungerford in Wiltshire where he served for 41 years until his death in 1910.

Agnes and Rev William Burkitt had eleven children. Four of their sons emigrated to Australia.

Agnes died six years before her husband; they are both buried in the graveyard of the small village church of St James the Great in Buttermere. There is also a memorial brass plaque in the church.

A family tree showing some of Agnes's family is held at Somerset Archives with a copy of an extra-illustrated version of Elizabeth's sister Martha's book 'Recollections of Childhood or Sally the Faithful Nurse'.

[Agnes Elizabeth Burkitt grave on Find a Grave](#)

John Holmes

Born August 1838, St George. Died August 1838, St George

Died as an infant.

John was the only child of Elizabeth to die as an infant. Sadly, he only lived only two days, he was baptised on 27th August 1838 and buried the following day.

John Emra Holmes

Born 4th July 1839, Cleeve. Died 10th March 1909

Married Eliza Mawdesley

John Emra Holmes used the name 'Emra Holmes' in his adult life.

Emra Holmes career was as a Civil Servant with HM Customs. He was also an author and his first work, '[Tales, Poems, and Masonic Papers](#)' published in 1877 included a 'Biographical Sketch' of the author by George Markham Tweddell.

As well as details of Emra Holmes' life the biography includes details of the life of his father (Marcus Holmes) and grandfather (George Holmes).

John Emra Holmes was born in Cleeve while his parents were taking a holiday, John Emra, son of Marcus Henry and Elizabeth Holmes was baptised on 20th July 1839 at Brockley near Yatton and his abode was given as Cleeve in Yatton Parish, the register records his date of birth as 4th July.

In her memoir of Mrs Elizabeth Holmes, Martha (Elizabeth's sister) says

"led on by love of her pleasant holiday, and unwilling to frustrate a scheme of her kind husband's, she left home when such a step was not perhaps strictly prudent ; and at the village of Cleve was born one of her little sons, in the summer of 1839"

It is clear that Elizabeth was not well after the birth and remained in Cleeve for over a fortnight after the birth, hence Cleeve being given as their abode at the time. Elizabeth's father was curate at Yatton before becoming Vicar at St George, so the family would probably be remembered in the area.

At the very beginning of his sketch Tweddell says John Emra Holmes was born at Old Cleeve (five miles from Minehead in Somerset) and he mentions its Cistercian monastery, however, the baptism register confirms that this was the wrong Cleeve.

John Emra Holmes was only three years old when his mother died in 1843. Thanks to the generosity of a 'wealthy lady in token of her admiration of Scenes in our Parish' he attended Christ's Hospital School at Hertford from the age of seven. Three years later he went to the Blue Coat School in London, which he left age 15. He then went to Shepton Mallett Grammar School, where, as mentioned above under the description of his sister Annie, John Farbrother a relation by marriage was headmaster.

In 1857 Emra Holmes joined the HM Customs in Liverpool and during a long career moved up through the service with roles in various towns around England. George Tweddell reports that in late 1857 he was promoted to a role in Hartlepool, which is where he was at the time of the 1861 census. He then moved to Stockton-on-Tees in 1865.

He married Eliza, second daughter of Mr Thomas Smith Mawdesley, at Ramsey in the County of Huntingdon (now part of Cambridgeshire) on 17 September 1868. Emra Holmes is recorded on the marriage register as living in Seaton Carew, County Durham.

While working at Stockton-on-Tees he became a Freemason and wrote for their publications, it was through these contributions that he got to know George Tweddell.

At the time of the 1871 census the family was living in Ipswich, there is one daughter, Edith (aged 1 year) and two servants.

He was then appointed Collector of Customs at Woodbridge in Suffolk in 1876, followed by Fowey in Cornwall in where he was living with Eliza and their three children at the end of the period covered by Tweddell's 'sketch' in 1877. He was still in Fowey in 1881, with one daughter and three sons.

We know that by 1887 he was Collector of Customs in Guernsey as he is mentioned in an account of a visit by the Crown Princess of Austria. By 1901 he was in Harwich, Essex. At his death in 1909 he was resident on Oundle, Northamptonshire.

A brief account of his life by William Sanigar in 'People and Houses of Old St George' mentions two other books by Emra Holmes – 'Amabel Vaughan and Other Tales' (1879) and 'The Lady Muriel and Other Tales' (1886).

His oldest son was also named Emra Holmes and his second was named after his grandfather, Marcus Henry Holmes. This Marcus followed his grandfather in becoming an artist and teacher. This Marcus was educated at Sangeen School at Christchurch, Bournemouth (where his Aunt Elizabeth ran the school with her husband, see below) and later studied at Aberdeen School of Art 1896-1899 and three years at [Herkomer's Art School](#) at Bushey, Hertfordshire. He became an art master and housemaster at Monmouth School 1907-1946 and an Oxford University extension lecturer on art history.

Sanigar tells us that Emra Holmes' youngest son, Colonel Robert Blake Worsley Holmes, was an Engineer who was mentioned in despatches and received an Order of the British Empire for his work in the Great War. He became Director General of Railways and Docks in Palestine.

Herbert Holmes

Born January 1841, St George. Died 5th April 1854 at sea.

Died age 15-years

Herbert Holmes was baptised on 24th January 1841 was recorded as living with his parents on 6th June 1841 when the census was taken.

The only other thing we know about his short life is what is written on his father's gravestone in Minehead.

“Also of Herbert his youngest son who drowned at sea April 5th 1854 aged 13 years”

[Herbert Holmes grave on Find a Grave](#)

Marian Holmes

Born 26 May 1842, St George. Died 18 October 1909, Salem, Virginia, USA

Married Libert Chandler

Marian Holmes was baptised on 19th June 1842 at St George, her name is clearly 'Marian' on the register but often appears as Marion in other documents. Her birthplace is sometimes quoted as being Bournemouth, but the 1851 and 1861 census returns both have it as St George.

In 1861, Marian was living with her Aunts Frances and Susanna Emra at Eastfield Villas in Westbury, Bristol. A third aunt, Sarah Grey Emra, also lived at that address, but on census day was visiting Charlotte Bevan at 5, Whitleladies Road, Bristol.

Marian married Libert Chandler at Canterbury, Kent on 25th June 1862. Canterbury was where her Aunt Martha lived. Libert was born in Bishops Castle, Shropshire in 1836.

Soon after their marriage Libert and Marian moved to Canada (Libert may already have been living there) and their first child was born there in 1863.

The growing family remained in Canada until at least 1878 when their eighth child, Frederick was born.

By the time of the 1900 census they had moved to Salem, Virginia.

Marian became owner of the copy of her Aunt Martha's book 'Recollections of childhood; or Sally, the faithful nurse' that is now in Bristol. Martha was Elizabeth Emra's oldest sister, most likely given to her by her aunts.

Marian wrote the following note in the front of the book:

"Aunt Martha wrote this simple little book and I wish Fred to have it" [Fred has been crossed out and then rewritten and arrowed, Fred was Marian & Libert's son] her name is written above this note and clearly writes her name as 'Marion Chandler'

A further note below this says *"(Marion Holmes Chandler Liberts grandmother)"* [Fred's son was Libert]

A note at the top of the page says *"Written by Martha Emra about her childhood. Aunt Martha was Grandma Holmes sister"*

The earliest inscription in the book is by 'S G Emra' [Sarah Gray Emra] she says:

"This copy which Martha sent her dear father, and, from which he made the remarks which he sent to her in a series of letters" dated *"Feb 4th 1843"*

Marian and Libert Chandler's son Frederick F Chandler was born in 1898, his son Libert T Chandler was born in 1910.

[Marian Chandler grave on Find a Grave](#)

Elizabeth Emra Holmes

Born 6th October 1843, Westbury-on-Trym. Died 1st December 1897.

Married Edmund Bennet **Brackenbury**

Elizabeth was born only four days before her mother's death and she was only 10 years old when her father, Marcus, died.

In 1861 she was living with her sister, Marian and her aunts at Eastfield Villa.

Elizabeth married on 2nd January 1868 at Westbury-on-Trym where she was still living. Her husband was the Rev. Edmund Bennett Brackenbury, of Exeter College, Oxford. He was a Minor Canon of Bristol Cathedral and then in 1873 he became headmaster of Saugeen, a preparatory school for boys in Bournemouth. He was a musician and also taught music at the school.

A quote taken from an account of the life of one of their pupils says:

"The school was run by a Mr Brackenbury and his wife, regarded as tolerant and warm-hearted surrogate parents"

Some photos and a brief history of Saugeen School [can be seen here](#).

As mentioned above, Elizabeth's nephew, Marcus Henry Holmes (her brother Emra Holmes' son) was a pupil at the school.

Elizabeth and Edmund also provided a home at the school for Elizabeth's father's half-sister Mary Holmes in her final years. There is more about this remarkable woman below.

Elizabeth and Edmund's first son was born in October 1868, he was one of 6 children.

At the end of 1891 Edmund and Elizabeth reportedly moved to East Hill House, Ashford, Kent where Edmund opened a new school.

However, it was at Saugeen that Elizabeth died on 1st December 1897 leaving a personal estate of just over £140. Her husband, Edmund, lived for a further 24 years, he died in December 1921.

Marcus Henry Holmes, Husband of Elizabeth Emra

Born 5th May 1803, Bristol, Died 21st January 1854, Minehead

Married Elizabeth Emra, 12th July 1833

A note in the back of the copy of 'Recollections of childhood; or Sally, the faithful nurse' that passed through Marian Chandler's family (see above) says:

"Marcus Holmes was a portrait painter of the Royal Academy. His father fled from Ireland during a rebellion to Bristol England there his wife died leaving the baby Marcus. Marcus Holme's mother's name is unknown. He was a tall jolly very ugly man so tradition says."

The note is signed 'A.M.Peel' and she adds '*All this was told me by Mrs Emra Holmes in 1925*'.

This 'Mrs Emra Holmes' was likely Hettie Katherine Holmes née Elliott wife of Emra Holmes, the son of Elizabeth's son John Emra Holmes.

In the text of 'Recollections..' Martha only mentions Elizabeth's husband in passing, but there is a brief description of him in 'A Sister's Record' Martha's memoir of Mrs Marcus H Holmes:

"It is not needful minutely to describe the growing up of that deep affection which, blessed be God,, became a source of much happiness, and which in succeeding years did but strengthen. He who inspired it was first known, and familiarly received, as the friend of her only remaining brother. With this world's goods the young artist was but scantily furnished, but he was rich in industry and talent, in a flow of cheerful and happy spirits, and high Christian principle; and after an acquaintance of a year or two, and a few simple and prudent arrangements, Elizabeth Emra, on 12th of July 1833, became the wife of Marcus Holmes."

As mentioned above, under the description of Elizabeth's son John Emra Holmes, the 'Biographical Sketch' by George Markham Tweddell included in 'Tales, Poems, and Masonic Papers' published in 1877 included some details of Marcus Holmes' life.

Tweddell says that Marcus was born in Bristol in 1803, was educated at Bristol Grammar School and then '*became a student at the Royal Academy, under Fuseli, where he won the silver medal for still life*'.

He is said to have been named after Marcus Beresford, a member of the Beresford family, Lady Araminta Monk, was his godmother.

He goes on to say that Marcus then returned to Bristol, where he settled as an artist '*contributing occasional pictures to the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, and to those of the Old Society of Watercolour painters*'. He goes on to say that one of Marcus's students was '*Eugenie, the late Empress of the French*'.

More information about Marcus is given in '*Recollections of Marcus Holmes*' by 'TG', published in the Bristol Mirror and General Advertiser on 25th February 1854, just over a month after his death.

This tells us that *'Young Marcus was sent to school under the Rev M Nash, at Bourton, and afterward became a pupil of the Rev Goodenough, then master of the Bristol Grammar School'*.

TG also confirms that Marcus was admitted to the Royal Academy, giving the date as August 1823.

'As he advanced in years he developed a character remarkable for its artlessness, cheerfulness, kindness and honest worth'.

TG particularly mentions his 'active piety' referring to the fact that before his marriage he was a member of the 'Parochial Visiting Society' at Westbury-on-Trym where he 'chose the roughest district of that extensive parish'. He is also described as *'an attentive and popular teacher at the Adult School established by the Christian generosity of the a gentleman resident in the neighbourhood, for the quarry-men and donkey-boys on Durdham-down'*.

TG describes Marcus's marriage to Elizabeth *'after a year's acquaintance'* and notes that they *'enjoyed ten years of conjugal affection and happiness, at Homefield, St George's, her excellent father's parish'* followed by a move to *'a pleasant cottage on Westbury-hill'* in December 1842.

During his 10 years in St George Marcus continued to work as an art teacher. William Sanigar in describing the school at Summer Hill House in St George mentions that Marcus was employed as a drawing master by John Stone who took over the school in 1835.

TG also gives us some detail of the end of Marcus's life at Minehead.

'The filial piety of Marcus was requited by the very liberal subscription raised for his benefit, when, suddenly seized with paralysis, in 1852, he was disabled for those professional labours, which he had pursued for many years with an excess of exertion, under which he prematurely sank. On his retirement to Minehead, where some of his early life had been spent, and in the beautiful neighbourhood of which he had sketched many a rustic scene, he was warmly welcomed by more than one of the humbler friends who had known him in his merry boyhood'.

'As an artist, if he did not inherit the native genius of his father, he was perfect and indefatigable as a teacher of drawing, and his pencil sketches of pastoral landscape are free, spirited and tasteful'.

George and Anna Holmes, Parents of Marcus Holmes

Father: George Holmes Born c1776 Dublin. Died 1852, Canada

Mother: Anna Born 17??, Kilkenny. Died c1803, Bristol

Nearly all that we know about Marcus Holmes' parents comes from the 'Biographical Sketch' by George Markham Tweddell of 1877 mentioned above. Others have referred to them, such as William Sanigar, but they in turn mostly quote from Tweddell.

Both Marcus's parents were Irish, George Holmes, an artist, being a native of Dublin. Tweddell states that George was educated at "*Whites Grammar School with the Duke of Wellington, Curran, Sheridan, and Tom Moore*", this must have been 'Whytes Academy' on Grafton Street in Dublin which was established in 1758 and is reported to have had many well-known pupils including the Duke of Wellington and Thomas Moore, as mentioned by Tweddell.

Tweddell describes that George's house was a meeting place for Irish patriots, he mentions Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Theobald Wolfe Tone and The Emmetts. These were some of the leaders of the 'Society of United Irishmen' who instigated a republican rebellion in 1798 uniting Presbyterians from Belfast and Catholics from Dublin, George Holmes himself was Protestant. Given the reputation of the school George attended and that leading members of Irish society apparently visited his house, it appears that George Holmes's family must have been reasonably wealthy. There was a Robert Holmes, a barrister, who married Mary Anne Emmet, the sister of Robert Emmet one of the rebellion leaders, but there is no evidence that he was related.

Tweddell says:

"George Holmes had the honour of being one of the units which made up that noble hundred thousand, About the year 1796, he married a young lady from Kilkenny. It was during one of those periods of bloodshed which have blazoned gules the vert shield of the Emerald Isle, that a body was borne past the door of their house, during the absence of George Holmes on duty, which his young wife feared was that of her husband, who was uninjured; but the shock so alarmed her that her nervous system suffered in consequence, and the doctors advised her removal to England, in the perturbed state of the country, as absolutely necessary to save her life. George Holmes, therefore, bade adieu to his loved native land, and went to Bristol about 1802, where his son Marcus was born the following year."

Tweddell does not mention Marcus's mother's name but the parish register for St Andrews in Clifton records Marcus's baptism in 1803 and gives Anna Holmes as his mother's name. Sadly Anna died shortly after Marcus's birth.

Following the death of his wife, George moved to London for a few years but in 1807 he married Mary Ann Anstie (1781-1858), a native of Devizes, Wiltshire and returned to Bristol. George and Mary Ann Holmes had three children, George, Mary Hester and Annie Catherine.

Tweddell tells very briefly about these three half-siblings of Marcus Holmes:

“- George, afterwards a physician, who died in Canada - Annie, married to the Rev John Curran, a Canadian clergyman, who was great nephew of the celebrated John Philpot Curran, and cousin of the late Right Reverend Doctor Cronyn, Lord Bishop of Huron – and Mary Holmes, a lady who is still living [in 1877], whose performances on the piano were very much admired at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the composer of numerous pieces of music which have been highly commended”.

Tweddell ends his description of George Holmes by saying:

“George Holmes was the intimate friend of Bird, Danby, and Eagles (the art-critic of Blackwood’s Magazine); was one of the leaders of the old school of Water-colour Painters; and, in conjunction with J. D. Harding, brought out lithography as applied to free hand drawing. He died in Canada, about the year 1852, whither he had emigrated some few years before.”

In ‘A Few Words about Miss Mary Holmes’* Christine Kyprianides (see also below) gives us a bit more about George Holmes’ life in Bristol saying that he worked primarily as a drawing master. She says that George’s wife, Mary Ann Holmes, established a boarding school in Brunswick Square.

In ‘Recollections of Marcus Holmes’ by ‘TG’, published in 1854 we are told *“we might record the generous devotion that Marcus displayed toward his father, who, pressed by pecuniary embarrassments, quitted England for Canada, where he died in a good old age, several years before his son”.*

William Sanigar in ‘Houses and People of Old St George’ published in 1936 adds: *“At the solicitation of these children [George and Annie], in 1850 their father joined them in Canada, where he ended his days”.*

It appears that George Holmes emigrated to Canada with his wife, Mary Ann, who outlived him by some six years.

Sanigar also tells us that:

“The Permanent Collection of the Bristol Art Gallery contains one of his water-colours, 18½ x 12½, entitled ‘View Near Blaize Castle’ and his merit can be also be judged from numerous examples of his work preserved in the Braikenridge Collection, both at the Museum and the Central Reference Library, Bristol”.

‘View Near Blaise Castle’ is still in the Bristol Museums collection along with others of George Holmes works. [Some have been digitised.](#)

Mary Hester Holmes, Half-Sister of Marcus Holmes

Born 9th September 1815, Bristol. Died 1st October 1878, Bournemouth

As described above, George Tweddell describes George and Mary Holmes' younger daughter as someone "*whose performances on the piano were very much admired at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and the composer of numerous pieces of music which have been highly commended*"

However, there was much more to Mary Hester Holmes than music, and her story has been published in some detail in a journal article by Christine Kyprianides published in 2017 under the title 'A Few Words about Miss Mary Holmes'* and available at JSTOR.

The title of Kyprianides' article stems from her research into the author of a series of articles published in the 'Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times' of London in May 1850 - Jan 1851. The series was entitled 'A Few Words about Music' and was by 'M.H.' The articles were expanded into a small book published in 1851.

A biographer in 1868 had incorrectly identified 'M.H.' as a Mrs Hullah and this had been repeated in later studies, but Kyprianides has shown that 'M.H.' was actually Mary Hester Holmes, daughter of George and Mary Holmes. She describes her as 'governess, composer, and Catholic convert'.

The full article is very much worth reading on JSTOR, below is a brief summary of the life of Mary Hester Holmes, with some quotes from Kyprianides.

With her mother, Mary Ann Holmes, at one time running a school it seems Mary had a good education, becoming 'proficient in literature and languages (French, German and Latin) as well as music'. Her mother apparently 'gave Mary a solid grounding in piano technique'.

'In 1837, at the age of twenty-two, Mary Holmes became caught up in the fever of the Tractarian Movement. Seeking guidance, she wrote to John Henry Newman in 1840 and he soon became her spiritual director'. This was the beginning of her '*voluminous correspondence*' with John Henry Newman, who later became Cardinal Newman. A number of their letters survive and have been '*studied, cited and reprinted*' much of it centred on religious questions. Mary Holmes also corresponded with William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope.

In 1843 Mary Hester Holmes published her first book 'Aunt Elinor's Lectures on Architecture, Dedicated to the Ladies of England'. At this time she was living in Sussex and working as a Governess, as she did for much of her life for different employers.

In 1844 Mary Hester Holmes converted to Catholicism – at the time a momentous decision. Her employer at the time had also converted and from 1846 she worked for the architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin another convert. By the late 1840s she was working in Yorkshire and at this time had several compositions published, she also contributed regularly to the 'Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times'. It was then that she started writing 'A Few Words about Music'.

The book was not a great success and so Mary returned to work as a governess and music teacher, at this time her parents emigrated to Canada. For a while she gave piano lessons to William Makepeace Thackeray's daughters.

At times Mary found herself in financial straits and she also suffered from ill health. *'Holmes continued to correspond regularly with Newman and later with Anthony Trollope'*. She wrote a novel which she was never able to get published and also unsuccessfully made several efforts to get verses published.

Mary finally retired from teaching and as her health worsened she moved to Bournemouth to live with her niece, Elizabeth Holmes' youngest daughter, Elizabeth Emra Brackenbury.

'Mary Holmes had indeed led a difficult life. She had been a gifted and talented girl who grew up at a time when formal higher education was denied to females, As an adult, she had to make her way without a supportive father, husband, or brother behind her. Her attempts at a literary career were hampered by the lack of self-discipline and focus necessary to build on her early accomplishments'.

*Friends of Troopers Hill
January 2026*

* "A FEW WORDS ABOUT MISS MARY HOLMES."

Victorian Literature and Culture, vol. 45, no. 3, 2017, pp. 527–47.

JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26788817> Accessed 18 Dec. 2025

Access to JSTOR is free but requires registration.

The Family of Elizabeth & Marcus Holmes

Elizabeth Emra

b 1804, St Pauls d 1843, Westbury-on-Trym

“Little Elizabeth”

“The Country Parsons Daughter”

Married 1833

St George

8 children

Marcus Holmes

b 1803, Bristol d 1854, Minehead

Artist & school master

Ann

b 1834, St George
d 1897 Haywards Heath
“Sister Mary Clare”

Henry

b 1835, St George
m Lucia Sheldon
d 1895, Mason County, Texas

Agnes

b 1837, St George
m Rev William Esdaile Burkitt
d 1904, Buttermere, Wilshire

John

b 1838, St George
(died age 2 days)

John Emra

b 1839, Cleeve
m Eliza Mawdesley
d 1909 Oundle
Author, “Emra Holmes”

Herbert

b 1841, St George
d 1854, drowned at sea

Marian

b 1842, St George
m Libert Chandler
d 1909, Salem, Virginia, USA

Elizabeth

b 1843, Westbury
m Edmund B Brackenbury
d 1897 Bournemouth