

Bulletin

"The World is my Country
To do Good is my Religion"

Thomas Paine.



THOMAS PAINE

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TPS BULLETIN

The official newsletter of the Thomas Paine Society
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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual subscriptions are now due and members are asked to send them in as soon as possible. Although the minimum subscription remains at £2, it is hoped that members can add a donation when sending their subscription in.

We face the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine with very few funds to mark the event, so we appeal to members to be generous.

JOURNAL OF RADICAL HISTORY.

Publication of this journal will be resumed this year and will be sent to all members as published, as it is included in the subscription. Papers for possible publication in the journal are invited.

TOM PAINE LIVE - This play was performed in London at the Old Red Lion Theatre, Islington, from September 24 - October 12, 1985

THE play may have been "Tom Paine Live!", but for a while it seemed as though it had little, if anything, to do with that eighteenth century corset-maker turned writer and revolutionary.

A young woman is mugged in New York. So is a British visitor - and in no time at all he is on a flight back to Heathrow with a forged passport in his hand, a package of suspicious white powder, and the young American never far from his side.

By the time the pair reach Thetford, however, the woman's obsessive interest in Paine is beginning to emerge. And as they hurtle across England and the Chhanel, on their way to the Eiffel Tower, their journey becomes a background for some colourful vignettes of Paine's life, from his involvement in the revolutions in both America and France, to his incarceration by the French and his eventual death in poverty' in the USA.

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THE ANNIVERSARY

AS members will be aware, 1987 marks the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine, and naturally the society will celebrate the event, however, we are also seeking to encourage other organisations to do so, not only in England, where he was born, but in other countries, particularly the United States and France. We are aware of planned celebrations in the former, however, our efforts to promote interest in the latter have so far born no fruit. Members with contacts in France which might be able to help are asked to see if they can stimulate interest.

I personally feel that we should mark the Anniversary with something rather more substantial than mere meetings, so in a letter being sent with this issue of the *Bulletin* I outline a positive suggestion and appeal for your help to achieve it. This apart, our other plans are as follows, though I might add that these are not complete.

The Anniversary year will commence with a meeting organised jointly by the TPS and the Leicester Secular Society at the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, on Sunday, January 25 at 18.00hrs, when our Vice President, Tony Benn, M.P., will be the speaker. This is the nearest Sunday to the actual date of Paine's birth, January 29, which does not fall on a Sunday in 1987, and though it might have been good to celebrate on the actual day, members may be able to get along to a meeting more easily on a Sunday. It is hoped that we can arrange for a floral tribute to be placed at Paine's statue on the 29th., though no formal ceremony is planned, unless we can find anyone in Thetford to organise such an event - there are plans to celebrate the birth in Thetford itself, but later in the year. Of this see the special item in this issue.

LONDON MEETING

In cooperation with the South Place Ethical Society, the TPS will be arranging a major meeting in London to celebrate Paine's birth. The venue will be the main hall

at Conway Hall, which is named after Moncure Conway, Paine's celebrated American biographer. Details of this meeting are still to be worked out. It is also hoped that both the British Library and the Marx Memorial Library will hold special exhibitions. A request to the local museum in Thetford for them to hold an exhibition went unanswered, which strikes us as a lack of courtesy at the very least.

Obituaries

We have the sad duty to report the deaths of two of our members, Miss Audrey Williamson and Henry Hovell.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON was born in 1914 was by profession a dramatic critic and theatre historian, though her initial profession had been acting, however, due to her diminutive physique her opportunities in that sphere were somewhat restricted and she turned to writing about the theatre, her work appearing regularly in *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Scotsman*, *Opera News*, *Drama* and *Theatre Arts Monthly*, to name some publications.

During the 1960s, Audrey was based in the United States and reported on the American theatre scene for several British papers. As well as articles in the press Audrey Williamson was the author of a considerable number of books on the theatre, and on individual authors such as Bernard Shaw. Her book on Gilbert and Sullivan became a best seller. Fascinated by the mystery of the Princes in the Tower, Audrey wrote a work on it entitled, *The Mystery of the Princes in the Tower*, for which she was awarded in 1970 the Annual Crime Writers Competition. She was in fact fascinated by medieval history and was an active supporter of the Richard III Society and writer on him.

For TPS members Audrey Williamson's best book was unquestionably her superb, *Thomas Paine: His Life, Work and Times*, which was published in 1973. Incorporating new data on Paine's life as well as relooking at source material and showing how several other biographers had perpetuated mistakes copied from earlier works, the book

immediately became one of the most important written on Paine for some time and remains essential reading for any student of Paine, his ideas and influence. In another work, Wilkes, "*A Friend to Liberty*", published in 1974, she added further details to the Paine story. Regretably both books are now out of print, and there can be no doubt that the Paine biography, in particular, needs to be republished for it is a very important book.

Audrey Williamson was a socialist and an atheist, and reviewed books for *Tribune*, as well as occasionally contributing to *The Freethinker*, *TPS Bulletin*, *History Today*, *The Journal of Radical History* and *The Ethical Record*, amongst other publications. Elected a Vice-President of the Thomas Paine Society, Audrey Williamson was always willing to speak on the society's behalf to other organisations, and travelled extensively in doing so. As a mark of the society's thanks for her active work on its behalf Audrey was Guest of Honour at a society dinner one year. She was always present at society functions until a few months before her death.

As far as I know Miss Williamson had no relatives, but was a personal friend to many of Britain's leading theatrical luminaries. She had a secular funeral in London on March 27, which was conducted by Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society. The TPS were officially represented. We shall miss Audrey Williamson greatly, and her death is a great loss to the society and the world of the theatre and literature.

HENRY HOVELL was a keen supporter of the society, although never really active in its work. I knew him primarily through the post, but gathered that he was interested in and supported several humanitarian causes. Henry remembered the TPS in his will.

THETFORD LIBRARY

OWING TO a spate of thefts from special collections, anyone wishing to use these, which include the Paine Collection, should first apply to: The Divisional Librarian, Central Division Library Headquarters, County Hall, Norwich, NR1 2DH. A letter confirming their visit must then be produced to permit access to the collection.

WELCOME

WE warmly welcome the following new members:-

GEORGE A. BASHORE, 921-F, Wilmington Ave., Dayton, Ohio 45420, USA.

VICTOR PAWLEY, C/o Professor A.K.Pawley, 30 Marua Road, Auckland 5, New Zealand.

E.S.WALDMIRE, Cardinal Hill R.R. 2, Rochester, Il.62563, USA.

NANCY S. THOMAS, 73, Kennedy Street, Alexandria, VA 22305, USA.

ALAN ROSENBERG, South View, Chapel Road, Necton, Swaffingham, PE37 8HZ.

AKAD.NAUK SSSR, Krasikova 28/45, Moskva V-418, SSSR.

TERRY LIDDLE, 83, Gregory Crescent, Eltham, London, SE9 5RZ.

DAVID CARPENTER, 25, Cherry Hill Close, Workingham, Beccles, Suffolk.

ROBERT J. STOKELY, 4620 Adair Street, San Diego, CA 92107, USA.

KENNETH R. GREGG, Jr., 405 E 3rd. St., #194, Long Beach, CA 90802, USA.

JOHN L. COFFIN, 300½ W. Commercial, Springfield, MO 65803, USA.

ALAN SUTTON, 5, Sydney Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 9JP.

RUF0 R. BAES, Lawa-an, Roxas City, Capiz, 5701-Philippines.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, Washington, D.C. 20540, USA.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA TWIN CITIES, Serials Acquisitions, 170 Wilson Library, 309 19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455-0414, USA.

UNIVERSITATSBIBLIOTHEK AUGSBURG, Universitätsstrasse 22, 8900 Augsburg, West Germany.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH LIBRARY, Serials Dept., University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024, USA.

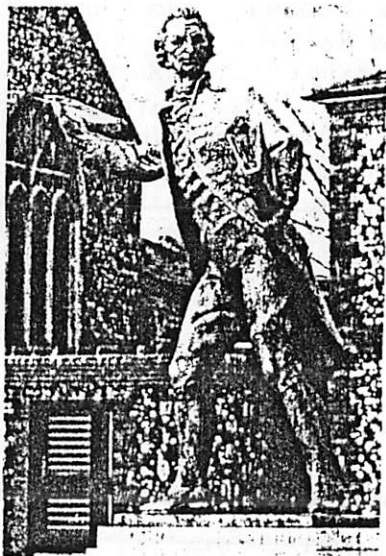
Rufo Baes, our first member in the Philippines, would like to correspond with members. He runs a small freethought school in the country which recently lost most of its library due to floods caused by storms, and is anxious to obtain replacement freethought books, including works by Paine, however, they have no funds available for purchases and so should readers be able to provide gifts of books I would ask them to do so.

P A I N E L E C T U R E

THE BI-ANNUAL THOMAS PAINE LECTURE, founded by Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Collins of the Thomas Paine Society, was given at the University of East Anglia this year by TPS President, Michael Foot, M.P. From all accounts it was a great success, although we have not as yet received a full report, and Mr. Foot was unable to supply the text.

P A I N E P R I Z E

PROFESSOR GRAEME DUNCAN, first Professor of Politics at the University of East Anglia, recently left to take up a post in Australia. He desired to establish an annual prize of £30 to £50 to be awarded to an honours student at the university, though he did not wish it to be named after himself, suggesting instead that it be called after a Norfolk radical. It was felt that such a figure was Thomas Paine, and Professor Albert P. Weale, Professor of Politics at the university, contacted the TPS on the matter. We welcomed the suggestion and offer our thanks to Professor Duncan for his splendid gesture.



Statue of Thomas Paine at Thetford.

THETFORD CELEBRATIONS

THE Thetford Labour Party have announced plans to celebrate the birth of Paine, though as yet the date has not been finalised. The celebrations will be in two parts, a political march with a rally which will include leading Labour Party and trade union speakers, and later an evening meeting at the Carnegie Room, Thetford, which will feature readings from Paine's works, drama and music. Speakers who will participate include, Michael Foot, M.P., President of the TPS., Tony Benn, M.P., a Vice-President, and Dr.E.P.Thompson, who is a Founder Member of the TPS. Incidentally, Andrew Carnegie, who I assume the Carnegie Room is named after, was a great fan of Paine's, and according to a recent ITV documentary on the Scottish-American steel baron, the most used book in the library at his castle in Scotland was a copy of Paine's, *The Age of Reason*. The Thetford celebrations will be styled, a "Festival of Liberty". The Festival will probably be held in April.

BBC BAN ON PAINE PROGRAMME REPEAT?

TPS member, Michael Roll, has charged the BBC with censorship for its failure to give a repeat showing to its Paine documentary, "The Most Valuable Englishman Ever". In a letter to the Director-General, Alisdair Milne, dated March 3, he ask bluntly "why have you banned any repeats of the outstanding documentary...?" He goes on to ask if the reason was the "outrageous editorial that appeared next day in *The Daily Telegraph*", which attacked the programme, "repeating the pathetic lies invented Thomas Paine's contemporary enemies of the truth". Members may have seen Michael's letter of protest against the editorial which the paper published and which we republished in an issue of *Contact*. The programme needs repeating and perhaps the BBC will respond to public demand to do so, or make an even better documentary for the Anniversary. Members can help by writing to ask the BBC to do BOTH. The Director-General's address is: BBC., London, W1A 1AA. Anyone who writes is asked to let the TPS secretary know of the response given their letter. Incidentally, Michael Roll has published a

fascinating study of data on survival after death which readers might like to read. It is highly critical of Christianity and atheistical in its stance. Michael's address is: 28, Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol BS16 6AH, and the two publications cost £1.20 plus postage.

BOOK REVIEWS

TOM PAINE: THE GREATEST EXILE. By David Powell. 303 plus unpaginated preface. Croom Helm, Beckenham, 1985. £18.95

BIOGRAPHIES of Paine are not ten a penny so another to the few which are available is, one hopes, an event to be celebrated, for there is always the hope that here at long last will be a significant addition to the available information on him. Unfortunately this new book, although well written and giving a reasonably comprehensive insight into the background events which the author feels influenced the development of Paine's thinking, I do not think it gets above the routine.

Paine did not live in an intellectual vacuum, and he seems to have had a very agile and inquiring mind from an early date, plus a dislike for the position in society his background set him. From all accounts he was able to influence various people into helping him, notably Benjamin Franklin, who was almost a second father to him and certainly enabled Paine to find a reasonable form of employment when he arrived in the colonies in America. But the more I study the various claims that this or that event "influenced him" the less convinced I become that we have discovered the main influences. Paine, as he tells us, was passionately interested in science and attended classes in various subjects, particularly astronomy, when living London. He also became friends with various scientists and teachers, and it may not be admiss to bear in mind that Franklin himself was as interested in things scientific as was Paine. Science and technology embodied radical change, and I feel that this was the primary factor which influenced Paine towards a radical and progressive stance, and it is this aspect of his life which all too many authors, Mr. Powell included, do not pay sufficient attention to, although naturally not ignoring

the fact of Paine's active interest in science and technology.

Mr. Powell spends much time, particularly when presenting Paine's earlier years, in examining background events, though he is not the first to do this, as readers of the late Audrey Williamson's biography of Paine will know. This technique, while being quite acceptable in historical studies, and certainly placing figures in the context of their day and age, can be dangerous as we are left wondering to what extent the authors inclinations are right, and whether this will lead to the creation of a degree of historical mythology. Mr. Powell ignores certain studies of Paine, such as those by George Hindmarch, which argue that Paine was an active writer in his Sussex days as well as a would-be nonconformist clergyman when based in Lincolnshire. The latter would clearly indicate Paine's inner urge to escape from what was the position in life his birth had destined him for in the socially layered society of England in the 18th century, while the former would indicate the school from which he graduated into journalism, for above all else Paine was a superb writer in a journalistic manner.

Paine's ideas are still in many cases advanced, far too advanced for some countries, and he appeals to people across the political and religious spectrum, though *The Age of Reason* does not go down with fundamentalists in the United States and other countries, which highlights the irony of the fact that it was written to combat atheism in France. Had Paine not writted this book I strongly suspect he would now be accepted unquestionably in the United States as an unquestioned founding father, but Chapman Cohen was right when he claimed that writing *The Age of Reason* played into the hands of Paine's political foes. Mr. Powell certainly highlights the two faced attitude, not to mention the ingratitude, of many of those who had used Paine's abilities to further their own ends, and this was never more stressed by the almost total official indifference to his death. Times have changed, however, and in both the United States, particularly there, and Britain, recognition is now being accorded Paine at an increasing tempo, though this side of the saga is beyond the scope of this book.

Tom Paine: The Greatest Exile is not a great book, but it is a competently written and very readable study of Paine which can be recommended. What does puzzle me is why it is so highly priced, for this will clearly place it beyond the reach of many who might otherwise buy it. There are no masses of coloured illustrations in it, indeed there are no illustrations apart from the frontis which reproduces an all too familiar portrait of Paine. The definitive biography of the great radical still remains to be written, if ever it can be in view of the all too obvious gaps in our knowledge of Paine.

Robert Morrell.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF UNBELIEF. 2 vols. Edited by Gordon Stein, Ph.D. 819pp. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1985. \$99.95.

THIS is undoubtedly the most important freethought work to have appeared for a very long time and will become an essential reference tool for any scholar of the history of ideas, indeed anyone who wishes to write seriously on the clash of opinions between believers and unbelievers. It is our intention to review it at considerably more length and this note, then, simply constitutes a sort of an advanced glance at it. The entry on Paine is written by the secretary of the TPS.

W.L.

"Tom Paine Live!" concluded,...

It is a strange tale, vividly brought to life by the fine performances of Julianne Mason and Alex Easton, and the often funny writing of Vince Foxall. But the attempt to incorporate a slice of history into the theatrical equivalent of a road movie meant that the history was limited to a sequence of fleeting images - entertainingly presented, but lacking any real substance.

Those hoping for an in-depth biography, full of new information, were thus bound to be disappointed.

Pat Rush. Reprinted from *The Stage*, 31-10-1985.

1. Not quite accurate - *Editor*.

MY LORD TOMNODDY

*My Lord Tomnoddy's the son of an Earl,
His hair is straight, but his whiskers curl;
His Lordship's forehead is far from wide,
But there's plenty of room for the brains inside,
He writes his name with indifferent ease,
He's rather uncertain about the 'd's', -
But what does it matter, if three or one,
To the Earl Fitzdotterel's eldest son?*

*My Lord Tomnoddy to college went,
Much time he lost, much money he spent;
Rules, and windows and heads, he broke-
Authorities winked-young men will joke!
He never peeped inside of a book-
In two years' time a degree he took;
And the newspapers vaunted the honours won
By the Earl of Fitzdotterel's eldest son,*

*My Lord Tomnoddy must settle down-
There's a vacant seat in the family town!
('Tis time he should sow his eccentric oats)-
He hasn't the wits to apply for votes;
He cannot e'en learn his election speech,
Three phrases he speakss-a mistake in each!
And then breaks down-but the borough is won
For the Earl of Fitzdotterel's eldest son,*

*My Lord Tomnoddy prefers the Guards,
(The House is a bore) so!-its on the cards!
My Lord's a Lieutenant at twenty-three,
A Captain at twenty-six is he-
He never drew sword, except on drill;
The tricks of parade he has learnt but ill-
A full-blown Colonel at thirty-one
Is the Earl of Fitzdotterel's eldest son!*

*My Lord Tomnoddy is thirty-four;
The Earl can last but a few years more,
My Lord in the Peers will take his place;
Her Majesty's councils his words will grace,
Office he'll hold, and patronage sway;
Fortunes and lives he will vote away-
And what are his qualifications? -ONE!
He's the Earl of Fitzdotterel's eldest son,*

ROBERT BROUGH (1828 - 1860)