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EDITORIAL NOTICE

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DANIEL HOLT THE NEWARK RADICAL, PUBLISHER AND PAINEITE MARTYR

R.W.Morrell

On January 29, 1799, Daniel Holt died of tuberculosis in the small Nottinghamshire town of Newark, at the early age of 33. Few people, even in his hometown, appear to have heard of him, yet for the latter part of his short life he did much to promote in Nottinghamshire radical political reform and what we now popularly term human rights, being, in so far as I can discover, the only person in the county to have been prosecuted for printing and publishing a work by Thomas Paine.

Holt's father, Simeon (he may have changed this to Simon, as he is listed in a trades directory of 1784 as Simon Holt), a native of Edmondsthorpe Leicestershire, settled in Newark with his wife Mary, where he established himself as a nurseryman and seedsman. His business prospered and he appears to have had a happy married life, his wife giving birth to five children, four boys and a girl, of which Daniel was the second oldest, being born in April 1766 and baptised at Newark's parish church of St.Mary Magdalen on the 25th. of that month. No record as to where he was educated appears to have survived, but considering he was to become a printer, bookbinder, stationer, writer, poet, newspaper editor, bookseller and, of all things, upholsterer, the presupposition must be that he may well have attended the Magnus Grammar School in the town, although there is no reference to him in its published history.¹ Interestingly, Holt's older radical contemporary, Major John Cartwright (1740-1824), received his education at the school. There is no record of the two having become friends, though this is quite probable considering the similarity in their political opinions, however, they are certainly known to have met.

Holt served a seven year apprenticeship in the shop of the Newark printer, James Tomlinson, but set up in business (competition) for himself shortly after completing it, perhaps with financial help from his father. At what date he did so is not on record, however, assuming he was about fourteen when he took out his apprentices's indentures it would have been some time after 1787 but prior to 1790, for in that year he printed a work entitled, *The Old and New Charter granted to the Town of Newark by Charles I and Charles II.*

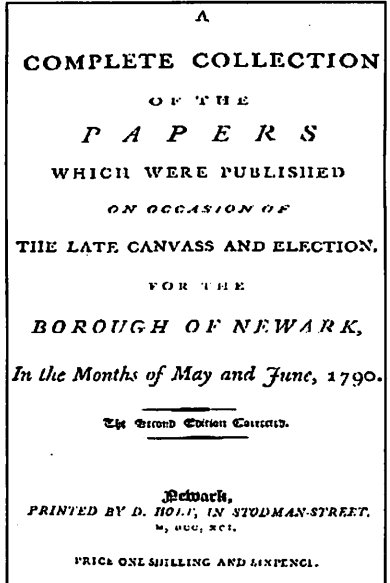


John Cartwright

M.J. Smith has suggested it was before 1789,² for on February 19th of that year he married Eliza Hankin by license, although Smith does not name her.³ His wife was to give him four children, three boys and a girl, one of the former dying in infancy.

Had Daniel Holt been content to remain an apolitical small town tradesman he would probably have lived far longer and left a flourishing business to his heirs. But he was a man of principle who refused to keep quiet about his political convictions which were opposed to those of the dukes of Newcastle and Rutland and the Sutton and Manners families, who were related to the latter and who collectively controlled the town council, even the town clerk, Job Brough, was also an employee of the duke of Newcastle. There were, of course, many in Newark who shared Holt's radicalism and local elections often tended to be bitter, sometimes violent, encounters between the blues and the reds, as the two major political factions were termed. Ironically, in light of current usage, the blues were the radicals while the reds were the 'constitutionalists', as they liked to be thought of, although, as might be expected, there were times when the distinction between the two became blurred. Holt first exhibited his political colour when he publicly espoused the cause of the radical candidate, Richard Paxton, in the election of 1790. In his account of the two month electoral campaign he clearly implies there to have been considerable irregularities in the poll in which, it should be added, Paxton came last.⁴

According to Thomas Blagg, Holt founded Newark's first newspaper in 1791, calling it, *The Newark Herald*,⁵ its full title being, *The Newark Herald and Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire General Advertiser*, the first issue was published on Wednesday, October 5, from Holt's shop in Stodman street, a narrow thoroughfare which still exists and leads to Newark's market square, the focal point of the town then as now. The location of the shop in the street is now uncertain for the practice of numbering individual premises had not been introduced when Holt lived, however, a clue is provided by Blagg who wrote of it being 'on the site of the (*Newark*) *Advertiser* publishing offices'⁶ although he offers no evidence



supportive of this. It is known that when Blagg wrote the *Advertiser* offices were at 30 Stodman street, but as the practice of using street numbers appears to have been discontinued by all but a few shops in present-day Stodman street, we are left to guess just where number thirty was. However, as a handful of numbers can still be seen I calculate on the basis of these that Holt's shop was located where Boots now stands, although I stand to be corrected on this.

Although Holt claimed his paper would be politically neutral, it became obvious from the first issue that this was not the case and it would be strongly supportive of radical and reform causes, although his political philosophy can hardly be described as extreme or even revolutionary, an opinion perhaps not shared by those of his local contemporaries opposed to his beliefs. As there were no church rates in the town it had a considerable electorate, in fact one of the largest in the country, a fact which made elections in the town extremely interesting. Newcastle and Rutland and their associates may have considered it a 'pocket borough' but they could not rely upon it remaining so, particularly as the town's newspaper was hostile to them. The many radical supporters in the town must be considered to have formed the customer base for the *Herald*, though to be fair to Holt he did seek to cater for the non-radical elements in the local population by publishing news of the views and activities of those with whose political beliefs he differed strongly from. Nevertheless, overall his paper was clearly radical in its selection of political information. Detailed coverage was given to national and international events, which in respect of the latter tended to emphasise what was happening in France, being presented in a supportive or sympathetic manner. He certainly appears to have taken some pleasure in the news of the abolition of aristocratic and ecclesiastical titles in France, if the space devoted to the news is anything to go upon.⁷ Holt was a strong opponent of the slave trade and gave extensive and prominent coverage to parliamentary debates about it. Notice was also taken of the activities of radical organisations, among them a commemorative celebration held in London by the Revolution Society (the revolution in question being that which had overthrown Charles I) attended by many leading radicals, including Thomas Paine, whose health was toasted during the proceedings.⁸ All in all, Holt's newspaper, a weekly not a daily, represents a good example of a late 18th century provincial paper, perhaps at times a bit long-winded or even pompous, but even now still very readable.

Poetry was a regular feature of the *Herald*, many of the offerings, all anonymous in respect of author, being political in content which, one suspects, were written by Holt himself. Some versified sympathetically, if

not enviously, about France, one of the earliest being titled: 'Ode on a Distant View of France from Dover Cliff', which envisioned Franco-British co-operation once the political situation in Britain had changed. A few sample lines read:

*Militant shadows - hence away!
His to some dark, unletter'd shore!
Behold the dawn of reasons day -
Britain and France contend no more.
In Freedom's cause from age to age,
Shall both with equal warmth engage,
Pursue the same exalted plan,
And vindicate on Earth the RIGHTS OF MAN.*

Another rather longer poem, which I have little hesitation in attributing to Holt, takes Edmund Burke to task with a vengeance, tearing into him with no holds barred. It is entitled, 'The Life, Death and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke',⁹ three sample verses follow:

*But heavens ills on Edmund wait,
He seeks to 'scape in vain -
For but there rush'd a fierce foe,
Whose dreaded name was Paine*

*This dreaded foe when Edmund saw,
He felt his fate and sigh'd.
But ere the approaching blow could fall,
He fainted, gasped and died.*

*And now this wandering spectre walks,
By night and shy by day,
A warning to the thoughtless crew,
That beauty leads astray.*

Hardly brilliant poetry, but typical of late 18th century political verse (many radicals, including Paine, were inclined at times to get poetic, as were their opponents, whose efforts can be found in the pages of *The Anti-Jacobin*). The reference to the death of Burke is odd, for he did not die until 1797, so perhaps this is a coded reference to his failure to reply to Paine's *Rights of Man*, which had been published in February, 1791, being the most effective reply to Burke's defence of privilege in pre-revolutionary France and his musings on government as offered in his book, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791).

In the *Newark Herald's* issue for February 22, 1792, Holt published an extract from Part 2 of *Rights of Man*, describing it as 'just published' and prefacing the extract with the following comment: 'From this masterly publication, we shall continue to lay before our readers extracts as will be generally interesting, from the discussion which it will undoubtedly

occasion'. However, he does not appear to have put this promise into effect for no further extracts appeared in the paper, presumably because the second part of *Rights of Man* had been banned when Paine had been found guilty of seditious libel, for Holt said he had stopped selling the book 'as soon as it was judged a libel',¹⁰ however, he did publish Paine's letter to Lord Onslow Cranley¹¹ and devoted an entire page to his letter to Henry Dundas, then the Home Secretary.¹²

In his final issue, Holt refers to having only planned to publish his paper for three years, a comment which does not ring true. He goes on to say it would now become *The Midland Mercury*, making it clear he would not be running the new paper, although he commends it to his readers. From the single issue of this scarce publication I have examined it seemed to lack the vigour of the *Herald*, which may explain why it folded after only twenty-five issues, the title being acquired by the Leicester radical publisher and bookseller, Richard Phillips, who merged it with his own *Leicester Herald*. Phillips had been imprisoned for selling Paine's, *Rights of Man*, but eventually made his peace with the establishment and ended up with a knighthood! Holt printed another paper, *The Briton*, from the first issued dated January 23, 1793 to what appears to have been its final issue dated January 22, 1794. Whether he contributed anything to it is impossible to say, but it is made clear on the title page of what can best be described as a weekly pamphlet concentrating on a single issue that he only printed it, 'for the editors', who, like all contributors, remained anonymous. The first issue took a swipe enthusiastic republicans, mentioning Paine by name, while later in the same issue there is a reference to 'the impecius rhapsodies' of Paine and Burke. Those behind *The Briton* saw it as a publication of moderation, or as the title of the only article in No.23 reads, 'Moderation the Test of Understanding'. Only one article really can be said to reflect Holt's views and that is No.62, which is taken up with an essay in the form of a dialogue between two people about the slave trade, coming down heavily points wise against it. Whether Holt compiled this one cannot say but he may have. There is no doubt that he promoted the new publication with some some enthusiasm, even sending the first issue out free of charge, presumably to subscribers to his own paper. A notice published in the *Herald* describes *The Briton* as being unconnected with any party and 'totally attached to the public good', a form of words echoing Holt's announcement in the *Herald* in January 1793, that he adhered to 'the party of the people'¹³

Appearing in the *Herald* for May 30, 1792, was the text of the 'Kings Proclamation', which was repeated in a subsequent issue. This was aimed specifically at Thomas Paine and the second part of his *Rights of*

Man, although neither he or his book are named. The proclamation was instrumental in prompting 'patriots' throughout the country to hold meetings which passed addresses condemning Paine. Responding to these he threw caution to the wind and replied with his, *An Address to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation*, which, as the Paine scholar, A.O. Aldridge, observed, was certainly seditious, being an 'open appeal for swift and immediate revolution.'¹⁴ Holt rather unwisely played into the hands of his political enemies by reprinting the *Address* as a separate publication so what followed was predictable, the newly formed Newark Association for the Support of the Constitution instituting proceedings against him on the grounds that in publishing Paine's letter, and another by John Cartwright, he has committed seditious libel. Holt was in prison when the charge was brought against him for early in 1793 he had been found guilty at the Nottingham Assizes of having libelled the Newark Town Clerk, Job Brough in his *Complete Collection of the Papers...* (see ref. 5) and had been sentenced to six months in prison plus a fine of £50 on May 11. Abigail Gawthorn of Nottingham, a relative of Brough, described him in her private diary following his death after a riding accident in January 1806 as 'a worthy man and much respected.'¹⁵ It is possible that despite the political differences between the two Brough, a solicitor, would have withdrawn his action had Holt made a public apology, however, there was a stubborn streak to his character and no apology was forthcoming. However, as the jury in the libel case was special jury, the possibility of there being a political element behind Brough's decision to sue Holt cannot be excluded from consideration. Brough, was, after all, known to be in the pay of the duke of Newcastle, against whom Holt had campaigned. In having him sent to prison the red element in Newark had got rid, at least for a time, of a political 'gadfly' who they would have liked to, but could not, ignore.

On July 19, 1793, Holt was again in court, this time charged on an *ex officio* information with seditious libel, presumably provided by a member of the Newark Association, as in his *Vindication* Holt refers to a clergyman, who he knew was a supporter of the association, having come into his shop and asked to buy a copy of *Rights of Man*, which he had refused to sell him as it was a banned book, even though the ban only applied to Part 2. Once more a special jury was enrolled and this time none other than the Attorney-General, Sir Archibald Macdonald, himself was present to lead the prosecution. In turn Holt's defence was led by one of the most able and expensive attorney's to appear in political trials, Sir Thomas Erskine, who had defended Paine when he was charged with the same offence in 1792. The use of *ex officio* information was favoured by the authorities in their campaign to

suppress agitation for reform as it permitted harsher penalties to be imposed if the accused was found guilty. To help bring this about a second course of action was employed, the use of a special jury. This allowed jury members to be vetted and thus made it almost impossible for the accused to have a fair trial for the odds were stacked against the defence. In short, special juries were nothing more than rigged juries, as the Chief Justice of England, Lord Ellenborough, once let slip, when he acknowledged that, 'Special Juries were required for special purposes.'¹⁶ When such a jury was called for the local Sheriff would submit a list of forty-eight prospective jurors to the Master of the Crown Office who was then able to select those considered as supporters of the prosecution, although, as might be expected, this was denied despite the evidence to the contrary, while excluding those considered likely to favour the accused. Commenting upon these juries, T.J.Wooler, the editor of the radical journal, *The Black Dwarf*, observed, 'The nature of Special Juries was unknown to the primitive spirit of our laws. They have resulted from those encroachments upon our rights, of which corrupt lawyers have been in all ages the willing agents. To trust the judgement of the people with themselves was a dangerous check to the designs of despotism. The mass of the nation could neither be influenced by fear, nor corrupted by avarice. It became necessary for power to invent some *expedient*, to take indirectly into its own hands the judgment which it wished to pass upon the rude licence of those who might offend its pleasure. Cases of *peculiar importance* were pretended, upon which the *commonality*, the ignorant *commonality*, "the swinish multitude,"¹⁷ were incompetent to judge, and Special Juries became the order of the day.'¹⁸ Wooler also described the employment of these juries as rendering trial by jury 'a mere farce played between the Crown Judges, the Crown Lawyers, the Master of the Crown Office and the Ministers of the Crown.'

The charge of seditious libel was, as noted above, for having published Paine's *Address...* and another essay, this being John Cartwright's, *An Address to the Inhabitants of Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham and Manchester, and Other Unrepresented Towns on Parliamentary Reform*, the title of which Holt changed at the suggestion of local radicals, to, *An Address to the Tradesmen, Mechanics, Labourers, and Other Inhabitants of the Town of Newark, on the subject of Parliamentary Reform*. Cartwright's essay had been published in 1782 and since then no attempt had been made to suppress it, which was perhaps understandable as it was known to have had the approval of William Pitt, Prime Minister from 1783 until 1801 and from 1804 until 1806, and numerous other influential individuals unconnected with radicalism, though sympathetic to reform,

If Holt had made a serious blunder in republishing Paine's essay, he had no reason to suspect there would be any threat to him from having reprinting Cartwright's essay, even if given a new title. If Holt had committed seditious libel by printing and publishing Cartwright's essay then why did he escape legal action? This question was to exercise Holt considerably when he came to write his *Vindication...* Could it be that the anonymous provider of the *information* knew nothing of the work's history, being misled by the change of title? On the other hand, there can be little doubt that Cartwright's wealth and his political connections (he was a friend of the Prime Minister) probably protected him from prosecution; it was easy to prosecute a small-town publisher such as Holt, but it was another matter when it came to an individual who had links with the establishment, even if he was well known for his radicalism.¹⁹

According to the charge, Holt had 'wickedly, maliciously and seditiously designing, contriving and intending to disturb the peace and tranquillity of the kingdom' by publishing the essays, and while Erskine conducted an able defence the rigged jury ensured the required verdict was brought in. Holt was sentenced to two years imprisonment, a fine of £50 and ordered to provide a surety of £200 along with two others of £50 each for his good behaviour for the next five years. These figures may appear small by present day values but in terms of 18th century values they represented fines amounting to several thousand pounds and while they did not bankrupt him they effectively destroyed Holt financially. He served his sentence in London's notorious Newgate Prison, sharing a cell with three other radicals, the London booksellers and publishers, H.D.Symonds and James Ridgway and a Nonconformist minister, the Rev.William Winterbotham. The imprisonment of the four men was commemorated on a penny copper token issued in Middlesex in 1794 in order to provide them with financial help, one side being inscribed with the words: 'Payable at the residence of Messrs Symonds Winterbotham Ridgway & Holt', the other showing an illustration of the prison. Holt appealed against having to serve his sentence in London but this was rejected.

While in prison Holt wrote and published an essay explaining his actions and beliefs which he entitled, *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Printer of the Newark Herald....* Published in 1794 it rapidly went through two editions and around 1826 another appears to have been published. In this book Holt shows he had retained his sense of humour despite financial ruin and ailing health. Commenting upon the prosecution's star identification witness, he ably and humorously exposes the almost farcical character of this aspect of the case against

him. The prosecution was attempting to show Holt to be a dangerous revolutionary and to do so produced a witness named as Bland. This character claimed he had been riding past Holt's printing shop when he saw a person posting a bill opposite. Stopping to read this he was handed a copy by the billposter, who remained nameless. He also said he had observed another individual inside Holt's office who was wearing a paper cap inscribed with the words, 'Liberty and Equ', however, he could not actually identify the person concerned, though the implication was clear, the prosecution wanted it to be believed that it was Holt himself. About this witness Holt comments, "Either from the weakness of Mr. Bland's optic nerves, or the treachery of his memory, he unfortunately could not say what other letters finishes this alarming sentence".²⁰ Throughout his *Vindication* Holt defends his political beliefs and actions vigorously, although one gets the impression that much of the old fire so evident in his newspaper had evaporated away. Nevertheless he offers no apologies or regrets, though he denies he was a revolutionary and insists his aim was to achieve political reform.

What appears to have puzzled Holt the most was having been charged for publishing Cartwright's essay, which he asserts had been originally published 'under the sanction and with the approbation of Mr. Pitt', indeed, he even suggests it was actually 'composed and written by Mr. Pitt, the Duke of Richmond and other eminent persons who stand high in his Majesty's favour'.²¹ He also reproduces as an appendix a speech by Pitt supportive of reform as an illustration of the fact that Pitt's ideas on the subject did not differ substantially with his own or Cartwright's. He also pointed out that when he had reprinted Paine's, *Address...* it had not been legally declared to be libellous, moreover, he actually felt honoured as having been prosecuted before it was pronounced a libel in London and the author or primary publisher prosecuted for it.²² He was strongly of the opinion that 'the real *object* (his emphasis) at which all the artillery of persecution had been directed' was his newspaper, but despite this it was still flourishing.²³

Prior to being imprisoned Holt was closely involved with several radical and reform organisations in both Newark and Nottingham. He

VINDICATION
OF THE
CONDUCT and PRINCIPLES
OF THE PRINTER OF
The Newark Herald:
AN APPEAL
TO THE
JUSTICE OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND,
ON THE RESULT OF TWO RECENT
AND
EXTRAORDINARY PROSECUTIONS
FOR LIBELS.
WITH AN APPENDIX.
BY DANIEL HOLT,
PRINTER OF THE NEWARK HERALD.

UNDESIRABLE WRITINGS ARE GENERALLY BROUGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN BY THE PEOPLE, THAT ARE IN THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO READ THEM. Lord Bacon.

Newark;
PRINTED AND SOLD BY THE AUTHOR;
SOLD ALSO BY SUTTON, NOTTINGHAM; WALKER, SHEFFIELD;
H. D. FISHER, PATERNOSTER-ROW; J. BIRCHWAY,
YORK-STREET; D. L. LAYTON, NEW GATE;
STREET; AND S. CROSSBY, STATIONER'S COURT, LONDON,
M.DCC.XCIV.

was a member of the Nottingham Society for Parliamentary Reform and the Nottingham Political Society, whose literature he printed, this suggests the Nottingham radicals may have experienced some difficulty in finding a sympathetic printer locally. He was appointed librarian to the Newark Book Society in 1791 (he also ran a circulating library as part of his business) and in 1792 became a supporter of the Associated Friends of the Unfortunate, which was established in Newark on June 25, of that year for the purpose of providing financial help for political prisoners.²⁴ It may be that this organisation was called upon to assist Holt financially. He was also a publicly spirited man, for when a public subscription was raised to provide the streets of Newark with lamps, he contributed fifteen shillings and six pence towards the cost of lighting Stodman street, this being among the largest donations given by the street's residents and tradesmen. The donation carries the implication that at the time Holt's business was prospering, indeed in March of the same year we find him advertising for an apprentice.

Daniel Holt was released on November 25, 1797, returning to Newark 'in a nobleman's carriage' to be greeted by the bells of Balderton and Newark parish churches, according to Blagg,²⁵ who regrettably fails to identify the nobleman concerned, though it indicates that there were many in Newark and district sympathetic to him. The years spent in prison had not only ruined Holt financially but also badly effected his health, which must have made it difficult to rebuild his business, although he certainly tried to, perhaps aided I believe by his by his wife who probably also ran it when he was in prison. Holt's father and mother had died while he was incarcerated and in 1798 his son, Hankin died at the age of seven months. A few months later Holt himself died and was buried in the churchyard of St.Mary Magdalen, perhaps in the same grave as his infant son. He left no will and in April 1799 two administrators, John Huddleston and John Falland, were appointed to administer his estate, or what there was of it, being empowered to use his goods, chattels and credits to meet his debts. They drew up an itemised list of his property and assets, which does not appear to have survived, though reference is made to it in one of their official documents; all we know for certain is that his assets were assessed at less than £1,000, although just how much less is anyone's guess.

On February 7, 1803, Holt's widow Eliza married Matthew Hage, whose name had appeared along with that of Holt, with the latter in the senior position, as printers (also publishers) of a work on Nottinghamshire by the local historian, W.Dickinson, in 1801, which indicates the printing business had survived Daniel Holt's death. Other works

followed until 1803 when a religious work was printed by Hage alone. Not long after the printer's name was given on books as Hage and Son, and in 1826 it changes to H. & J.Hage. It was Hage and Son who may have re-issued Holt's *Vindication*, as the title appears in an advert they published from their printing establishment in Stodman street, presumably Holt's old premises.²⁶

There is supposed to be a print showing a likeness of Holt but I have been unable to locate a copy. You will find no monument or commemorative plaque to him in present-day Newark, where even the site of his grave is lost; if there was a memorial over it this, too, has disappeared. However the interior of the parish church is littered with memorials to townspeople and others who in most cases if compared with Holt are nonentities. Nor does Robert Mellors in his collection of Nottinghamshire biographies have an entry for him, though he excludes many who deserve an entry while including many who do not.²⁷ In 1968 the Newark Archaeological and Local History Society planned to have a plaque erected to Holt,²⁸ but nothing appears to have come of the proposal. Perhaps, then, in the year in which the 200th anniversary of the death of a brave man has already past without notice in Newark, and elsewhere, the time has come to rectify the neglect.

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16. Wooler, T.J. *An Appeal to the Citizens of London against the Alleged Lawful Mode of Packing Special Juries*. London, T.J.Wooler, (1817). p.10.
17. A phrase Edmund Burke employed to describe ordinary people. Thomas Spence, a radical, issued a journal which he titled, *Pigs Meat* (1793-6) - he was sent to prison, of course. Holt also referred to the term twice in his *Vindication*...(pp.9 & 11).
18. Wooler, *ibid*. p.4.
19. John Cartwright (1740-1824 had been a naval officer and having resigned from the navy

was appointed a major in the Nottinghamshire militia in 1775. His radical political opinions led to him being dismissed in 1792 'by', according to his supporters, an illegal manoeuvre'. In the event, Cartwright appeared at Holt's trial as a defence witness.

20. *Vindication* p.31.
21. *Vindication* p.53.
22. *Vindication* pp.13-14.
23. *Vindication* p.10.
24. *NH*. 11 July, 1792.
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Acknowledgements

The writer would like to thank the staff of the Local History Department of Nottingham Central Library, Nottinghamshire Archives Office, the Local History Department of Newark Public Library, the Librarian of the Working-Class Movement Library at Salford and Glynn Hughes of Newark Museum for the help they have given him. I also owe a debt to Mr.Dorling of Newark who is also researching into Holt's life and work with a view to publishing a paper on him and who contacted me when he learned of my interest. He was kind enough to share some of his ideas with me and drew my attention to certain material I had not been aware of. I suspect that there will be a measure of overlap between our two papers but hopefully they will compliment each other, although I also suspect we may differ on the interpretation of some material. I must thank Mr.Dorling for helping to point me towards sources which filled some of the gaps in my information on Holt.

* * * * *

THE WIFE OF A REVOLUTIONARY

Christopher Rumsey

ELIZABETH, the wife of the famous (if not, infamous) revolutionary, Thomas Paine,^a died in Cranbrook on 17 July, 1808, and lies buried in the churchyard of St.Dunstan's. This fact is well known and is recorded by Tarbutt¹ and also by Pile.² The local newspaper for Cranbrook (the *Maidstone Journal*), contained the following announcement on 19 July, 1808:³

'Sunday morning, at her brother's house at Cranbrook, in the 68th.^b year of her age, Mrs.Pain, wife of the notorious Mr.Thomas Paine, author of the Rights of Man, to whom she was married, at

Lewes, in Sussex, in the year 1771.^c She had lived only three years with this Assertor of Rights, when a separation took place, occasioned by his brutal behaviour to her, since which she has lived with her friends. She was the daughter of Mr. Ollive, a respectable tradesman in Lewes; she lived much respected, and died sincerely lamented - a firm Believer in Christ and the Truths of the Christian Religion - may his last days be like hers!

It will be seen that the obituary is used as much to vilify Thomas Paine, as it is to lament Elizabeth's passing. No doubt composed by her brother (in fact half-brother), Thomas Ollive, with whom she had lived in Cranbrook, the obituary reads like a cathartic rant, inveighing not only against Paine as an 'assertor of rights', but also by implication against his lack of Christian beliefs. A charitable interpretation of the final words of the obituary is that they refer to the example Elizabeth gave in her Christian readiness to embrace the life to come, rather than to any particular painful terminal illness that she had suffered. Clearly, it would have been possible for the obituary not to have made any reference to Paine himself. The implication must be that Elizabeth's relationship to Paine was so well known that it would have seemed odd if it had not been mentioned. However, if it were to be mentioned, the treatment of Paine was to be one of censure. The fact was that, except in radical circles, Paine remained an anathema. Moreover, in this case the customary vituperation is heavily overlaid with personal animosity.

In essence, Paine's notoriety derived from the impact of two works - *Rights of Man*^A (as referred to in the obituary) and *The Age of Reason*.⁵ The former, written as a rebuttal of Burke's, *Reflections...*, appeared in two parts in 1791/2. It attacked the monarchy ('It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but, to be a king, requires only the animal figure of man - a sort of breathing automaton.');

the aristocracy ('The idea of hereditary legislators is...as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or an hereditary wise man.');

Burke's love of tradition ('...as government is for the living, and not for the dead, it is the living only that has any right in it.');

and his disdain for the common people ('He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird.').

The book was an enormous success and in E.P. Thompson's words was the 'foundation-text of the English working-class movement.' Paine became a household name, but also found himself the object of a major offensive from the Pitt government, which eventually led to his being convicted in absentia of seditious libel in December 1792. In *The Age of Reason* published in 1794/5 Paine posited a deist philosophy ('I believe in one God and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life') and attacked all organised religion in uncompromising language ('All national institu-

tions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit.'). The book sold well and was to become the "bible" for nineteenth century freethinkers, but many (inaccurately) branded Paine as an atheist and he was generally reviled amongst those who attended church and chapel.

What of Paine's alleged "brutal behaviour" to Elizabeth? What do we know of their relationship? The couple had first met in 1768 when he had come to Lewes to take up the position as an excise officer. He found lodgings in the Bull House at the top of the High Street, from which Samuel Ollive and his second wife, Esther, ran a retail snuff and tobacco business.⁶ There were four children - three by his first wife, Elizabeth (John, Samuel and Elizabeth) and one by Esther (Thomas).⁷ Paine seems to have been taken under his wing by Samuel Ollive and quickly became involved in local political and social circles, where he established himself as a formidable debater, as well as contributing articles for local publications. Samuel Ollive, however, died in July 1769 and, within a few months, Paine had accepted an invitation from Esther Ollive to help to run the Bull House business with her step-daughter, Elizabeth, "reportedly an intelligent and pretty woman," some twelve years younger than Paine. Paine's job as excise officer was not well paid - and he no doubt welcomed 'moonlighting' in the Ollives' shop. The relationship between Elizabeth and Paine burgeoned and, having made their vows in Westgate Chapel,^d they were duly married in March 1771 at St. Michael's Church, Lewes (since the law did not permit marriages in dissenting chapels). Elizabeth's eighteen year old brother, Thomas, was one of the witnesses.⁸

Without indulging in too much fanciful speculation, it is not difficult to see good reasons why Paine and Elizabeth were mutually attracted. For Elizabeth, Paine, who was somewhat older than her, may well have provided a father-substitute figure. She was no doubt impressed by the fact that her father had thought so highly of Paine that he had introduced him into influential civic and social circles in Lewes, where he had made a very favourable impact. Paine was tall and of an athletic build, with intense blue eyes, "full of fire, the eyes of an apostle." Moreover, he possessed "innate charm and disposition" and an "easy conversational style".⁹ Conway (who wrote the first authoritative biography of Paine) put it more succinctly: "He was her hero".¹⁰ As regards Paine, we have already noted that Elizabeth was characterised by being both pretty and intelligent, with sufficient education, initiative and independence to have started a boarding school for young ladies in Lewes in January 1769.¹¹ Moreover, the Ollive family provided a

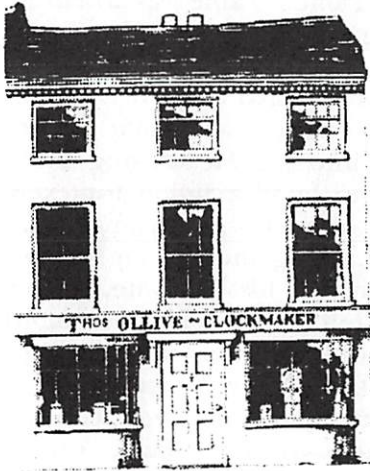
welcome refuge for Paine, who had been drifting somewhat aimlessly up to this point in his life, giving him an entree to local circles in Lewes and a level of social respectability.

However, as Keane¹² reports, within a year of their marriage, an "icy quarrel" broke out between Elizabeth and Paine. "Paine was absent for several months in London campaigning on behalf of the Excise officers... Rumours spread that the newlyweds had never slept together... Others said that a local doctor, John Chambers, had quizzed Paine 'on the non-performance of the connubial rights' and that Paine's impotence had led him to fling himself into the Headstrong Club,^e town affairs, his work and the campaign to build a union for excise men. Still others whispered that Paine was too set in his ways, neglectful of his wife and business, and too bent on drinking and arguing 'politick affairs'. Unaware of the death in childbirth of his first wife, no one considered whether Paine, driven by guilt and shame, had subsequently developed a coldness toward women and a liking for men's company." Regarding the charge of impotence, Fruchtman¹³ cites a comment from Clio Rickman, a long-time friend and biographer of Paine, who had asserted that "no physical defect on the part of Mr. Paine can be adduced as a reason for such conduct".¹⁴ Interestingly, Conway¹⁵ cites Paine's increasing deviant religious views as being the real basis for the developing schism with Elizabeth.

Things went from bad to worse. In April 1774 Paine was dismissed from his position as an excisemen for spending too much time away from his post and incurring debts. In the same month, all his personal effects were auctioned - an indication of his public bankruptcy. Elizabeth and Paine separated soon afterwards. The relevant articles of separation record simply that: "Dissensions had arisen between the said Thos. Pain and Elizabeth his wife, and that they had agreed to live separate." Paine was always tight-lipped about the underlying reason for their alienation: "it is nobody's business but my own, I had cause for it, but I will name it to no one." In the case of Elizabeth the separation may have been more understandable - a husband who probably offered her little affection, who spent long periods away from the marital home, who was an inadequate bread-winner, yet who would indulge in high-flown rhetoric about "justice for the poor and more liberty for all". Thomas and Elizabeth finally parted in June and were never to see or communicate (as such) with each other again.¹⁶ According to Rickman, "Mr. Paine always spoke tenderly and respectfully of his wife" and periodically sent her money anonymously.¹⁷

Keane¹⁸ reports that Elizabeth was disgraced by the separation and was thus compelled to leave Lewes with few possessions and never

returned there. He also states that she came to Cranbrook to live with her brother, Thomas Ollive, a clock-maker. There is in fact no definite information as to when Elizabeth came to live in Cranbrook. We can contrast Keane's account - of her need to leave Lewes in something of a



The shop in Stone Street

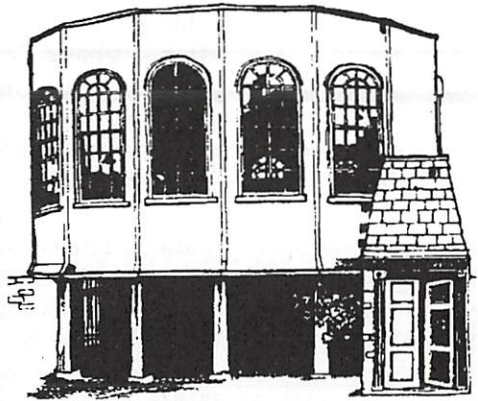
hurry - with Newton Taylor's speculation that Elizabeth may have come to Cranbrook in 1789 with her step-mother, Esther Ollive, to look after Thomas Ollive's three young daughters following the death of their mother.¹⁹ We do know that Thomas had become a master clock-maker in 1777 and in February of that year is listed in the Churchwardens' Rate Books as occupying a property next to the George Inn on the church side of that property. He remained there until 1791, at which time he moved to a property on the north side of Stone Street (formerly the Freeman Hardy & Willis shop, now Berry Antiques). It is thought that he remained here until his

death in 1829.²⁰

Whatever year Elizabeth came to Cranbrook, it is clear that as a separated woman she would have derived her standing and status in Cranbrook society from Thomas Ollive. The only direct reference that I can find regarding Elizabeth's life in Cranbrook can be found in Vale's, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, published in 1841.²¹ It is worth quoting in full: "She was afterwards a professor of a sectarian religion in Cranbrook, Kent, and boarded in the house of the watchmaker, a member of the same church; his house was consequently visited by religious people, many of them with strong prejudices and some very ignorant. These, after the publication of *The Age of Reason*, would sometimes speak disrespectfully of Mr. Paine in her presence, when she wilfully left the room without a word. If, too, she was questioned on the subject of their separation, she did the same. We have these facts from those who resided with her. Our most intimate friend at one point was a Mr. Bourne, a watchmaker in Rye, about eighteen miles from Cranbrook, England. This gentleman was apprenticed in the house where Mrs. Paine lived; he sat at the same table with her for years. We have these facts confirmed by other residents of Cranbrook. Thus nothing could be learned from her, except that though she differed from Mr. Paine on religious subjects, she could not bear to hear him spoken

ill of.”

Vale’s reference to “a sectarian religion” ties up with what we have been able to establish about Thomas Ollive. We know that in 1793 he was one of the signatories to an application for a certificate under the Toleration Act of 1689 to form a dissenting congregation at Isaac Beeman’s premises in Cranbrook (which were later to form the site for Providence Chapel.²² It is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that Thomas and Elizabeth were members of the congregation there. There is a certain irony about this, as Huntington, who preached periodically in Cranbrook, and who in Wright’s words²³ was ‘a high Tory and a perfervid admirer of Pitt’, viewed Paine as the devil incarnate. For example, in December 1797 in a sermon entitled ‘Watchword and Warning’ he urged his congregation in London “to obey the voice of God” rather than give heed to “the claims of Popery, the teachings of Tom Paine, and the tyranny of the mob.” It is not unreasonable to suppose that Beeman’s message to his congregation was a similar one. If it were so, then Elizabeth would surely have been discomfited by hearing it.



Providence Chapel

Whilst it appears that the fact that Elizabeth was the wife of Thomas Paine was not hidden from Cranbrook residents, there seem to be grounds for thinking that she was a potential victim of persecution. For example, the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* (published in Lewes) noted in its 8 July, 1793 edition:²⁴ “It is not true that Tom Paine’s wife subsists on the bounty of her neighbouring parishes, as stated in a Morning Paper on Saturday. She is a native of this town, and now follows the business of a mantua-maker,^f near London, by which she gets a good livelihood, independent of what she receives from her relations, who we believe are very kind to her.” It seems clear that the Ollives still had good friends in Lewes (and it is known that Thomas her brother maintained links with it). The certain coyness about Elizabeth’s whereabouts and her alleged proximity to London does not detract from the fact that she probably resided in Cranbrook at this time.

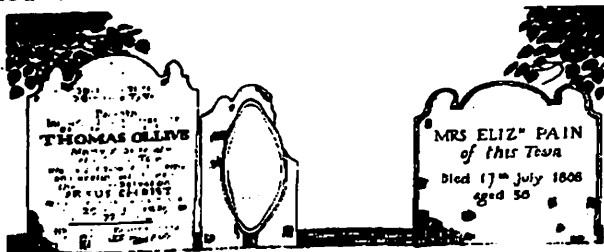
Following the publication of *Rights of Man*, Paine became a major target for the ‘counter-revolution’ of the Pitt government. One of its ploys was to circulate a copy of a letter supposedly written by Paine’s

mother, Francis, to Elizabeth on 27 July, 1774, following her separation from Paine.²⁵ The letter lambasts Paine for being both a worthless son and husband. Some doubts exist as to the authenticity of this document, but it really is pretty mild stuff with which to sully an opponent. If the letter is authentic the obvious provider would be the original recipient of the letter, Elizabeth herself. However, it seems apparent that she still felt a lingering affection for Paine, so she is unlikely to have colluded in besmirching his reputation. The whole matter remains a mystery.

In 1800 Elizabeth's step-mother, Esther, died in Cranbrook. In that year - no doubt associated with the latter's demise - Elizabeth was party to a property agreement which states that: "the said Elizabeth Pain had ever since lived separate from the said Thos. Pain, and never had any issue, and the said Thomas Pain had many years quitted this Kingdom and resided (if living) in parts beyond the seas, but had not since been heard of by the said Elizabeth Pain, nor was it known for certain whether he was living or dead".²⁶ According to Williamson,²⁷ the seals attached to the signatures of the parties to the agreement show the head of Thomas Paine as a young man - a further indication of Elizabeth's endearment. However, the statement itself shows a complete distancing of Elizabeth from Paine himself. Surely, she was not so isolated in rural Cranbrook that she had not been aware of the fame and infamy that had greeted both parts of Paine's hugely successful *Rights of Man* in 1791/2 and *The Age of Reason* in 1794/5. In fact we know from Vale's account²⁸ that this was certainly not the case regarding the latter. More likely she regarded the statement as merely legalese that she was only too pleased to sign in order to tidy up some legal loose ends.

Elizabeth died in July 1808 and, as we have noted, her death was announced in the *Maidstone Journal*. Also, according to Williamson, in another newspaper (which I have so far been unable to trace). The latter notice apparently reflected her wishes by stating that to abuse her husband would be "needless, ungenerous and unjustifiable".²⁹ Thus, according to this account, Elizabeth would seem to have retained a deep affection for Paine. If Williamson's account is correct, then it shows that Elizabeth's view of her husband contrasted sharply with that of her brother, Thomas, who was almost certainly the author of the vituperative *Maidstone Journal* obituary quoted earlier. Indeed, there seem to be grounds for believing that their differences over Paine gave rise to a degree of antipathy between them. Illustratively, the place where Elizabeth was buried in Cranbrook churchyard is not where her gravestone currently stands - adjacent to that of her brother Thomas Ollive, and presumably that of another member of the Ollive family

(which is completely impossible to decipher). We know this from a hand-written reference in the museum archives, which states: "the tombstone of the grave of Miss Ollive - wife of Tom Paine, has been moved to a position close to other memorials of the Ollive family".³⁰ Moreover, Elizabeth's headstone carries a very simple, if not, stark inscription: "MRS ELIZH PAIN of this Town Died 17th July 1808 Aged 58". While it was not to be expected that reference should have been made to her husband, it is perhaps unusual for some form of endearment not to have been added, nor anything about the hereinafter. Contrast this inscription, for example, with that of her brother which almost smugly speaks of, inter alia, "a life of exemplary piety and usefulness wholly relying on the full and free salvation of JESUS CHRIST".³¹



In conclusion, it seems likely that when Thomas Paine became a household name in the 1790s, Elizabeth not only publicly acknowledged that she was his estranged wife, but even implicitly defended his personal reputation. On the other hand, her brother Thomas - as a prominent local tradesman, and probable Pitt supporter, with declared Christian beliefs - must have preferred that Paine did not intrude into his life in Cranbrook and that 'Miss Ollive' lived a secluded rural existence. Following the publication of *The Age of Reason* in 1794/5, Thomas like others must have come to regard Paine as a complete infidel - and already as someone whom he regarded as having ruined his sister's life and embarrassed his own. When Elizabeth died in 1808, the obituary that he drafted gave vent to his accumulated venom regarding Paine.

References and Notes

- a. From at least 1774, Thomas Paine added a final 'e' to his name and this spelling is used throughout when referring to him, except where direct quotations spell the name otherwise.
- b. This is incorrect. Elizabeth was born in December 1749. She was therefore in her 59th year at the time of her death.
- c. Her marriage to Paine in fact took place in 1771.
- d. John Ollive, Samuel's father, had been minister of this chapel (which was Calvinistic in leaning) between 1711-40.
- e. An all-male dining and debating club which met at the White Hart in Lewes High Street.
- f. i.e. a dress-maker.

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8. Keane. *op. cit.* pp.65-71 & 75-78.
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21. Vale, G. *The Life of Thomas Paine*. (1841). p.25.
22. CKS Q/SB 284. (1793).
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25. Paine, F. to 'Dear Daughter', Thetford, 27 July, 1774. 47.6.12.105 British Museum (reference in Keane. *op.cit.* p.595).
26. Williamson, A. *Thomas Paine: His Life, Work and Times*. (1973). p.57.
27. *Ibid.* p.57.
28. Ref.21 above.
29. Williamson. *op.cit.* p.53.
30. Cranbrook Museum Archives, Ref.1397, 'Grandfather Clock 1752-1829', p.4.
31. I am most grateful to Mr.P.S.Newton Taylor for supplying this and other information relating to the Olive family.

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FORGOTTEN PAGES OF ENGLISH POETRY

THE POETRY OF THE CORRESPONDING SOCIETIES*

A.Nikilyukin

THE popular poetry created in England during the period of the industrial revolution has, up till now, been not only not studied, but not even collected. Folklorists and student of English literature alike have forgotten its existence. Bourgeois scholars who devote special research to minor problems of the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries pass over in silence the existence of the poetry of the popular

newspapers and journals, and also in the numerous pamphlets and broadsheets issued during the widespread democratic movement of the end of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth.

The authors of most of the songs, satires, epigrams and other popular verse are unknown. Some of the songs which persisted among the people, acquiring numerous variants, have become folk songs. Popular poetry stands on the line dividing literature from folklore. It played an important role in the social struggles of the period and exerted a definite influence on the romantic revolutionary poetry of Shelley and Byron and is today part of the literary heritage of the past.

A major contribution to the study of English literature has been made by the collection of articles *From the History of Democratic Literature in England from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century*, edited by M.P.Alexev, published in 1955.¹ O.Kovainitskaya, in an article in the collection written on the basis of new material discovered by her in Leningrad libraries, analyses many forgotten forms of English satire at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth.

The present article is written on the basis of the very rich collection of English democratic periodicals and broadsheets of this period preserved in the library of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. This new material has hitherto been unknown to historians of English literature both in our country and in England itself.

English popular poetry of the period of the industrial revolution shows a clear division into two periods: the first embraces the popular poetry of the corresponding societies of the end of the eighteenth century, and the second the popular poetry of the tens and twenties of the nineteenth century.

The beginning of the English working class movement goes back to the nineties of the eighteenth century, a period when for the first time in history there appeared political societies created by the workers and artisans themselves - the corresponding societies. The history of the English working class movement during the period of the French revolution has for a long time been subject to falsification by bourgeois historians. Study of this period of the working class movement in England has made it possible to present in an historically concrete manner the development of the poetry of the corresponding societies, as a reflection of the English workers' struggle for their rights.

Popular poetry is found in periodicals published by leading figures of the corresponding societies in London and the provinces - Thomas Spence, John Thelwall, James Montgomery and others. The verses which appeared in their journals - *Pig's Meat* (1793-95), *Politics for the People* (1793-95), comprise the central core of all the popular democratic

poetry of England of the nineties of the eighteenth century, and are remarkable for their very pronounced political trend.

The poetry of the corresponding societies was influenced to some extent by old folk songs and the songs of the workers' trade unions. Popular poetry was also effected by the many-sided influence of the literature of the enlightenment, which was widely publicised in the newspapers and journals of the corresponding societies. Excerpts from the literature of the age of enlightenment, both English and French, and reference to it occur literally in every one of their publications. The publicist literature of the English revolution, Milton's poetry, Swift's pamphlets, excerpts from Harrington's *Oceana* and from the works of Paine, Godwin, Priestley, Price, Fielding, Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu, were constantly being printed, especially in *Pig's Meat*. The majority of the verses and articles were anonymous, or were written under pseudonyms, since any one of them could have become the object of legal proceedings, which happened in fact on more than one occasion. As a result of one of Thelwall's more "daring" articles printed in No.8 of Spence's, *Politics for the People*, the editor was taken to court. But Spence used such occurrences to popularise the struggle for freedom of the press and still further.

The poetry and publicist literature of the societies reached its peak during the years when the revolutionary mood of the people was on the upsurge (1793-95). The basic themes of this democratic literature were the wretched condition of the mass of the people and exposure of the ruling class; the revolution and the people militant; praise of the American and French revolutions; a vision of the future; the events of the democratic movement and the image of the fighter for the people's rights.

The most frequent theme was the exposure of the ruling classes and the whole state machine of parliamentary monarchy from a republican standpoint. The poets wrote of the rightless condition of the popular masses in England at the end of the eighteenth century, especially of the urban proletariat. Here we already see the full variety of the genres of this literature: the solemn ode and the little satirical song of the tune of 'Malbrook', the parody of the lityny and the short catechism for democrats, the verse epistle characteristic of the eighteenth century, the satirical fable in the spirit of John Gay, the biting epigram and the topical impromptu. Satire is particularly characteristic of the verse of this cycle, Satirical portraits of the despotic monarchy, of the merciless landlord driving the peasant from the land, of the venal parliamentarian, judge or priest, constantly recur. One of the finest is the 'New Vicar of Bray'. The poet ridiculed political trimming and venality and in a

new and up-to-date version of the old song created a biting satire on the clergy and, in general, on all the lackeys of English reaction. For the new Vicar of Bray was ready even to make friend with foreign invaders: the very thought of English democrats filled him with dread:

*When London corresponding Folks
Set up the Rights of Man,
My anger glow'd like red-hot cawks²
Against the desp'rate plan.
For help then trembling P....t apply'd
Lest hanged he should be,
And I stepped forth, and boldly cried,
Sirs, wha wants me?³*

While drawing a picture of the ruin of the people, the poetry of the corresponding societies was not confined to complaints about their hard lot and to anti-militarist declarations. High civic feeling led the poet to turn from exposure to revolutionary protest, to the image of the people militant.

There were two wings among the democrats, differing in their view of the way to transform society. The journals of Spence and Thelwall, although not always consistent, took up a revolutionary standpoint on the question of methods of struggle. The group around Francis Place and William Godwin advocated peaceful 'petitioning' as against revolutionary agitation. Most of the popular poetry which has come down to us reflects the former point of view. In a number of poems written at the end of 1793 and the beginning of 1794 there appears a direct call to rebellion. Only the guillotine can cleanse the whole world of oppressors. A parody on the national anthem, performed at one of the theatrical shows organised by the corresponding societies, ended with the glorification of the guillotine:

*Long live great guillotine,
Who shaves the Head so clean
Of Queen or King:
Whose power is so great,
That ev'ry Tool of State
Dreadeth his mighty weight.
Wonderful Thing!!!⁴*

The guillotine is the symbol of the approaching vengeance of the people. No wonder the reactionary parodies of *The Anti-Jacobin* attempted at the end of the nineties to blacken this image of democratic poetry, representing it as incitement of the rabble to bloody debauchery. We must also include in the popular poetry of the corresponding societies the revolutionary song with the chorus, "Come rouse to

arms!”, which was sent from the provinces to Thomas Hardy, secretary of the London Corresponding Society, and which was found among his papers at the time of his arrest. In an amended version this song is still attributed to Burns (“Why should we idly waste our prime...”).⁵ Burns’s work in the nineties was closely linked to the democratic upsurge in the country. Such political songs as ‘The Tree of Liberty’ and ‘A man’s a man for a’ that’, prove that Burns, in essence, shared the views of the corresponding societies and spoke out in passionate defence of democratic principles. It is no accident that it was precisely the radical-democratic press of the nineties that popularised his poetry, and that the popular verse of the beginning of the nineteenth century contained an extensive group of Scottish songs and verses, using Burns’s rhythms, melodies and peculiarities of style down to direct borrowing of the poetic structure of Burns’s poetry.

The song was the most ‘plebeian’ genre of this type of poetry; it made possible a swift and instant response to all the events of the day.

Another constant theme of civic poetry was the glorification of the French and American revolutions, linked to the general theme of revolution and the people. If the themes of revolutionary retribution were distinguishing features of the poetry of the corresponding societies, then praise of the great French Revolution was characteristic of all English democratic literature. The corresponding societies undertook the defence of the basic principles of the French Jacobins and welcomed the Jacobin terror. The English democrats, however, had their own aims in the struggle, their own programme, reflecting the strength and weakness of the English democratic movement. All attempts at representing the English democrats as mere imitators of the French stem from the bourgeois historians hoary but still practised endeavour to falsify the history of the democratic movement by explaining it away as a phenomenon not at all typical of England and due to foreign influence.

As an example of revolutionary poetry we may mention the ‘Patriotic Song’ published in the democratic newspaper, *Sheffield Register*, by the young Corresponding Society poet James Montgomery. For publishing the poem, which exposes foreign intervention against revolutionary France, Montgomery was imprisoned. The court objected in particular to those words of the song which declared that the fate of European freedom depended on the victory of the French Revolution.

The democrats at the end of the eighteenth century conceived the future as a utopian realm of liberty. Typical of this point of view is Thomas Paine’s, ‘Tree of Liberty’, written during his participation in the American Revolution but popular in the corresponding societies

and later in the nineteenth century. A more complete vision of the future freedom is expressed in the song, 'The Tree of Liberty, or the Rights of Man', sung to the tune of 'Hearts of Oak'. The chorus sounds a note of firm confidence in the final victory of the people; the poet vows that he will go on fighting until oppression has been driven from the land.⁶

Revolutionary protest and songs of the future realm of freedom frequently appear in the poetry of the corresponding societies in a religious form. The true character of this religiosity, which had nothing in common with the official English church, becomes clear when we consider the popular parodies on church litanies printed in Spence's papers. There is no doubt about the freethinkers enlightened tendencies of the anti-clerical song-parodies. In contrast to parodies of the biblical style, we find elements of a new style taking shape in the songs. Comic over-exaggeration of the biblical style produced a satirical style of its own which in the nineteenth century more than once attracted the democratic poet-satirist William Hone and many Chartist poets.

An important place in the poetry of the corresponding societies is occupied by songs which print a picture of the fighting democrat and the events of the democratic movement. In them we find a reflection of the people's sympathy for the courageous fighter who, for the sake of the people's cause, suffered imprisonment, penal servitude and death. There was a particularly strong reaction to the legal proceedings against the leaders of the London Corresponding Society. The names of Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, John Thelwall and the playwright Thomas Holcroft became symbols of the struggle for democratic ideals. The image of the democrat appears in relation to concrete events in the struggles of the corresponding societies. Side by side with this there are attempts to create a more generalised image of the fighter-democrat and the poet-democrat.

The poetry of the corresponding societies is a literary trend distinguished by common ideological and artistic peculiarities. Having adopted the the ideals of Reason, Light and Liberty, it lends them a democratic character which is most consistent for the eighteenth century. Apart from this, it represents a point of transition in English literature from instructive realism to revolutionary romanticism. In this respect the poetry of the corresponding societies is close to the romantic work of William Blake, whose rebellious fantasy is interwoven with social exposure.

The basic genres of corresponding society poetry are the political appeal in song, the solemn ode or hymn, the political fable, the topical

satire and the epigram. The publicist style of popular poetry also determined the form of the images: we get frequent personification of social and political conceptions (freedom, oppression, truth, falsehood, peace, destruction and so on). Typical of the songs is their mixture of the old with the new, of traditional literary forms and the living language of the people. In the odes and epistles the style is close to the literary, rationalist language of classical poetry; in the songs and epigrams one often meets simple colloquial language close in spirit to folksong and satirical couplets. Folksong - its rhythm and form - had a very direct influence on the democratic poetry of the masses.

One of the major poets and publicists of the corresponding societies was the fiery orator, John Thelwall (1764-1834). Thelwall began writing poetry during the 1780s, when his verse was strongly influenced by the style of the Gothic novels. This early poetry as yet lacked revolutionary feeling. In 1793 Thelwall joined the London Corresponding Society, and his poetry developed a militant political flavour. The best collection of his poems, *Political Songs* (1794), is an outstanding example of the kind of poetry we are studying. They are full of original revolutionary feeling, though typical of the age of enlightenment: even here we find the contradiction between the call to decisive action and the assertion that the writer's pen is capable of transforming the world, which is a peculiarity of the whole ideology of the corresponding societies. Thelwall draws a picture of the appropriation of the country's wealth by the ruling circles and turns to the oppressors with grim warning:

*But cease ye fleeting Senators
Your country to undo-
Or know we British Sans Culottes
Hereafter may fleece you,
For well we know if tamely thus
We yield our wool like drones
Ye will not only fleece our backs
By God you'll pick our bones.⁷*

Many of Thelwall's songs and verses were first published in his *Tribune* which became the focal point of the literary struggle of the corresponding societies after the political trials of 1794.

Paine's, *Rights of Man* and Godwin's, *Political Justice* had a tremendous influence on Thelwall's outlook and on the whole ideology of the corresponding societies. Thelwall owed his understanding of how the character of man was determined by the world around him entirely to Godwin. From it Thelwall drew the revolutionary conclusion that it was necessary to change the social conditions of life, thus differing sharply from from Godwin. While popularising *Political Justice* in his lectures,

Thelwall at the same time pointed out its shortcomings, among which he numbered first and foremost its advocacy of passivity. His political lectures, in which he proclaimed the necessity of universal suffrage and reform of Parliament, Godwin considered dangerous and an incitement to open rebellion. It is not surprising then that after 1794 Godwin left the London Corresponding Society, because he saw in it a dangerous similarity to the French Jacobins. Even then, however, Thelwall continued to defend the more democratic ideals of *Political Justice* (for example, the critique of private property) from attempts by reactionaries to blacken this outstanding thinker.

The poet, publisher and publicist, James Montgomery (1771-1854) took an active part in the social and political struggles in the provinces and became one of the leading members of the Sheffield Corresponding Society. In a hymn written for Sheffield democrats, Montgomery called upon them to break their fetters and free themselves from the oppression of despotism. The paper which he edited, *Iris*, was in fact the organ of the Sheffield Corresponding Society and Montgomery was twice imprisoned because of his verse and articles printed in it. It was while in prison that he wrote his most significant poetry of the nineties, the verses which make up the collection, *Prison Amusements*. In one of the finest poems of this collection, the satirical, 'Monologue of the Wagtail', he ridiculed the haughty gentry who lived on the people's labour, and parodied the idealistic philosophising of the aristocracy. In the satirical poems of the collection we can clearly discern the traditional social exposure of the literature of enlightenment, which in Montgomery is blended with elements of revolutionary romanticism in a series of his pantheistic poems, close in many respects to Shelley's cosmic lyrics. His dream of mankind's bright future is embodied in allegorical images of the forces of nature, "light" and "darkness", "good" and "evil".

The traditions of the political songs and satires of the corresponding societies were continued in the popular poetry of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Among the new generation of English democratic poets there were many veterans of the struggle for the rights of the people. Montgomery, whose most significant creative period was in the first decade of the nineteenth century, depicted the national liberation struggle of the Swiss people against the Napoleonic invaders in his poem, 'The Wanderer of Switzerland' (1806). Anticipating the revolutionary romantics, he developed this theme in a militant democratic manner. His poem soon became an object of conflict between the two camps of English literature. The *Edinburgh Review* published a biting article comparing it with the crude farce of vulgar plays. Byron, who

prized 'The Wanderer of Switzerland' highly, spoke out in defence of the freedom-loving poetry of the "Bard of Sheffield", contrasting Montgomery's poem with the mystic ballads of the Lake poets.⁸

Another important poem by Montgomery, 'The West Indies' (1809), was devoted to the exposure of the English colonial system. The new element introduced into English abolitionist literature was his portrayal of the slaves in revolt, driving a road to freedom and happiness through revolution. The heroic figure of the Negro fighter, leading the coming revolt of all African peoples, occupied a central place in the poem and was close in spirit to the romantic hero of Byron's poems. Romantic images of the risen people and of the young rebel leader, however, exist side by side with lifeless allegories. The passionate publicist monologue is interwoven with a poetic didacticism drawn from experience of the descriptive didactic poetry of the age of enlightenment.

The ideological side of the poem is no less contradictory. The poet believed that Africa would throw off the yoke of the European colonisers and dreamed of a happy future for the people of Africa and the whole world, however, he regarded a flowering of science and art and spreading of enlightenment the prerequisite for this.

The struggle over the poetry and publicist activities of the corresponding societies sharpened at the end of the 1790s in connection with the slanderous parodies of *The Anti-Jacobin*. The radical democratic paper, *Black Dwarf*, wrote in 1823 of how reaction had feared the establishment of a direct link between the corresponding societies and the people. Right up to the period of Chartism their poetry remained a real weapon in the hands of democrats and invoked the fury of reaction.

References and Notes

1. A Russian publication.
2. A Scots word signifying red-hot embers.
3. *Politics for the People*. Part 2. No.10.
4. A broadsheet of 1793 entitled, *A Cure for National Grievances. Citizen Guillotine. A New Shaving Machine*.
5. In the text of the song published in the complete works of Burns, two verses are omitted, the second and the fourth, which expose the legalised robbery of the people of Britain, and in which the anonymous poet calls for the cleansing of the Augean stables of the English state:

*The starving wretch who stole for bread
But seldom meets compassion,
And still a crown preserve the head,
Of him who robs a nation?
Such partial laws we all despise:
See Gallia's bright example:
The glorious sight before our eyes,
We'll on every tyrant trample.*

Chorus: Come rouse in arms, etc.

*Our juries are a venal pack,
See Justice topsy-turvy;
On Freedom's cause they've turned a back,
Of Englishmen unworthy;
The glorious work but once begun,
We'll cleanse the Augean stables:
A moment lost, and we're undone,
Come strike while we are able.*

Chorus

6. *Loose Meat for Pigs*, the poetical supplement to *Pig's Meat*, published in the form of broadsheets which are the rarest editions of the popular press in England.
7. *Tribune*, No.8. May 2, 1795.
8. Byron's, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, was not the only defence of democratic literature. A few years earlier Thelwall had published his *Reply to the Calumnies, Misrepresentations and Literary Forgeries contained in the Anonymous Observations on his Letter to the Editor of the Edinburgh Review* (1809), in which he protested angrily against the dominant position in literature held by the reactionary Edinburgh critics.

This paper was originally published in Russian in *Voprosy Literaturny*, No.3, 1958. This being a translation by 'M.M' which was published in an abbreviated version on *Soviet Literature*. The author's reference to a lack of interest in radical democratic literature no longer holds true, although this does not decrease its interest.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE REPUBLIC MUST COME, THE ENGLISH REPUBLICANS OF THE 1870s.

Unpaginated (12pp). Wrappers. South London Republican Forum,
83 Sowerby Close, Eltham, London, SE9 6EZ., 1999.

YET against the SLRP have produced a fascinating study of an aspect of English political history which remains largely unknown, yet with the rise of interest in, and support for, England becoming a republic must, one would imagine, start to filter down to the general public, particularly those among it who are politically active.

The value of this short work rests with the light it sheds upon the extent to which republicanism influenced both political and secularist activities in the second part of the 19th century, although before the onset of the campaign to promote the concept of English imperialism

which saw Mrs. Victoria Saxe Coburg created empress of India, not that the population of the sub-continent were consulted about the matter, they just helped to foot the bill.

The pamphlet brings out the strength of republicanism, which was built upon the views of Paine and others adapted, as they should be, to new social and economic conditions, as well as political developments, not least the rise of socialism. It was this latter development which was to create considerable stress within English republicanism, particularly when the socialists challenged Liberal republicanism as led by Charles Bradlaugh, who was sensitive to what he saw as a challenge to his leadership, as indeed it was. At the same time the divisions which the conflict between liberalism and socialism weakened the republican cause as did the divisions within secularism, about which this work has little to say.

Working-class republicanism became very influential in the early period of the second half of the 19th century, particularly in the large industrial towns, though only in Ireland can it be said to have evolved into a mass movement, despite the hostility there of the Roman Catholic sect. In England it seemed to be developing into one, but the divisions mentioned above coupled with what was essentially a royalist re-launch orchestrated initially around the war with Russia in 1876, which saw jingoism whipped up on an unprecedented scale and later the transformation of Mrs. Victoria Saxe-Coburg Gotha into the what was called the empress of India, not that the inhabitants of the sub-continent were consulted about the matter, though they were expected to foot the bill for the royal circus, weakened the potential appeal of republicanism to the unconverted.

In addition to the above, which was largely a play on emotionalism, many 'advanced workers', the author writes, 'were now looking beyond negative republicanism and Freethought to the constructive ideas' embodied in the *Communist Manifesto*, the hundredth anniversary of the publication of which fell in 1998. He concludes his pamphlet by asserting that the only really successful conclusion of current republican agitation must be the demolition of the present social pyramid atop of which sits the present monarch and the establishment of a workers' republic. His readers must draw their own conclusions.

R.W.M.

THOMAS PAINE CONTRE L'IMPOSTURE DES PRE^TRES.

Nathalie Caron. Illustrated. 543pp. Paperback. Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999. 260f.

ALTHOUGH Thomas Paine appears to have been thoroughly

steeped in christian belief as a child, the fact of his parents sectarian differences may have been one of the factors instrumental in his later adoption of deism, while his experiences in the American colonists struggle for political independence, which brought him directly into contact with religious sceptics such as Franklin and Jefferson, who were also passionately interested in science, which by then had started to challenge orthodox christian beliefs, must also be considered another major influence on his thinking in matters of religion. Deism was, in fact, in the English speaking countries a belief which many leading figures subscribed to privately, political and social considerations making them rather circumspect when it came to being publicly identified as deists. In many respects Paine was to act in a similar manner, but when faced with what may have appeared to him to be his imminent death he went public about his beliefs in his essay, *The Age of Reason*, apparently being under the impression that this would be his last published work, a sort of personal testimony and a warning about the religious situation in France which he saw as one of dangerous confusion. In asserting his belief in a god and attacking atheism, Paine was being critical of many of his French contemporaries, but if he thought his essay would make the same impact on French religious and philosophical thinking as his political ideas, he made a serious error of judgement. If anything, and the author of this book illustrates this fact with considerable clarity, France reacted to *The Age of Reason*, Part One, and later Part Two, with what could be described as polite indifference.

One of the major reasons for French indifference to Paine's essay was the fact that his emphasis on the bible was lost on the French was simply because the dominant religious sect, the established sect in the country prior to the revolution, was the Roman Catholic sect, a religious organisation in which the bible played nothing like the role it did in Protestant religious thinking, in England and amongst English speaking citizens of the new United States, an infallible book had replaced an infallible sect. The uproar created by *The Age of Reason* was enormous, and while Paine had his defenders, for the most part even his political allies sought to distance themselves from him. The various sects lost no time in making Paine symbolic of the devil, if not the devil himself incarnate. Yet strange to say, his religious ideas were not really revolutionary, if anything they were highly moralistic in tone, though he also sought to make them compatible with the many scientific discoveries which were starting to call many major christian tenets into question, however, the debates on these were only being hinted at.

This important book takes a close look at Paine's deism set within the context of his historical period. The author examines deistical

concepts both in religious terms and in its political implications and impact. In doing this she follows Paine's life and work, examines the reaction to his deistical ideas and rounds off the whole with a reference to Thomas Paine Day in the United States. She has clearly absorbed much of the literature published both in Britain and the United States, where the main focal point of the debate is found, but she also examines the political implications in France. Her book is both thoughtful and challenging and will, I suspect, become a key study of Paine's deism in both a personal and wider context. It is a work which I would unhesitatingly say should be translated into English and thus made available to a wider general readership.

The author provides extensive appendices listing separately British and American replies to *The Age of Reason*, but there is no similar list of French replies, which is itself illustrative of the indifference to the essay there. One of the replies listed in the American section is Simpson's, *Plea for Religion*, though the author seems to have doubts about its place of publication being in Vermont. She is right to entertain such a doubt as the edition in question was published in Macclesfield, Yorkshire, being one of several editions published in both Yorkshire and Lancashire. Whether there was an American edition I do not know, not having come across one, but it is possible.

R.W.M.

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- 20 Shelley, P. B. *Life, Death & Immortality. Letter on Superstition. William Pitt, Earl of Chatham*. 16pp. Wrappers. London Secular Group, Nd. £1.00

THOMAS PAINE



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