

THE JOURNAL
of
RADICAL HISTORY
of the
THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY



Volume 8. Number 3. 2006

ISSN 0049 813

The Journal of Radical History

Volume 8. Number 3. 2006

ISSN 0049 813

Editor: Robert Morrell.

Printed and Published by the

THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY,

43, Eugene Gardens, Nottingham, NG2 3LF.

e-mail: r.morrell1@ntlworld.com

© 2006. Thomas Paine Society

Opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the writer/s and should not be assumed to be those of the society or its editor.

Contents

Thomas Paine and Comus.

A. O. Aldridge. Page 3.

'Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness'.

Robert Morrell. Page 9.

Thomas Paine: Observations on Methodism and his Marriage to Mary Lambert.

George Hindmarch. Page 13.

'The Rights of Man' needs 'An Age of Reason'.

Chris Staples. Page 24

The New Age of Reason.

Derek Kinrade. Page 26.

Book Reviews:

Tom Paine, The Life of a Revolutionary.
Jeremiah Joyce, Radical, Dissenter and Writer.

Terry Liddle. Pages 29-34.

THOMAS PAINE AND COMUS

Alfred Owen Aldridge

In the midst of the controversy over Silas Deane's negotiations with the French government, the most sensational political scandal of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine brought forth several satirical pieces in verse and prose under a new pseudonym, Comus. Deane had been accused by his fellow commissioner Arthur Lee of using his official position for personal gain. Although Congress instituted various official investigations, Deane's case was virtually tried in the newspapers, and Paine as Common Sense served as public prosecutor.¹

For a year after Deane's appeal to the public for vindication in December 1778, the newspapers carried literally hundreds of letters and essay supporting and attacking him. The controversy grew to comprise not only Deane's foreign negotiations, but all forms of war profiteering, real or and alleged. Paine, at the outset became Deane's most vociferous accuser, and in turn, the butt of retaliatory attacks by the Deane supporters. By adopting a new pseudonym, Comus, Paine was enabled to proliferate his offensives - to attack his enemies openly and soberly under his customary pseudonym, Common Sense, and to ridicule them under one that was unknown. In this way, he was sure to get a sympathetic hearing from those who were indifferent, or even antagonistic to his reputation, as well as from those who habitually followed his lead. Common Sense and Comus sound alike, and it is not strange that Paine should have thought of Comus as an alternative pen name. Also, he was aware of the classical association of Comus with fun and revelry, for he consistently reserved this pseudonym for works of satire and burlesque.

From a belletrist standpoint, one of the most interesting works in Paine's entire career is an essay signed Comus in the *Pennsylvania Packet* (March 16, 1779) in which Paine ridicules the prose style of two literary Congressmen in the Deane camp, William Henry Drayton of South Carolina, and Gouverneur Morris of New York.

Before discussing the content of this essay, however, it is necessary to show that Comus was actually Thomas Paine. First of all, Paine used the pseudonym Comus at another stage of his career - on his return to America after his ten-year sojourn in France as a member of the French Convention and amateur diplomat. On August 23, 1804, he published in the Philadelphia *Aurora* a burlesque of Federalist eulogies of Alexander Hamilton under the title "Nonsense from New York". This was signed Comus. In two extant personal letters to publishers Paine admits authorship. Writing to Elisha Babcock, publisher of the Hartford *American Mercury*, August 27, 1804, he refers to 'a piece of mine signed Comus and entitled Nonsense from New York',² and writing to William Duane, publisher of the *Aurora*, September 19, 1804, he complains, 'In the last piece I sent you signed Comus, you abridged some of the expressions'.³

Identification of the Revolutionary satire on the style of Drayton and Norris is almost as precise, although it comes from one of Paine's enemies rather than Paine himself. Four months after the essay by Comus, an anonymous poem appeared in another newspaper (*Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 16, 1779), abusing Paine for his defense of Lee against Silas Deane:

Hail mighty Thomas! In whose works are seen
A mangled Morris and a distorted Deane;
Whose splendid periods flash for Lees defence,
Replete with every thing but common sense.

Both of Paine's pseudonyms are introduced, the notorious Common Sense and the unknown Comus:

In pity tell, by what exalted name
Thou would'st be damned to eternal fame
Shalt Common Sense, or Comus greet thine ear,
A piddling poet, or puft pamphleteer

And the identification is completed by an allusion to the particular essay ridiculing literary style:

And eager to traduce the worthiest men,
Despite the energy of Drayton's pen.

This couplet could hardly refer to anything but the essay in question, for Drayton, unlike Morris, remained relatively untouched by personal controversy, he was not a prolific writer, and condemnation of an opponent's literary style was a rare weapon in Revolutionary polemics. It is scarcely conceivable that there existed another take-off y Paine or anyone else on Drayton's writing.

Paine's main affair was with Morris, a personal enemy, and he probably included Drayton in his squib only because Drayton served with Morris on many committees of Congress and also belonged to the Deane faction. Both Drayton and Morris had recently composed answers to British proclamations, Drayton a pamphlet reply to a speech by George III,⁴ and Morris a newspaper reply to a speech by Governor George Johnstone, recently sent to America as a joint commissioner to treat with the colonies.⁵ His title of governor was one of courtesy, presumably applied because he had once been appointed governor of West Florida.

Paine described the productions of George III and Drayton as 'a dead match of *dulness to dulness*', but otherwise limited his satire to a single sentence in Drayton's pamphlet and its physical appearance: 'ornamented like an ale-house-keeper's sign, with the letters W. H. D.' Paine felt that the terms in which Drayton opened his address to the King were ludicrous: 'Your royal voice to your Parliament on the 27th of November last, has a length, reached the ears of freemen on the western shore of the Atlantic'. Paine exposed the absurdity of referring to the passage of the King's voice across the Atlantic to the ears of America, a journey which required nine days but should have taken only four hours, according to Paine's estimate of the velocity of sound.

Paine dismissed Drayton with the N.B., 'The Devil backs the King of England, and Silas Deane backs W. H. D. because he has good 'ears', and they are not 'shut'.' This is a reference to Deane's plaint at the outset of his *cause celebre* that the ears of Congress had been shut against him.⁶

Two years before writing this criticism of Drayton's rhetoric, Paine in his *Crisis* No.3 had publicly praised one of Drayton's other works, in his charge to the grand jury for the districts of Charleston in April, 1776. Paine said that it was written 'in an elegant masterly manner' and described it along with the address of the convention of New York as 'pieces, in my humble opinion, of the first rank in America', one of the rare passages in Paine's works in which he pays tribute to a fellow author. His approbation is understandable, however, for Drayton in his charge had not only supported the principles of Paine's

Common Sense, but also warmly praised the work. Paine was in a sense repaying a debt. Later, when he found Drayton associated with his opponents, the Deane faction, Paine changed his opinion of his literary style.

In turning to Gouverneur Morris, Paine opened up the full force of his satire. He affected to forget Morris' surname and spelled his given name as 'Governeer'. Since Morris had written against Governor Johnstone, Paine was able to deride the mighty contention between Governor and Governeer. Johnstone in his speech had declared that 'the maxim of dying in the last ditch was his principle', and Morris had undertaken to ridicule that application of the maxim to the American war. Paine without saying anything in Johnstone's favour sought to reduce Morris' literary achievement to pretentious flummery.

Since Paine's essay is fundamentally an analysis of literary humour, one may logically raise the question, why, in the midst of the rancorous controversy over Silas Deane during which Paine wrote at least thirty or forty disputatious pieces for the newspapers, did he take time to write at length on a purely literary subject? There is a measure of truth in the explanation which Paine himself offered to account for the vigour of his satire on the works of rival authors: 'not only because such gasconad productions take away from the character of modern and serious fortitude which America has hitherto supported, and that without even giving wit in its place; but because they have a tendency to introduce a false taste among youth, who are too apt to be caught by the extravagance of a figure without considering its justness'. It may seem inconsistent for Paine to be supporting 'modern and serious fortitude' in a work devoted exclusively to burlesque. Also, a large proportion of Paine's other work, both during the Revolution and after, consists of unrelieved satire. It may be that he recognised a distinction between subjects of national importance and others or merely local or individual significance and considered that only the latter could be treated in a comic or frivolous vein.

Paine may also have singled out Drayton and Morris because they were joint authors of a Congressional report, *Observations on the American Revolution*, which Paine disapproved because it slighted the importance of the military action at the very beginning of the war.

Four days after his *Comus* essay, Paine published a serious condemnation of the material in this report, which he signed with his usual pseudonym, *Common Sense*.⁷

Paine used still other pseudonyms in addition to *Comus* and *Common Sense*. An opponent in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (January 7, 1777) described him as a 'voluminous author', appearing to the public 'in three characters', a 'Roteus of a being, who can not only change his shape and appearance, but can divide and subdivide his own identity'. According to this critic, the manoeuvring of Paine, 'a self-created multitude of an author', resembled the tactics of General Burgoyne, who allegedly changed his ground when he could not maintain a post.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that Paine's contemporaries should have been aware of his identity as *Comus*, but that the circumstances should not have been registered in literary history until the twentieth century is still more surprising. Actually, this can easily be accounted for. Even before the end of the Revolution Paine spoke of collecting and publishing his literary works, and the project remained in his mind throughout his life, but he was never able to carry it out. And even had he made the attempt, it probably would have been difficult after his return from France to resemble the newspapers of the Revolutionary decade in which his multitudinous essays had appeared. No collection of his miscellaneous works appeared during his lifetime, and that which appeared after his death, and on which all subsequent editions are based, was composed largely on the authority of one of Paine's later acquaintances in New York.⁸ In addition to the *Comus* pieces, there are scores of Paine's newspaper essays which have never been collected or identified in print. Paine did not even supervise a complete edition of his *Crisis* papers. The version which appears in editions of his works was not assembled by Paine himself, and even to this day there are various doubts about which of his writings he intended to represent as number ten.

The *Crisis*, of course, had ineffably greater influence than the *Comus* piece satirising Drayton and Morris, but the latter gives us a new insight into the human side of the Revolutionary polemics and reveals that Paine himself had formulated conscious aesthetic principles for

his writings.

References

1. The relationship of the international aspects of the Deane affair to local Philadelphia profiteering is discussed in A. O. Aldridge, *Man of Reason, The Life of Thomas Paine* (London, 1960), pp.64-77.
2. Richard Gimbel, 'New Political Writings by Thomas Paine, *Yale University Library Gazette*, XXX (January, 1956), 98.
3. Typescript in Thomas Paine Historical Association from Gable Sale, New York, No.544, February, 14, 1924.
4. I have been unable to find any traces of Drayton's pamphlet. He wrote a similar one in the previous year: *The Genuine Spirit of Tyranny, exemplified in the Conduct of the Commissioners, Sent by the King of Great-Britain....* (Philadelphia, 1778 (Evans: 15784 (a))).
5. *Pennsylvania Packet*, March 11, 1779.
6. *Ibid.*, December 5, 1778.
7. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1779.
8. For circumstances of the communication of Paine's manuscripts, see H. T. Meserole, W. T. Sherwin: 'A Little Known Paine Biographer,' *Papers of the Biographical Society of America*, XLIX (1955), 271-272. The exchange described by Meserole led to the publication of Richard Carlile's *The Political and Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Paine* (London, 1819 (1820)).

This paper was originally published in the *Bulletin of the Thomas Paine Society*. 3. 2. 1967.pp.5-9, and is here reprinted in memory of our late vice-president.



Thomas Paine, Morris and Deane.

'THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS'

Robert Morrell

It often surprises me when I discover, as I do from time to time, the story of Paine having supposed to have recanted of the opinions he expressed in *The Age of Reason*. It is difficult to understand why Christian critics of Paine's theological opinions, some of whom are also critical of his political ideas, although usually reluctant to be explicit on this. I have commented on the story in the past,¹ but at a meeting in Sheffield a few weeks ago I was rather taken aback when a distinguished astronomer at a northern university referred in passing to Paine having renounced his views critical of Christianity. When I pressed him later as to how he knew this was the case, he referred to a little book by the Rev. Leith Samuel entitled *The Impossibility of Agnosticism* (1968). A few days later I was surprised to receive a copy from the professor.

The story of Paine's "conversion" surfaced within days of his death. In fact there has rarely been a critic of Christianity who has not renounced his critical opinions according to writers such as Mr. Samuel, one-time president of the Protestant Truth Society and author of several evangelical works who also trots out the tale of Voltaire having renounced his opinions. In fact inventing stories of infidels being converted, usually after encounters with simple, young believers, became a sort of evangelical cottage industry and those familiar with the religious press of the 19th century and later - the most recent I have seen is a piece claiming that F. A. Ridley converted just before his death, this being supposedly based on a claim made by a member of the staff of the nursing home he was in, although the home in question has denied that the person named as the story's source ever worked there. In fact such tales were a feature of evangelical newspaper and magazines in the 19th century, and parts of the 20th, as G. W. Foote noted, such tales have 'been a fertile theme of pulpit eloquence', and one clergyman named Erskine Neale, even published an entire collection of such claims in a work he called *Closing Secrets*, which Foote states 'was at one time, very popular

and influential; but its specious character having been exposed, it has fallen into disrepute, or at least into neglect' (*Infidel Death-Beds*. London, Pioneer Press, Nd. pp.vii-viii). Though I suppose we must exclude from this Mr. Samuel, not that he refers to it.

The claim that Paine had renounced his theological opinions first surfaced in the memoirs of Stephen Grellet, an American evangelical of Dutch origin who had connections with the Quakers, who claimed that he had got the story from a girl named Mary Roscoe. Samuel also claims that it came from a girl named Mary Hinsdale, its source being one Charles Collins. In fact both girls were one and the same person, Hinsdale being Roscoe's married name. She was in the employ of a Quaker named Willett Hicks; a friend of Paine's who conducted his funeral. She claimed to have been sent by her employer to deliver something to Paine and when there to have had a conversation with him during which he is supposed to have called out 'with intense feeling Lord Jesus have mercy upon me', then informed here that, 'if ever the Devil has had any agency in any work he has had it with me writing that book' [*The Age of Reason*]. Paine is also said to have asked the girl's opinion of his book, and later told her that he wished he had burned it.

Needless to say this tale took on a life of its own and from having supposedly made a single delivery Mary Roscoe had, it was claimed, been in 'constant attendance'. According to the Reverend Mr. Samuel, Grellet's 'unimpeachable testimony... seemed to outweigh anything found in contrary sources', as he put it in a letter he wrote to me in 1967 when I had inquired as to what investigation he had made of the story before going into print (I had read his little book many years ago, unknown to my astronomical correspondent). It then transpired that he had not read any criticism of Grellet's little tale, admitting so in a letter written to me in July 7, 1967, following me having drawn attention to William Cobbett's investigation into the story.

Cobbett had sought out both Mary Hinsdale and Charles Collins in New York in 1818 while collecting material for his own life of Paine. It seems that Samuel was labouring under the impression that Cobbett was a critic of Paine, as indeed he was when writing as Peter Porcupine, but after he had read Paine's pamphlet on *The Decline*

and Fail of the English System of Finance (1796) and found the ideas expressed therein coincided with his own, he underwent a genuine 'conversion' and became as ardent a supporter of Paine as he had hitherto been a critic. Cobbett asked Collins for evidence of Paine's conversion and he had in response given him a document containing Roscoe's statement. Cobbett then called on her at her home 10, Anthony Street, New York, and showed her the document, requesting her to authenticate it. This Hinsdale flatly refused to do, and said she could provide no information about it what was in it. She said she had never seen the document before, nor had she authorised Collins to speak in her name. So the story collapsed and that would have been the end of the matter except it was just too good a tale for evangelical propagandists to give up and so we still find the likes of Leith Samuel trotting it out as though it had never been refuted by the very person it is claimed who had made it in the first place.

As for Willard Hicks, he personally denounced the story as a 'pious fraud and fabrication', stating that Roscoe had never spoken to Paine. He also spoke of the many bribes and other inducement he had received to produce a statement in which he said Paine had recanted.

We know from various other sources that Paine maintained the opinions he had expressed in *The Age of Reason* to the last. His friend the painter Wesley Jarvis is on record as stating that there were those who would seek to claim that he had denounced his theological opinions and for that purpose he insisted on there being witnesses present when being interviewed, doing so when he learned of the possible fatal character of his illness he showed no regret about having made public his theological opinions, which he in fact looked on as a defence of Christianity, thus when John Pintard the founder of the Tammany Society, who is now looked upon as one of the originators of what became the modern Democratic Party, a long-time friend of Paine, told him at a dinner in New York held in his honour and attended by many distinguished figures, that he had read *The Age of Reason* several times and that it had removed any doubts he had about the truth of revelation, and that his arguments had convinced him 'of its truth', Paine was delighted that the intent behind it had been grasped. 'I may return to my couch tonight with the consolation that I have made at least one Christian'. Paine's doctor

James Manley, a devout Christian but one who usually kept his opinions on the matter private, had informed him of the probable fatal consequences of his illness, and later gave a statement under oath that three days prior his death Paine's opinions in respect to religion had not changed. He had asked him whether he 'wished to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?' To which Paine had replied following a pause of some minutes, 'I have no wish to believe on that subject.'

I suspect we have not heard the last of the Paine conversion myth as it appears to give some sort of psychological satisfaction to those who continue to retail it. They remind me of ghouls who in mythology are desperate to steal the souls of the dead. Perhaps the likes of the Reverend Leith Samuel should read Matthew 19; 18, where they are told not to bear false witness.

'Truth in every case, is the most reputable victory a man can gain'.

Thomas Paine, *Pennsylvania Packet*, 16-2-1779.

Right:

A 19th century print of Paine sitting by the open window of 293, Herring Street (later renamed Bleecker Street), Greenwich Village, New York.



THOMAS PAINE: OBSERVATIONS ON METHODISM AND HIS MARRIAGE TO MARY LAMBERT

George Hindmarch

A biography can follow a personal life-history as honestly or as deviously as suits its author's purpose, for biographers may be motivated just as strongly against as in favour of their subject. The justification for a biography is that its subject has achieved enough distinction to excite curiosity about the factors in his life, which induced a situation marking parts in the development of many personal lives, and these can become known only in variable degree, even to close associates. It is not very surprising when a man from a distinguished background makes an impact upon the history of his times (although his background does not diminish his title to credit for his achievements), but it is much more intriguing when a man from an apparently common-place background makes a strong impact. Sons born to monarchs, and sons born to prominent dignitaries may reasonably be expected to make a contribution to contemporary society, but members of the lower orders do not inherit springboards from which to launch themselves. Those of undistinguished birth who do achieve enduring fame, whether or not they drive – or were driven by, – the special circumstances with which posterity subsequently associate them, may therefore fall to be judged by serried ranks of undistinguished peers unwilling to award them adequate credit through reluctance to concede that better results than their own have been attained from similar circumstances. As has long been recognised '*a prophet is never without honour save in his own country and amongst his own people*'. So it has been, in considerable measure for Thomas Paine, the man from the people who remained always a man of the people, notwithstanding that he achieved far greater distinction than did most of his fellows.

To the resentment of those of similar social standing to himself, who felt – and still feel in their subconscious minds, that his exceptional success underlined their own mediocrity, there must be added the open hostility shown by members of the upper classes who could not bring themselves to recognise that greater intellectual powers could emanate from a man of lower social

ranking. To these, any rod was a suitable one with which to belabour the upstart stay-maker turned excise officer, later driven by intellectual hostility into rebellion against the Crown that failed to reciprocate his loyalty. And since Paine was modest about his private life. A circumstance which greatly contrasted with his justified pride in his immensely popular writing – his personal life was an avenue to which his enemies and detractors have turned *en masse* when seeking to off-set the great unassailable support his writings elicited from the numerous thinkers then emerging from the populace. Within Paine's little-known private life, there was no important aspect less familiar to the public than the marriages which had been central to his early life in England, and so it was the matrimonial field which was selected as the location for the most virulent attacks upon his personal character.

Paine's experience of marriage, that of his parents as well as his own, did greatly influence him, just as it greatly influences the great majority of other Englishmen; and it is therefore appropriate to take another look at all three of these, within the broad context of feminine influence upon him during his formative years; for greater insight into this aspect of his life has slowly accrued to us, and has conferred an ability to make a more fair assessment thereon than Paine has generally received from earlier writers.

Paine's parents, Joseph Pain and his wife Frances, came from two very different backgrounds; Joseph was a farmer's son and a practising Quaker, Frances was daughter to an attorney and a member of the Established Church. Their points of contact are not easily imagined, but were obviously sufficient to allow them to move towards wedlock. They seem to have resolved their religious differences through toleration of each other's opinions. Frances's view was allowed to prevail when they decided the mode and location of their marriage, and Joseph's yielding to her wishes was a reasonable masculine deferment to her natural concerns that their wedding should be recognised by her family and friends; but Joseph's choice of a bride from outside the Quaker community brought him into disfavour with his own religious confreres, who are thought to have expelled him from formal membership of their Society. However, this would not have debarred Joseph and his family from attendance at Quaker meetings.

Joseph and Frances were married on June 20, 1734 in the parish church at Euston, just outside Thetford. Joseph was twenty-six on

his wedding day, and his bride was eleven years older. According to Oldys [George Chalmers], the biographer who found out most about Paine's family, Frances possessed a sour temper and was an eccentric character, and later commentators have sometimes drawn the conclusion that Joseph contracted an unhappy marriage, but this opinion is probably ill-founded, as is explained below, and there is no positive reason to suppose that the marriage was other than normally stable and happy. Thomas was born after two years of wedlock to a mother aged thirty-nine, and was followed eleven months later by a sister, who did not survive infancy. Understandably, in view of Frances's age, there were no more children born to the union, which continued without known loss of harmony until Joseph died in 1788 at the age of seventy-eight; Frances survived him by nearly three years, living to the grand old age of more than ninety.

Joseph Pain probably received a great deal of help from his wife in the course of his business, for Oldys speaks of 'fitting stays for the ladies of Thetford'. At that time, corsets were worn continually until they were worn out, and they were never cleaned. The fitting of these foundation garments would have called for considerable tact, and a working wife would have been necessary for a small stay maker; certainly, a woman such as Oldys represented Frances to have been would have driven customers away, and the family business would scarcely have survived. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, and Joseph's constant source of guidance, had expressed Quaker opinion on such matters: 'There are many things proper for a woman to look after, both in their families and concerning women, which are not so proper for the men; which modesty in women cannot so well speak of before men as they can amongst their own sex'. Undoubtedly, the matrons of Thetford would have addressed themselves more readily to Frances than to Joseph when they needed a new corset.

Thetford was an old town and the government maintained a constant presence in it, for an excise officer was stationed there. Excise offices were usually located at inns and when Paine was born it was at *The Swan*, though the following year it was moved to another inn, *The Cock*. Thomas would have been familiar with the excise presence from his earliest days and Oldys suggested that in his early youth he enquired about the duties of the excise men.

Later in life, when Paine returned to Thetford and applied for an excise appointment, his application would have entailed placing on record a considerable amount of information regarding his personal circumstances, and this would have been fully disclosed to Oldys when the Excise Head Office was instructed to cooperate with him in his privileged researches into Paine's life and excise experience. Thus it was Paine himself who supplied much of the information drawn on by Oldys for his book, though it was adversely slanted by him, but every biographer of Paine since has turned to his biography for information; but it is not necessary to accept it blindly and without consulting contemporary information from sources Oldys found convenient to ignore. For example, he disclosed that Paine had not been baptised, but he did not make known to the public that this was sufficiently common in excise applicants (in those days) for the Excise Commissioners to have provided for alternative evidence of an applicant's age to be acceptable for ensuring that it fell within the strictly prescribed limits. Family evidence, such as an entry in a family bible, was the favoured alternative, but all alternative evidence of age was required to be vetted by an investigating supervisor (a senior excise official), who had to reconcile it with visual indications, and have it confirmed by formal declarations before magistrates. When Paine applied to join the excise service his mother would have been visited by a mature official who studied her face and inquired why she was so much older-looking than he had expected, and why there had been variations in the baptismal practices of her children, and he would have demanded legal statements in support of her replies. Such probing into her personal life might have seemed highly impertinent to Frances, and if she gave sharp replies, the investigator would have recorded them as evidence of Paine's family background, and in due course they would have been made known to Oldys. Such is the likely basis for the adverse comments he made about Frances.

Paine separated himself from the direct influence of the unusual marriage of his diverse parents when he left Thetford whilst still a young man, having found himself dissatisfied by the hum-drum life of an assistant to his father in the stay making business, and went to sea, but returned to the stay making craft for a while in London, at which stage in life he probably joined the new Christian sect we now know as Wesleyan Methodism, which was then growing within the Established Church. Methodism took root and spread most swiftly within the concentrations of workers who had entered the

new industries spawned by the Industrial Revolution; many of them keenly missed the social support they had known in cottage industries now superseded, and they found an answer to their need in Methodism. Much of the credit for the movement's success is due to the genius of its leader John Wesley, whose novel technique for integrating local groups into an internally-communicating national organisation was soon copied by other movements seeking to integrate workers.

Well-known features of modern trade-unionism such as the membership card and regular local subscriptions are of Methodist origin. Wesley's local societies were the fore-runners of local union branches, each guided by a class leader who collected a penny a week from every member. Each society also elected its own officers and took a lively interest in the welfare of every individual member. Membership was formally acknowledged by a 'ticket' which conferred membership nationally as well as locally and thus served as a 'passport'. It is probable that Paine availed himself of such a Methodist 'passport' when he moved from London to Dover in 1758, and there entered into employment with another stay maker, Mr. Grace, a prominent Methodist in the town. Indeed, he may even have heard of the vacancy in Dover through the Methodist grape-vine.

The *Methodist Recorder* for August 16, 1906, described Mr. Grace as the Dover class-leader, and that he took Paine to class with him. On one occasion a preacher failed to turn up and Paine was invited to take his place. It is interesting that Grace did not himself take the missing preacher's place but delegated the job to Paine. Clearly he had decided that Paine was worthy to stand before his fellow Methodists, but it is unlikely that this was solely on his own judgement, for there was another member of his household whose advice would have been highly influential, Miss Grace, his niece, a lady of outwardly meek behaviour, but who was driven by an implacable will. She had already demonstrated her concern to further Methodism by converting her uncle, and she was probably the strongest influence on Paine. She has been frequently misrepresented by Paine biographers as the daughter of Mr. Grace, a precedent maliciously set by Oldys which others have ineptly followed. Oldys also foolishly imputed a romantic attachment between her and Paine, although at the time of his sojourn in Dover she was probably being courted by the first of her two husbands. But she was undoubtedly a strong influence on

Paine at the time, and she is long overdue for depiction in his story.

Miss Grace was born about May 1735 and was brought up in Wakefield, where she scandalised her parents by attending a Methodist service in a public house. They thought her insane and threatened to have her confined in an asylum if she attended again, but on reflection decided to send her to live with her uncle in Dover, where Methodism had not quite arrive, but it soon did and Miss Grace attended its first service there held in a cooper's shop about 1755. Now it was her uncle's turn to remonstrate with her and he too banned her from attending but she ignored the ban. He then reported the matter to her family in Wakefield which brought her mother to Dover. But this too failed to prevent the girl attending the meetings, and eventually she converted her uncle!

Paine moved to Sandwich, but the town was in the doldrums and a poor prospect for a stay maker. Oldys states that Paine was 'not the first who had there used the mysteries of stay-making', and Mr. Grace would have known the fate of Paine's predecessors in trade and probably had warned him of the risk he was taking, but also probably hoped that Paine would bring hope to the town with his missionary zeal for Methodism. Oldy's records that 'There is a tradition that in his lodging he collected a congregation to whom he preached as an independent, or as a Methodist...'

One of Paine's most urgent needs was for a local source of raw materials, which would have brought him into contact with Richard Solly, the town's woollens draper; his visit would also have afforded him an opportunity to make known his evangelical mission and issue invitations to his meetings. Solly's wife Maria seems to have become interested in the remarkable new-comer, and just as Miss Grace had taken her uncle to a Methodist meeting in Dover so did Maria Solly bring her maid an orphan named Mary Lambert, who, according to Oldys, was 'a pretty girl of modest behaviour'. To her the lonely preacher may have seemed a romantic figure. Five months later Paine and Mary married at St. Peter's Church, Sandwich, one of the witnesses being Maria Solly.

The marriage did not last long. Paine may have drawn encouragement from his parent's union, as they had achieved success although initially appearing to have little in common, but his parents were much more mature on their wedding day than

Mary, aged twenty-one, and Thomas twenty-two, whose parents had both come from the same locality and had got to know each other over a far longer period than Thomas had known Mary, a mere five months. The pair simply had not had enough time together, nor enough leisure in each other's company to discuss to adequately discuss their ambitions and domestic prospects. For Mary, the sudden transition from a life in service where many decisions would have been taken for her, to a hectic doubly-demanding existence divided between being a working wife to a newly-established stay maker, and a supportive wife to an enthusiastic evangelical preacher, must have been traumatic. Many years later, in the June 1775 issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Paine published his essay, 'Reflections on Unhappy Marriages', and his comments therein seem drawn from the disappointment of his youthful first marriage:

'Those that are undone this way are the young, the rash and amorous, whose hearts are ever glowing with desire, whose eyes are ever roaming after beauty, those dote on the first amiable image that chance throws in their way, when the flame is once kindled, would risk eternity itself to appease it. But, still like their first parents, they no sooner taste the tempting fruit, but their eyes are opened: the folly of their intemperance becomes visible; shame succeeds first, then repentance; but sorrow for themselves soon returns to anger with the innocent cause of their unhappiness. Hence flow bitter reproaches, and keen invectives, which end in mutual hatred and contempt. Love abhors clamour, and soon flies away, and happiness finds no entrance when love is gone. Thus for a few hours of dalliance, I will not call it affection, the repose of all their future days are sacrificed, and those who but just before seem'd to live only for each other, now would almost cease to live, that the separation might be eternal.

Little is known of Paine's first marriage except that it was short; and the circumstances of its termination have never been reliably ascertained. The couple are said to have furnished a house with the assistance of Mr. Rutter, an upholsterer, who could have been another supplier of materials to Paine in his business; a house in Sandwich has long been regarded as their abode, but this is not an established fact, and a few months after their wedding, the couple moved to Margate, a busier town where Methodism was also making its appearance. And there Paine's first marriage seems to have come to an end.

Oldys sought to portray Paine as a cruel husband, disappointed because Mary, who had been merely a lady's maid, had brought no fortune, but conceding that Maria Solly remained a benefactress. Oldys also recalls a local tradition that Mary died in childbirth, but

this is unsubstantiated, although many writers sympathetic to Paine have seized upon it as the reason for the termination of the union. Finally, Oldys suggested that Mary may have left Paine to live out the rest of her life in obscurity, and this is not only plausible, but is the most probable outcome of his ill-advised, short lived first marriage. Little information has ever come to light, although Oldys availed himself of every assistant he could find, including an antiquary living in Sandwich, and various excise officers in Margate and London. He tried very hard to trace Mary, because Paine's first marriage and its break-up, offered him the most likely prospect of embarrassing Paine though his private life, but he did succeed in capitalising on this opportunity. However, he did succeed in discovering a lot about Mary's background (probably through trawling the excise network in south-east England), and elicited the fact that her father had once been an excise officer in the vicinity of Sittingbourne, consequently, with the assistance of the surviving excise archives, we can discern some features of Mary's life and experiences before her marriage to Thomas, from which an outline of her world may be attempted.

Mary Lambert seems to have been of considerable interest in her own right; she was the only known child of James Lambert and his mentally unstable wife, having been born two years after he was dismissed from the excise station of Milton near Sittingbourne. James became first a shop-keeper and then a bailiff for the rest of his life. He died in poor circumstances when Mary was only fifteen years old, and her mother died in an asylum about the same time, thus her situation must have been very difficult. Nevertheless, she made a life for herself, although this entailed crossing the county and entering into service in the Solly household, where six years later she appears to have achieved the status of an accepted companion for Mrs. Solly, going with her to church, and enjoying her mistress's support both at her marriage and afterwards. Why she came to Sandwich is not clear, but there is a link between Sandwich and Sittingbourne through trade, for many of the brick houses in Sandwich had been built of Sittingbourne bricks; the distance between the two towns was about thirty miles, and heavy consignments of bricks would have floundered in mud on poor roads if they had been conveyed in horse drawn carts, but both towns had access to functioning wharves along the coast and transport by sea would have been convenient and economic for this trade. The greater part of Lambert's professional life whilst Mary lived with him was as a bailiff, which would have brought him

into contact with disputing parties within this established trade, and he would have been called to Sandwich on occasion and to have met some of the established traders there, possibly including the Sollys. We do not know when Mary's mother entered a mental home, but as Mary approached school-leaving age, her father may have looked out for vacancies in service for young girls in his area of work, and he may have been the agent arranging Mary's employment by Mrs. Solly, who is a rather shadowy figure of whom we know little. But Maria Solly was obviously a warm-hearted woman, possibly lacking a daughter of her own, and she seems to have treated Mary more as an adopted daughter than just a maid.

When Mary tried to settle down with her very busy husband, and friction began to arise in the marriage, it is quite likely that from a background of a quasi-favoured daughter she stood her ground against Thomas, and noisy quarrels became known to their neighbours, which reflected against Paine as both a stay maker and preacher. Mary, indeed, may seriously have fought to make a success of her marriage, but whether she knew it or not the dice were loaded against her, for her husband probably already had in mind a fixed idea of the wife he thought he needed, and believed he had found in Mary, whose modest behaviour would have initially seem to reflect that of Miss Grace, the talented niece of his previous employer. But if so, such an expectation would have been unfair, as well as ill-judged. Miss Grace had settled into her uncle's household before Methodism became a growing part of both their lives, and her later style of living was in the established house of a successful man much more mature in outlook than the young preacher Mary married. Had Paine been similar to John Bunyan, and content to develop his religion with the assistance of his wife, Mary's marriage might have enjoyed better prospects, but Paine was more akin to George Fox, and zealous to pit himself against a world still hostile in many places to Methodism. Mary may have soon lost heart, and Thomas may well have lost patience; the circumstances of unhappy marriages which Paine later described accord very well with what is known of his swift courtship and hasty marriage to Mary, and with the rapidly deteriorating domestic relationships they soon seem to have found themselves in.

In such stressful circumstances, the not-distant town of Margate where Methodism was also taking hold, may have offered better domestic prospects from stay making, and hence a firmer basis from which Paine could acquire

expanding status as a preacher, but clearly any such idea did not work out. There is no indication whether Mary developed similar irrationality to that which had brought her mother into mental care, but having once before made a new start in life, Mary could have felt it was time to do so again, and slipped away to another location where Oldys failed to find her. And Paine probably sought her himself after she had gone missing and similarly failed to find her. However, speculative gossip retailed by Oldys that Mary, now pregnant, had gone to a lying in hospital may have been well-founded although it was not confirmed by his subsequent enquiries. But two entries survive in the records for the nearby Parish of St. Lawrence in Thanet which strongly suggest the presence there of Mary after the presumed break-up date of her marriage; the first is of the baptism on December 7, 1760 of: 'Pain – Sarah, daughter of Thomas and Mary; the second sadly records that Pain's daughter did not survive infancy, for in a burial entry reading baldly: Sarah, daughter of Thomas and Mary Pain. Clearly someone had been concerned that Sarah's brief existence should be formally recorded; Mary herself is the obvious suggestion, and since Sarah lived for nine months someone must have taken care of her, presumably within the Parish of St. Lawrence, where Mary gave her birth, and may have seen out her own life also. Nothing is known of any other friends of Mary along the coast, but her father may have had contacts she could avail herself of, through deliveries coastwise of consignments of Sittingbourne bricks. And of course Maria Solly may have had friends to whose care Mary and her unborn child could have been recommended; but although Mrs. Solly is reputed to have maintained contact with Mary after her marriage, Mary's return to the Solly household never seems to have taken place.

How much Paine ever learned about his daughter and his estranged wife we will probably never know. Sarah would appear to have conceived about six months after the marriage, and Paine was back in Thetford to commence studying for the Excise about the time his daughter died in the Autumn of 1761, according to information supplied by Oldys. Only one piece of evidence as to what actually happened has ever existed, and amongst the scores of Paine biographers it has been held only by Oldys. It is the

written declaration of his marital status Paine made in his own hand when he applied to enter the Excise. Oldys seems to have held this document in reserve, presumably to challenge Paine if he could tempt him into public dispute, but it must have been insufficient in itself to clinch a case against Paine in the contemporary climate. Unless Paine's excise dossier ever comes to light, and this, in the opinion of the present writer, remains a possibility, then the circumstances of the break-up of his first marriage, and its probable effect on his second, will remain for ever subjects of speculation. The likelihood is that Mary simply left him, possibly while he was visiting his parents and seeking their advice, and it may have been that when Paine returned to Margate he found her gone, and never ascertained what had actually happened to her. This possibility, which Oldys also postulated, is supported by what we know of his second marriage ten years later in 1771.

Editorial Note.

The paper presented above was extracted from notes left by the late George Hindmarch that are now held by the society, having been presented to it by his wife. It was intended to be followed by a study of Paine's second marriage, as there is a note to that effect at the conclusion of the paper, but there is no manuscript of such a study in the papers we have.

However, Mr. Hindmarch, who worked as an Excise officer for forty years and took a great interest in its history, wrote about Paine's work in drawing up a petition for better pay and conditions for excise officers which he set out in his *Case of the Officers of Excise (1772-3)*. Mr. Hindmarch's study was published in an edition of only one hundred copies in 1998, of which he allowed only a strictly limited number to go, and then only to scholars he felt would acknowledge his work. His book, a paperback of 95 pages was entitled, *Thomas Paine: The Case of the King of England and his Officers of Excise*, and is a very important though little known study. Anyone seriously interested in Paine's life and work should read it. The remaining copies of the book have been presented to the society to sell for its funds and copies are available at £3. 50 which includes postage.

**'THE RIGHTS OF MAN'
needs**

'AN AGE OF REASON'

A Talk by Christopher Hitchens at the Brighton Festival on
Thursday, 25 May, 2006.

Chris Staples

I went to this talk with some foreboding, as a person of left wing sympathies, I had felt alienated by Christopher Hitchens's progression from a broadly left-wing position to that of being a high priest of the right. However, I knew that Hitchens was about to publish a new book about Thomas Paine and that his talk was to inaugurate a regular series of at the annual Brighton Festival about a fascinating historical figure who spent much of his early life in the nearby town of Lewes. Moreover, I hoped to hear an articulate case put forward by an admirer of Paine for supporting Bush, Blair and their allies and their foreign policy.

The best part of the talk came in the first five minutes when Hitchens projected a short poem of two verses composed by Arthur O'Connell when being sentenced for being an Irish patriot.

The pomp of courts and pride of kings
I prize above all earthly things
I love my country: the king
Above all men his praise I sing.
The royal banners are displayed
And may success the standard aid.

I fain would banish far from hence
'The Rights of Man' and 'Common Sense'
Confused to his odious reign
That for to princes, Thomas Paine!
Defeat and ruin seize the cause
Of France, its liberties and laws!

At first sight this appears to be an attack on Paine and his doctrines but closer examination reveals a different story.

If one reads the first line of the first verse and follows this with the first line of the second verse followed by the second line of the first verse and then the second line of the second verse and so on, its true meaning is shown. So we have:

The pomp of courts and pride of kings
I fain would banish far from hence
I prize above all earthly things
'The Rights of Man' and 'Common Sense'
etc.

After this promising start, the talk degenerated into a very generalised account of Paine's life, which did not provide any insights, which would be new to any TPS member. Hitchens took an inordinately long time over this exercise but I hoped that the question and answer session might prove more scintillating.

As was to be expected, most of the questions revolved round current issues and about Paine's likely attitude to these. The answers were extremely ponderous and by the time Hitchens had finished his replies, one had almost forgotten the original question, which, when one could remember it, he had not actually answered! There were also many factual errors in his replies and snide comments about the motives of those who did not share his views.

I will give a very few examples. When questioned by a man from Pakistan about the worldwide hatred of the USA because of its uncritical support for Israel, he countered by a long attack on Pakistan. When asked about the injustice meted out to the Palestinians, he grudgingly accepted that they did have some grievances but the reply was mainly an attack on Bin Laden. It failed to answer the accusation that the suffering of the Palestinians has increased Bin Laden's following dramatically, a connection which Paine would surely have made. It would be perfectly fair to attack Bin Laden – how one wishes Bush had taken him seriously before 9/11 and, indeed, after that grotesque event instead of being sidelined into adventures in Iraq.

Hitchens criticised Bin Laden again for opposing the independence of East Timor from predominantly Muslim Indonesia. He appeared to be ignorant of the fact (or chose not to mention it) that US President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger had given the green light to the Indonesian dictator, Suharto, to take over that unhappy country in 1975. This, of course, brought about the deaths of at least 100,000 of its population and probably more so. Had Ford and Kissinger not made this recently revealed, though long suspect deal, East Timor would never have become part of a Muslim state in the first place.

Islam itself was dubbed as merely an Arab tribal religion, ignoring the fact that the overwhelming majority of Muslims are not Arabs. Those who opposed the violence of attacking Iraq were branded as supporting the violence of the insurrection in that unhappy country. He was pleased that the USA now attacked dictators like Saddam rather than democrats like Allende of Chile. I suppose this IS progress of a sort! Of course no mention was made of the fact that the USA had supported Saddam for a very long period. There was no mention, naturally, of strategic oil. He alleged that British support for the war in Iraq is something to be proud of and he prophesied that we would all reap the benefits of this. This seems an extraordinary view for an alleged Paineite. It seems certain that Paine would have attempted to understand the CAUSES of 'terror' in the world today and would have been horrified to see the role being played by his adopted country.

Hitches may be a polemical writer but, judging by this performance, is certainly not an effective public speaker, except that his inordinately long and ponderous replies to questions, a technique perfected by many politicians, makes it difficult to challenge his highly controversial views I shall be interested to read review of his forthcoming book on Paine but I am unlikely to read it myself and will certainly not be adding it to my fairly large collection of works by and about Thomas Paine.

1. *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, A Biography*. London, Atlantic Books, 2006. Reviewed in *News Briefing* 37. p.9.

THE NEW AGE OF REASON

Derek Kinrade

Those of a radical persuasion are unlikely to have missed the reference in Richard Dawkins' new book *The God Delusion*. Dawkins points to the epithets hurled at 'poor Tom Paine: Judas, reptile, hog, mad dog, scoundrel, louse, archbeast, brute, liar and of course infidel' in an age when deists were commonly seen as 'indistinguishable from atheists'.

Although Paine's views on religion are not yet universally accepted, and perhaps never will be, it is open to question whether my use of the term 'radical' remains appropriate. Leaving aside those 'don't know' or who are 'not interested', it may be that in Britain today thinking that was once thought of as radical has for the most part become orthodox. Despite pockets of religious fundamentalism we live in a largely secular society.

Nonetheless, I wonder whether members of the Thomas Paine Society, in focussing upon the historical context of Paine's life and work and associated memorabilia, are in danger of neglecting the enduring relevance of his core ideas. I am thinking in particular of his mature opinions as set out in *The Age of Reason*, addressed to his fellow citizens of the United States of America: a nation, paradoxically, that is now home to some of the most entrenched opponents of his views.

In his approach to religion, I believe that Dawkins can be seen, in every aspect save one, as the lineal descendent of Paine. The exception is that Paine, despite his rejection of religious creeds and denunciation of national institutions of churches as "human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit", remained firm in his belief in one God and a hope for happiness beyond this life. With that reservation, however, he was comprehensive in his critique of the foundations of every established religion, singling out the Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan traditions. All of them, he argued, pretended some special mission from God, communicated to certain individuals, and relied upon books claimed as the revealed word of God. But, Paine protested, revelation, when applied to religion, could only be something communicated immediately from God to man. Anything else is hearsay, or hearsay upon hearsay, that we are not obliged to believe.

In the present climate of sensitivity surrounding criticism of Islam, it is particularly apt that Paine, as well as laying about the contrivance of the Christian tradition, was forthright in expressing his view of the origin of the Muslim faith:

'When I am told that the Koran was written in Heaven and brought to Mahomet by an angel, the account comes too near the same kind of hearsay evidence and second-hand authority as the former [the commandments of Moses]. I did not see the angel myself, and, therefore, I have a right not to believe it'.

Yet to my mind, Paine did not go far enough. Impeccably fair, he asserted that everyone has a right to their own opinion, however different that opinion might be to one's own, and that the most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is reason. Well my reason tells me that even what is perceived as immediate, first-hand revelation is not to be trusted. And that if there is no God, then there is no immaculate, divine revelation. Which brings me back to Richard Dawkins.

FREETHOUGHT HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

Some Publications of Interest

The following publications may be of interest to members of the Thomas Paine Society.

The Gentle Revolutionary, The Life and Work of Frank Ridley, Socialist and Secularist by R.W.Morrell. £2.00. Post: 60p.

Socialism and Religion by F. A. Ridley. A reprint of a classic work. £2.00. 60p.

Witchcraft in Christianity by 'Saladin' (W. S. Ross). A reprint of a scarce pamphlet published in 1882. £2.50. Post 23p.

The History of the Leicester Secular Society by F. J. Gould. A reprint of the edition (the only) of 1900 with additional material and an introduction by R. W. Morrell. £2.50. Post 60p.

The National Reformer for February 8, 1891. A slightly reduced in size facsimile reprint of the Bradlaugh Memorial Issue. £3.50. Post 60p.

The God Pestilence by Johann Most, with a biographical introduction by Terry Liddle. A no holds barred work on the existence of god by the celebrated Anarchist. £2. 50. Post 60p.

Available from 83, Sowerby Close, Eltham, London, SE9 6EZ. Cheques should be made payable to the Freethought History Research Group. For information about the group please request from the honorary secretary at the above address

Book Reviews

Tom Paine, The Life of a Revolutionary. Harry Harmer. 122pp. Haus Publishing Ltd, 2006. ISBN 1 904950 24 8. £18

Could this be the same Harry Harmer who was a South London contact for Republic in the 1980s? Why having written on Martin Luther King, the Labour party and slavery he chooses to write a biography of Paine when there already enough of them to fill a small library I can't imagine. Unless it is his way of thanking his father who introduced him to Paine. The book adds nothing new to our knowledge of Paine's life and ideas, but having said that for anyone who is not familiar with them it is 'a useful short introduction if somewhat expensive for a work of 122 pages.

It seems odd that Paine who came from a Quaker background should have chosen to go to sea as a privateer and saw violent against the French. Perhaps it was more exiting than being a staymaker, a job Paine obviously found boring. Not that being an exciseman was much better. And it was only with his departure for America that Paine's life as a revolutionary started. Paine never profited from his revolutionary writings and the proceeds from their sale went to good causes. The profits from the sales of his 1796 *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, The American Foreign Affairs Ministry bought 1,000 copies, went to relieve the dreadful plight of debtors in the Newgate Prison.

Paine was no socialist as Harmer points out, he supported private property and the market and thought that trade would bring peace but he could be seen as a pioneer of the welfare state that would be introduced by the post-war Labour government. He advocated a retirement age of 60 with a pension of £10. At a time when Blair's government complains that it can't afford pensions and wants to make us all work until 68, Paine still seems far in advance of his times. Curiously like his friend Franklin Paine developed a pre-Marxian labour theory of value.

Harmer makes much of Paine's drinking habits and seems to lend substance to the view that Paine was something of a sot. Harmer writes that towards the end of his life Paine was consuming a quart of brandy in an evening. Today this seems excessive (would Paine

have been served with an ASBO?) but in an era when the ruling class was pickled with claret and port and the poor drowned their sorrows in gin, as depicted in Hogarth's famous drawing, this was normal.

Paine was capable of making both close friends and bitter enemies. When Paine produced his plans for a French naval invasion of England and the overthrow of its government one of the few to support him was Napoleon fresh from his victories against the Austrians in Italy. Napoleon advocated building golden statues of Paine in every city and claimed to keep a copy of *Rights of Man* beside his pillow. But when Napoleon became a dictator Paine denounced as a "butcher of liberty". Among the guests at a banquet to celebrate the French victory at Jemappes were the poet Wordsworth and Edward Fitzgerald who had Paine made a member of the United Irishmen.

Again like Franklin, who had once owned household slaves, Paine advocated the abolition of slavery. But the economies of powerful states like Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, where Christian priests found biblical support for slavery, depended on slavery and they were powerful enough to stop Paine. It took nearly another century and a bloody civil war to end slavery. Paine also took a positive view of the Native Americans who in the 19th century were subjected to genocide.

If Paine had not been a revolutionary he could have made a success as a bridge builder or a maker of smokeless candles. Sentenced to death in his own country for his attack on the Hanoverian monarchy in *Rights of Man* (King George is said to have read a copy in a bookshop in Windsor) imprisoned in France and all but abandoned by his friends in America such as Washington Paine was reviled on his return to America for his attack on organised religion in his *The Age of Reason* which was wrongly seen as atheist. He was refused a vote in an American election because it was alleged he was not an American citizen although without him America would never have existed. Even near to death his home was invaded by clergymen but he bade them take away their "Popish stuff" His funeral was poorly attended although one wonders who the coach load of Irishmen were who travelled from Greenwich were. After his death his remains removed to England by Cobbett vanished. But it is Paine's revolutionary democratic ideas not his bones that were, and still are, important. The America of the born again former alcoholic and

imperialist warmonger Bush is not the America of Paine.

If you have little time this book is useful. But if you want more detail there are many other books to read. However, the book does have many good suggestions for further reading on Paine, the American and French Revolutions.

Terry Liddle

Jeremiah Joyce, Radical, Dissenter and Writer; John Issitt. Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2006. 202pp. Hardback. ISBN 0 7546 3800 9. £55.00

Frightened by revolutionary events in France, the Hanoverian state moved to counter any threat from British Radicals. An obvious target was Thomas Paine. But having been elected as a deputy to the French National Convention he departed for France before the authorities could catch up with him. It was rumoured that he had been warned by the poet and artist William Blake. One who they did catch up with was Jeremiah Joyce who was arrested in May, 1794, detained in the Tower of London and charged with "treasonable practices". At best he faced transportation to Botany Bay, at worst the gallows.

Like Paine, Joyce came from the artisan class, his father being a master wool comber. He was born in Cheshunt a centre of religious dissent. He was apprenticed to the highly skilled trade of glass painting and moved to London. Joyce's radical politics were fuelled during his time as an apprentice, which on completing at the age of twenty-one he became a freeman of the City of London. In his spare time he was an apprentice minister. In 1783 he became a Unitarian. That year Joseph Priestley had published *History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ* which advocated Unitarianism as the true theology. Unitarianism had some support amongst tradesmen, and shopkeepers but was too cold and too polite to appeal to the urban or rural poor.

In 1786 Joyce went to Hackney College, Priestley being a tutor there and William Godwin and William Hazlitt were students. Despite a bursary and money received on his father's death, Joyce had to work at cataloguing books in the College library. The College offered a better quality of education than that offered by the universities. The course for students of divinity lasted five years but Joyce left after

three and a half and did not become a minister but became instead the tutor to the son of Lord Stanhope, a radical aristocrat and brother-in-law of the Prime Minister William Pitt. It was 1789 -the year of the French Revolution.

Stanhope, who called himself "citizen", acted as a conduit for communications between the French revolutionaries such as Paine's friend de Condorcet, they shared a fondness for mathematics, and English Radicals. Joyce joined three Radical societies.

The Revolution Society was formed to celebrate the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 when James II was replaced by William of Orange. They met on November 4, William's birthday. Joyce and his elder brother Joshua were proposed as members in 1790. In 1788 it declared that "all civil and political authority is derived from the people" and "the abuse of power justifies resistance".

The Unitarian Society was a theological body which advocate freedom of religion and kept its political agenda largely concealed. A leading Unitarian was Joseph Priestly, a philosopher and scientist nicknamed Old Phostogen. In 1791 Birmingham, where he lived and worked, was wracked by three days of rioting by a drunken, reactionary Church and King mob. Priestley's library and laboratory were destroyed and a Unitarian meeting house burned down. Like Paine, Priestley was elected to the French National Convention but declined as he was emigrating to the United States.

In February 1794 Joyce preached a sermon at the Essex Street Unitarian Chapel. He described the Scottish Radicals who had been convicted and transported to Australia as "some who are already suffering for their attachment to principles which they believed would tend to the happiness of the world". It became his first published work, issued when he was behind bars.

In 1792 he had joined the Society for Constitutional Information, becoming heavily involved in the distribution of Radical literature and with his brother distributed 500 copies of Paine's *Letter to Mr Secretary Dundas*. The Society distributed 200,000 copies of *Rights of Man*. The literate population at the time was 4 million. Joyce became the secretary of a joint committee between the Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society. He wrote a letter to the Society of the Friends of the People seeking their aid in organising a convention "for the purpose of obtaining... a

full and equal representation". Joyce was a steward at a dinner of the Corresponding Society when the band struck up the French revolutionary songs *Ca Ira* and *The Marseillaise*.

On May 12, 1794 the secretaries of the Society for Constitutional Information and the Corresponding Society were arrested. Joyce was arrested on May 14 at Lord Stanhope's home. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Among those who came to see the prisoners exercise was a young Robert Aspland who would later edit the *Monthly Repository* to which Joyce would contribute. In the 19th century, Aspland's son Robert Aspland Cooper became a leading secularist and republican in Norwich. He stood as a Republican candidate in local elections.

Joyce was removed from the Tower to Newgate. From there he was taken to the Old Bailey. When asked "How will you be tried?", he answered "By God and my country", that is, he opted for a jury trial. While held in Newgate, Joyce published *An Account of the Author's Arrest for Treasonable Practices*. The print run of 1,000 copies sold out in a few days.

The lawyer Thomas Erskine conducted a defence campaign for the defendants. The government's case, exposed as contrived and badly directed and collapsed. Joyce was brought to the bar on December 1. The Attorney General announced that he did not propose to proceed and Joyce was acquitted. He returned to Stanhope's home in Chevening, near Sevenoaks in Kent to a celebration to which 400 people had been invited. The event went on all night. A public celebratory dinner of 1300 was held in the Crown and Anchor tavern in The Strand.

Shaken by his experience Joyce decided to present a lower political profile and devoted himself to writing on such scientific matters as the microscope and the telescope. However, he continued to support the Scottish Radicals who had been transported to Australia. They had organised a convention of reform societies at which delegates from the United Irishmen were present and recommended Paine's writings. Three of them were accused of plotting to murder the captain of their transport ship the *Surprize*. Joyce organised, edited and introduced a pamphlet *The Narrative of the Sufferings of T.F. Palmer and W. Skirving during a Voyage to New South Wales, 1794, on board the Surprize Transport*. Palmer was minister to a Unitarian congregation in Dundee, the evidence against being a pamphlet he

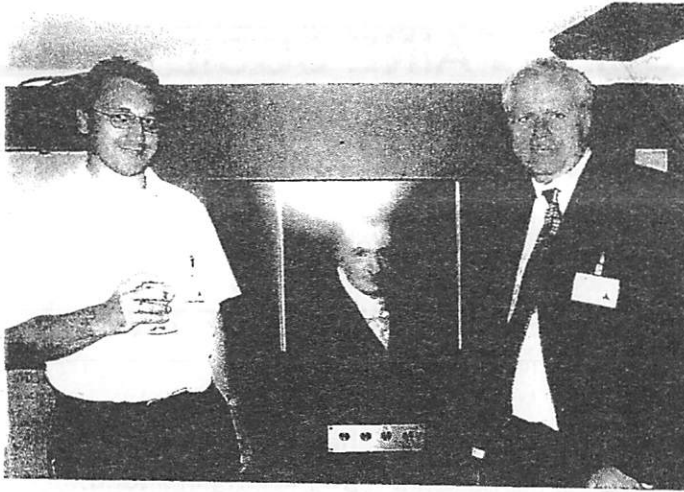
had produced on Paine's ideas for the Dundee Friends of Liberty. Joyce added Stanhope's protest against the convictions in the House of Lords in an address to those awaiting transportation from the Society for Constitutional Information. Also including an extract from Skirving's log recording the flogging of two girls to force them to confess taking part in the conspiracy. To publish such material in an England at war with France and where Pitt's government was taking repressive action against Radicals was a dangerous occupation. The French sent a warship to rescue the prisoner but the transport managed to escape. Palmer served his seven years and died on the way home. Skirving became a farmer and died on his farm.

Joyce married Elizabeth Harding. They had six children. He left Stanhope's employment in 1799 and moved to Camden becoming a friend of William Godwin the author of *Political Justice*. Godwin had abandoned Christianity and become an avowed atheist. From 1814 to 1815 he taught mathematics at Aspland's Unitarian Academy and secured a ministry at the Rosslyn Hill Chapel. He died in 1816 and was buried in Cheshunt churchyard. Robert Aspland wrote a substantial memoir in the *Monthly Repository* that Joyce "displayed his earnestness chiefly when exposing the misrepresentations of sophists and the calumnies of bigots. He was tolerant to all but baseness and hypocrisy."

John Issitt is to be praised for rescuing from undeserved obscurity one of Britain's lesser Radicals. But one cannot but wonder how many more rest uneasily in its dark shadows.

Terry Liddle.

THETFORD MUSEUM RE-OPENS



Following a major renovation lasting almost two years Thetford Museum has re-opened as The Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life. Housed in a Grade I listed Tudor merchant's house, the property has been conserved and renovated to provide an extra space for displays, one of which features the town's most famous son Thomas Paine.

The house was given to Thetford by Prince Duleep Singh, and is open free of charge, for the present, from Monday to Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

The photograph above shows Thomas Paine Society treasurer Stuart Wright, who represented us at the official re-opening ceremony, along with the curator Oliver Bone. That below shows him with the project manager Jane Bennett, in both instances standing before the Thomas Paine exhibit, which includes a short film.



THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY

For details in respect of membership please contact the honorary general secretary at 43, Eugene Gardens, Nottingham, NG2 3LF.

Publications for Sale

THOMAS PAINE, PIONEER OF TWO WORLDS

by

Chapman Cohen

52pp. Paperback £2.00 Postage/packing included.
Strictly limited number of copies.

THOMAS PAINE, THE CASE OF THE KING OF ENGLAND AND HIS OFFICERS OF EXCISE

by

George Hindmarch

Published in a limited edition of 100 copies and never
put on public sale.

95pp. Paperback. £3.50 Postage/packing included.

THOMAS PAINE - EMPIRE AND WAR IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

by

Brian Walker

25pp. Paperback. £2.83 Postage included.