

# Harry Bingham Thomas, 1856 – 1913

by Brian Stevenson, Kentucky, USA

As did many other amateur microscopists of the Victorian era, H.B. Thomas advertised extensively to exchange his slides for those of other enthusiasts. As a result, Thomas' slides spread far and wide, to join a large number of slide collections. Some of his mounts bear labels with Thomas' printed name, although a considerable number appear to have been produced without identification. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate several of Harry Thomas' preparations, as aids to help identify other examples of his work. Published records of Thomas' interest in microscopy date his slides from between 1872 and 1879.



**Figure 1.** Microscope slides prepared by H.B. Thomas. The leftmost slide bears his name and address of Boston, Lincolnshire, England, and so dates from the early 1870s. The rightmost slide does not carry an address, so it may predate the left slide, or may be a later preparation from when Thomas lived away from his parents' home. In 1873, however, he offered material from "Several fine and rich newly discovered diatom deposits from Aberdeen", which may have included the material that was mounted in the rightmost slide. The "Object No." labels are generic, and do not necessarily indicate that a slide was made by Thomas.

H.B. Thomas is mentioned briefly in Brian Bracegirdle's *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters*. An entry for "R.B. Thomas" of Boston probably refers to H.B., a likely misreading of the old English style print on Thomas' labels (see the leftmost slide in Figure 1, above). Bracegirdle illustrates two mounts by Thomas, slide A of plate 35, and the unattributed slide H of plate 52.

Harry Bingham Thomas was born July 17, 1856, in Boston, Lincolnshire, England. He was the third son of John Halliday and Anne Thomas. Harry's father was a successful businessman and public servant. The 1861 census recorded John H. Thomas as being a "Chemist and Soda Water Maker employing 5 men and 6 boys", and the 1871 census described him as a "Justice of the Peace, Land Owner, Wine Merchant, Soda Water Manufacturer, Chemist employing 8 men". At the time of the 1861 census, the Thomas family employed a cook, a housemaid and a nurse for 4 year-old Harry, and in 1871 employed a Lady's maid, a housemaid and a cook. The Thomases were also able to afford to send their third son to Cambridge University.

I did not find any records of Harry Thomas joining any microscopy or other scientific clubs. His first published offers to exchange prepared slides with other microscopists appeared in May, 1872, when he was only 15 years old. Throughout 1872, he offered preparations of diatoms and foraminifera, which would have been relatively simple for the young man to prepare. He offered quite a variety of specimens, however. Following are exchange offers from Thomas that appeared during 1872 in *Hardwicke's Science-Gossip*, a premier magazine for communicating with other scientists:

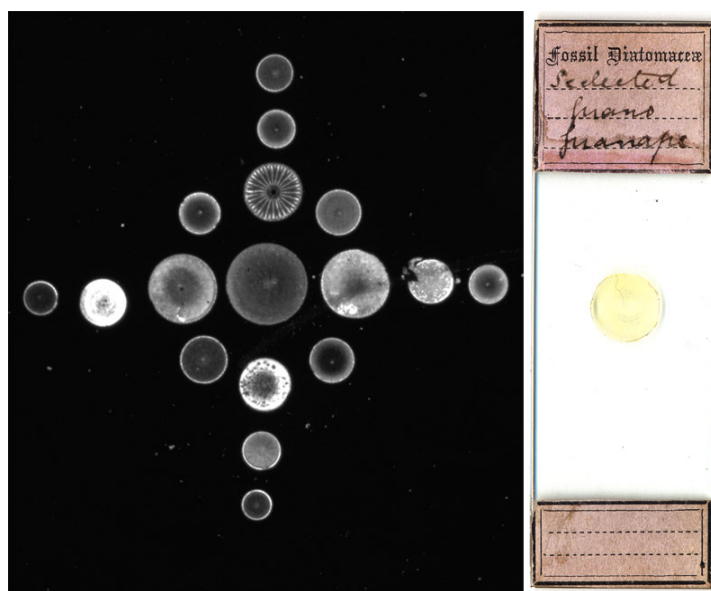
*Trachea of Centipede or Ox Parasites, in exchange for well-mounted Polycistina. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

*Well-mounted Tongue of Bee, for Diatoms from Guano, mounted and named. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston.*

*Well-mounted fossil Diatomaceae from Oran, Algiers, for ditto from Mull, Bermuda, or Algoa Bay. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston.*

*Fossil Diatomaceae, Ebstorff, Hanover, or Orbitolites cornplanatus, both well mounted, for other slides. Names required. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston.*

*Well-mounted slides of diatoms, &c, for unmounted and unprepared diatomaceous earths. Names required. N.B. Except Toomebridge. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston.*



**Figure 2.** Diatoms selected from guano and arranged by H.B. Thomas. This arrangement is quite good, considering that Thomas was an amateur and probably made the slide before he turned 24.

Exchange slides offered in 1873 showed Thomas diversifying in his preparations. In March, he offered “*geological*” slides, possibly thin-sectioned minerals. In August, he offered thin sections of hard biological tissues such as horns and hooves, which make desirable objects for viewing with crossed polarizing filters (i.e. polariscope). Figure 1 (above) illustrates two such slides, sections of rhinoceros horn and grizzly bear claw. The following exchange offers appeared in *Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* during 1873:

*Chalina oculata (a spiculous sponge), for named unmounted sections of canes and peppertree. - H.B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

*Well-Mounted Sections of Teeth, &c, from coal, for well mounted Geological Microscopic Slides.*  
- H.B. Thomas, 13, Market Place, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Well-Mounted Slides for injections: opaque preferred. A liberal exchange for good ones.* - Harry B. Thomas, 13, Market-place, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Wanted, Diatomaceous Earths, chiefly Springfield, Barbadoes, Nottingham, and Yarra, for well-mounted slides.* - Send list to H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Excellently prepared Slides of Sections of Hoofs and Horn for Polar, for Diatoms unmounted, either recent or fossil.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Several fine and rich newly discovered diatom deposits from Aberdeen, named, for other good material, &c.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Good well-mounted Slides, various, offered for good unmounted objects, &c.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Section 1 in. long of Fruit of Palm, well-mounted, for slides or material.-* Send list to H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Well mounted Slides of Rare Diatoms and Polycistina, Springfield, Barbadoes, for Diatom Earths, Guanos, &c.-* H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

Thomas continued to primarily offer diatom slides during 1875:

*Wanted, good slides of Isthmia nervosa, good Naviculae, and Cuxhaven Mud Diatoms for first-class Slides.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Well-mounted and well-prepared Polycistina and rare Diatomaceae, Springfield, Barbadoes, for diatomaceous material.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Well-mounted Foraminifera from Pacific, 1,400 fathoms, for good Diatom or other Slides and material.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*First-class Slides of pure gatherings of Rhabdonema arcuatum and Gomphonema germinatum, &c., for other really good Slides or material.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Well-mounted and prepared Diatomaceae from Richmond, Virginia, or Yarra Yarra, for Diatomaceous Material and pieces of Holothuriae, cleaned or uncleaned.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*First-Class Slides of Navicula bombus, Odontium undulatum, Rhabdonema arcuatum, R minutum, Fragilaria assumis and undosa, for other really good Slides.* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*Six first-class well-mounted Micro-slides, various subjects, for each number of "Quarterly Journal of Microscopic Science."* - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

*A perfectly pure gathering of Navicula humerosa, well mounted and prepared, for good Slides or Material.-* Send lists to H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.

In the autumn of 1875, 19 year-old Harry Thomas matriculated at St. Peter's College (Peterhouse), Cambridge University. An exchange offer in Hardwicke's Science-Gossip that December is the last known record of Thomas' involvement with amateur microscopy for the next four years. His request, for mounted chemical crystals, was probably a search for study aids. Other, earlier exchange offers of 1875 were:

*"Hogg on the Microscope," and six Slides offered for "Carpenter on the Microscope." - H.B. Thomas, Boston. Lincolnshire.*

*Liberal Exchange in really first-class Objects, for superior Diatomaceous Material from South America, Africa, or Asia, or other really good stuff. - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

*Well mounted Slides of various Diatoms, for others, or Material: must be good. - H.B. Thomas, Boston, Lincolnshire.*

*Wanted, some well-prepared and well-mounted Chemical Crystals: the commonest kinds not wanted. - Send lists, &c, to H.B. Thomas, St. Peter's Coll., Cambridge.*

Harry Thomas earned his B.A. degree from Cambridge in 1879. That January, which would have been a few months before graduation, he posted his last known microscopy notice:

*Slides of diatoms, hoofs, horns of animals, &c., well-mounted, for other well-mounted objects. - H.B. Thomas, 34 Montpelier Street, Montpelier Square, S.W., London.*

Thomas appeared in the 1881 census as an "articled clerk solicitors", living in a lodging house in Landport, Portsea, Hampshire. He passed his final examinations in law that November 8-9.

According to his obituary, Harry Thomas moved to Sydney, Australia in approximately 1883. He married in 1885, "January 8, at St. John's, Dalringhurst, by the Rev. Arthur W. Pain, B.A., Harry Bingham Thomas (B.A., Cantab.), youngest son of the late John Halliday Thomas, Esq., J.P., of Bolton (sic), England, to Harriette Annie Sloper". Annie was a daughter of George Warren, who had been a General in the Afghan and Indian wars.

Thomas began working as a Title Examiner for the Australian government in 1891.

He was admitted as a Pensioner of Peterhouse, Cambridge University, in 1912.

The June 30, 1913 *Sydney Morning Herald* announced,

*"DEATH OF MR. H. B. THOMAS.*

*The death occurred suddenly on Saturday afternoon at his residence at Neutral Bay, of Mr. Harry Bingham Thomas, examiner of titles at the Registrar-General's Office. Mr. Thomas had been absent from duty for a couple of weeks on account of a severe attack of gout, and had apparently made rapid progress toward recovery. He went for a short walk on Saturday morning, and shortly afterwards his heart became affected, and he expired suddenly. Having graduated at Cambridge University, and being called to the bar in London, deceased came to Sydney about 20 years ago, and after having been associated with a leading law firm, commenced practice on his own account. Fifteen years ago he was appointed an examiner of titles at the Registrar-General's Office, and rose in the service until he became head of the staff. He was 56 years of age, and leaves a widow and daughter."*

This and other illustrated essays of historical microscopy may also be seen at the author's website, <http://microscopist.net>

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## **Resources**

*Admissions to Peterhouse or St. Peter's college in the University of Cambridge (1912) "Harry Bingham Thomas, son of John Holliday Thomas Esq<sup>re</sup> (deceased) and educated at Boston Grammar School, was admitted a Pensioner. B.A. 1879. Born 17 July 1856. Rec. by Rev. G. E. Pattenden, LL.D. Sometime of Lansdowne Villa, 70 Englefeld Road, Canonbury, N."*

Bracegirdle, Brian (1998) *Microscopical Mounts and Mounters*, Quekett Microscopical Club, London, page 93 and plates 35-A and 52-H

England census, birth and marriage records, accessed through [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk)

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1872) Exchange offers from Harry B. Thomas, Vol. 8, pages 120, 168, 192, 240 and 264

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1873) Exchange offers from Harry B. Thomas, Vol. 9, pages 24, 72, 96, 120, 192, 216, 264 and 284

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1874) Exchange offers from Harry B. Thomas, Vol. 10, pages 48, 72, 120, 144, 216, 240, 264 and 284

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1875) Exchange offers from Harry B. Thomas, Vol. 11, pages 72, 90, 216 and 281

*Hardwicke's Science-Gossip* (1879) Exchange offer from Harry B. Thomas, Vol. 15, page 24

*Public Service List, New South Wales* (1904) page 27

*Solicitors' Journal and Reporter* (1881) Examination results, Vol. 26, page 81

*The Sydney Morning Herald* (1885) Marriages: Thomas-Warren, January 15

*The Sydney Morning Herald* (1913) Death of Mr. H.B. Thomas, June 30, page 10

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