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Contents

- Thomas Paine's Republic of Reason. 1
David Nash.
- Peter Porcupine and the Bones of Thomas Paine.
4.
Leo A. Bressler.
- Contested Sites*. Book review. 25.
Robert Morrell.

THOMAS PAINE'S REPUBLIC OF REASON

David Nash

The Eric Paine Memorial Lecture for 2004

The writings, thoughts and indeed the eventful life of Thomas Paine regularly leaves an indelible mark upon a significant number of us who have lived after him. He challenges and excites the receptive just as much as he can infuriate those who have already made their minds up about the things Thomas Paine chose to criticise. My first encounter with the name and ideas of Thomas Paine occurred in a secondary school history lesson in which those present heard that an Englishman had gone dramatically out on a limb to defend the ideas of freedom embodied by the French Revolution. Moreover, he had done so in a text entitled *Rights of Man*, a title to stir the emotions and blood of any early adolescent. However discovering and investigating the legacy of Thomas Paine, even at the rudimentary level of youthful exuberance, was also an important moment for me in entering a dialogue with the conflicting identities I had been bequeathed. Just as Paine argued, as I was later to discover, no generation had a right to determine the choices of a future one so I felt able to question my own inheritance or at least to look at it more critically.

Growing up simultaneously with Irish and English influences could certainly have led to some stark choices. Paine's good (common?) sense and pithy dislike of humbug was, for me, an enabling intellectual strategy. It clearly helped me to transcend the archaic triumphalism of an English identity that was about to go into a rapid irretrievable tailspin. However, disdain of humbug was equally valuable in transcending the dangers of ghettoised identity that Irish nationalist sympathy might have led me into. 'The world is my country and to do good my religion' was a forceful motto to carry around in late seventies and early 1980s London. A London which as we know witnessed conflict, violence and social being without doubt 'a time to try men's souls'.

I was fortunate enough to attend university in England, in the last gasp of a properly funded, enabling education system which valued knowledge and personal enrichment as unequivocal social

goods with potential benefits for all. In studying history and (for me) the 19th century, in which most things of importance seemed to happen, Paine became indispensable. He and his works were valuable companions to my undergraduate study both of radicalism and 19th century literature. These henceforth became a constant companion for me in my studies and writing of 19th century history. This is, in its way indicative of a time in which my studies responded to the consequences of an historical moment. My tutors, almost to a man and woman, had been through the flowering of leftward inspired social history. Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson had left indelible imprints upon all who had lived through the academia of these years. Even those sceptical; and even downright hostile to such developments could clearly not ignore the fact that they were happening. In those years in academia, if you wanted to, you could trace the impact of Paine upon the thousands of people who were the source and raw material of history from below. For the self educated artisan whose consciousness filled riot and corresponding society alike Blake had been an exemplar poet whilst Paine was the ultimate consummate politician. This became cast as the newly recovered contribution of the English to the broader culture of the European left.

Nonetheless, Thomas Paine and his influence did conflict with other agendas. When I studied the chartist movement and the radicalism surrounding it Paine was cast as a crucial part of the oldest, outmoded ideological emphasis. Paine's creation of 'Old Corruption' was cast as a regency hangover, which owed perhaps too much to eighteenth century Whiggery and anachronistic conceptions of duty and worth. Paine above all others would concede that mankind appreciates ideas, even old ones, through the history of experiences. Creating and praising the productive classes in the early 1980s made Paine sound uncomfortably poujadist and far too close to the mutterings of the Grantham grocer's daughter for comfort. This attitude was readily contrasted with the economic agenda and analysis in radicalism that had been advocated not primarily by Thomas Paine but by Thomas Spence and Robert Owen. Owen, in particular for those who felt more comfortable with Marxism, could be portrayed as the man who simultaneously invented the labour theory of value, created the language of anti-capitalist denunciation, yet also disdained politics as an unnecessary distraction.

My immersion in this exiting and rewarding world took me into postgraduate study in which I reconnected with radicalism and most importantly rediscovered one of its most underrated, yet endearing qualities – indignation. Owen was an alarmingly cold-fish in comparison to Paine. He assured all who heard him that he alone had the answer to society's ills and began to speak the language of inevitability which Marxists would later adopt as their own. This lineage undoubtedly had a history but it certainly did not deserve the liberty to overwrite political radicalism that some allowed it. Indignation had been central to motivation of this earlier political lineage and this was a valuable emotion which Paine contained in abundance. An emotion which he successfully trickled through the whole of the nineteenth century popular politics. So Paine and indignation had been a constant companion to my studies of Radicalism, Chartism, Secularism, Blasphemy and Republicanism. He remains valuable to all of us who would venture into those worlds in search of historical and ideological explanations of how society developed during these crucially turbulent years.

So why is he so useful? Why has Paine been a constant companion and why should he be afforded quite such importance? We are already, by now, familiar with a conventional ideological history. However I would like to take us down some of the less obvious ways in which Paine is a companion to English history and – let me say a founder and proponent of the public interest and opinion as key concepts that make us modern. It is not simply a question of Thomas Paine being ideologically valuable, he was also a radical who learned the important lesson that publicity and the skilled use of the media was essential to the successful reception of one's message. Paine was an endlessly pithy and articulate critic. For a historian wanting to write the history of radicalism through these years Paine endlessly creates and inspires public pronouncement – even after his death. Paine was also the definitive user of the decisive moment calculating the value of what he said and appreciating the importance of when he said it. He was the first to understand the nature of revolution and the first modern to understand the nature and potential magnitude of political change.

He also understood that the first way to change things is to think them into being different – to imagine and use 'mental strength' (a phrase frequently used by 19th century radicals) to transcend the

status quo. After all, it was Thomas Paine who showed the resonant power of thought and its publicity through his invention of the global village. No idea ever moved around the globe so fast as revolution in the name of reason. As a historian I could spend the rest of my life tracing the radical ripples from the huge pebble that was Thomas Paine. But his value also lies elsewhere. He is also a voice I sometimes hear when I am trying to evaluate our radical history alongside some of its personalities and byways. But there are also things that are essential about Paine's work and contribution that made the entire phenomenon of the 19th century radicalism possible. Paine and his ideas have an enormous presence in their own right in this world and these clearly deserve to be studied. But also importantly for me, he sometimes acts as a companion and a prism through which to view the phenomena one encounters as a historian in this era.

Ironically for someone who despised inheritance we need and deserve to look at what Paine inherited that is useful to us. Edward Thompson, in his last (posthumously published) work *Witness against the Beast*, tried to show how William Blake learned religious dissidence from his Muggletonian mother. We might similarly ask what did Paine take from Quakerism? The Quakers had once been extraordinarily radical and had been numbered amongst the dangerous sectaries of the English Revolution. They refused to accept what they regularly saw as spurious authority and refused (literally) to doff their hats to it and similarly refused to swear oaths to do things they deemed unworthy. In doing so they nurtured a culture of sober, considered yet determined resistance. Moreover, the Quakers through their actions in both England and the New World got themselves into trouble through their insistence upon the necessity of converting an unregenerate world. For these dedicated sectaries actions spoke emphatically as loudly as words ever did. Above all, Quakers were moved by the spirit within them to pronounce and denounce. Quakerism was about speaking the mind and soul. Now obviously we know that Paine rejected Christianity in its remotely organised forms but some of those traits from Quakerism he arguably retained. Through his indulgence of some of these he gave radicalism in Britain the means and confidence to speak. Radicalism was to have opinions for itself, and to have no compunction about publicising these no matter how awkward and unpopular they might prove and no matter where such sentiments might lead the speakers.

Paine also provided the 'ways and means' for others to form and communicate their opinions. He was lucky enough to be regularly published and republished whilst continually exposing his readers (even posthumously) to the endless exciting possibilities of print culture. The danger for us is to see such developments as natural components of the modern world. Or worse to underestimate them or even consider them to be mundane. We should always remember the enlightenment world this torrent burst upon. It was a world where philosophical societies throughout the land craved information and acquired the urge to experiment and derive knowledge about a universe freed from the cant and prescription of protected knowledge. Corresponding societies and societies for constitutional information were more than mere focus groups. Provincial societies like these were places where the science of electricity would be discussed one evening to be followed the very next by the sciences of man and his interactions – in other words politics.

Paine also wrote in a linguistically liberating language. Not only did he expose the possibilities of print culture he also innovated in his use of it. Many scholars have noted how his literary style was a break from the past – putting aside the classical allusions (we might say in unison with his audience illusions) to adopt and promote plain speaking and writing. He attacked Bastilles of the word and Palaces of the imagination. Being in awe of language and spurious unearned nobility not only cheated us of our humanity it also cheapened and demoralised our lives turning them into mere enslaved existences. Bastilles of the mind and Palaces of the imagination, these ideas are potent and have not been purged from contemporary life, never mind our history, and we will have cause to visit them later.

Again, for Paine, this innovative and immediate language was about creating the decisive moment although as we also know at times he could also lose the plot. Like most figures his ability to produce material that was memorable – when he could do it was what people would remember him by. The value of Paine's language would extend beyond the simple and didactic into producing the endlessly quotable epithet. His image of the 'plumage and the dying bird' resonates throughout the radical world but the lack of reverence he showed for even the institution of accepted British history is also informative and demonstrates how irreverence had a purpose. Paine's forthright language could

be seen as a form of blasphemy upon the sacred cow of conventional British history. If the power of blasphemy lies in the power to remove the sting from revered institutions then Paine could do this with his waspish version of history. Could his contemporaries (and can we) ever take the Norman Conquest (or even most of aristocratic history from above) seriously again without conjuring to mind the scornful phrase 'The Armed Banditti'?

Thus for me, Thomas Paine has been a companion on a journey through 19th century radicalism and the language attached to this. He comes into his own when examining the history of the unstamped press in the 1830's. Those daring and courageous individuals who took indignation onto the streets to sell unstamped newspapers in defiance of authority. They took such struggles into the court room and thence to prison only to come out and sell such papers again. Paine here reminds us of the duty to communicate, the value of such communication and also of the fear that authority would always possess about these issues.

In thinking about Chartism Paine is perhaps of little help in looking at the mass movement and the demagoguery of Fergus O'Connor. He is of more assistance in assessing the value and achievements of James Bronterre O'Brien – the man with more credentials than most to lay claim to the title of the English Robespierre. Paine is of most use however in assessing the contributions and achievements of William Lovett and John Collins, the individuals who found themselves in prison after the Bull Ring riots of 1839. These men took a long hard look at what Chartism had achieved for them as individuals and the cause of the working classes. They asked themselves some frank questions. Where had anarchy and mass protest got us and why they had not realised the potential of the radical mass platform? Rapidly these men realised that Chartism needed to rethink its strategy and ultimately to make some harsh decisions about what it was trying to achieve. They found themselves arguing that the working classes had not achieved their aims because they appeared raw and debased in the eyes and minds of their rulers. Thus their task was to raise expectations and standards through 'Education Chartism', 'Temperance Chartism' and 'Christian Chartism'. This communicated in their publication 'Charitism a New Move'. Whilst Paine might not have liked the last of these all of them were species of self-help and enabling strategies that were taking and

establishing rights for the individual, even if only within their own environment.

However, this is not to say that Thomas Paine is not a useful companion to have at your side when examining some of the set piece moments of the Chartist era. It is possible to hear him in one's ear when scrutinising the events of the 1842 Chartist petition and its presentation to parliament. In presenting the petition the chartists believed parliament would see the justice of their cause and produce actions that would rectify the damage that had been done. However they reckoned without the Tory Thomas Macaulay, who rallied to protect the vested interests of those who had property to defend. In refuting the requests of the chartists, albeit in the kindest possible way, Macaulay outlined the manifesto of the conservatives with vested interests who have ever thought about the issue from that day to this

....I believe that universal suffrage would be fatal to all purposes for which government exists, and for which aristocracies and all other things exist, and that it is utterly incompatible with the very existence of civilisation. I am firmly convinced, that the effect of any such measure would not merely to overthrow those institutions which now exist, and to ruin those who are rich, but to make the poor poorer, and the amount of misery of the country even greater, than it is now represented to be... No one can say that such a spoliation of property as these petitioners point at would be a relief to the evils of which they complain, and I believe that no one would deny, that it would be a great addition to the mischief which is supposed to be removed. But if such would be the result, why should such power be conferred upon the petitioners? That they should ask for it is not blameable; but on what principle is it that we, knowing their views are entirely delusive, should put into their hands the irresistible power of doing all this evil to us and to themselves?

Now is it possible that, according to the principles of human nature, if you give them this power, it would not be used to its fullest extent? There has been a constant and systematic attempt for years to represent the Government as being able to do, and as bound to attempt that which no Government ever attempted; and instead of the Government being represented, as is the truth, as being supported by the people, it been treated as if the Government possessed some mine of wealth, some extraordinary means of supplying the wants of the people - as if they could give them bread from the clouds, water from the rocks to increase the bread and the fishes five thousand fold. Is it possible to believe that the moment you give them absolute, supreme, irresistible power, they will forget all this? You propose to give them supreme power; in every constituent body throughout the empire capital and accumulated property is to be placed absolutely at the foot of labour. How is it possible to doubt what the result will be?'

Certainly it is possible to analyse the language here and as a historian to see that it embodies many well understood conceptions of eighteenth century government. But how should we get into the mind of the chartists whose claims and questions are to be consigned to oblivion by this answer? The language of indignation taught to them through a generation of unstamped papers and through their own paper the *Northern Star* must have made them equally able to hear Thomas Paine's voice clearly. In this incident they would have heard him telling them in no uncertain terms that such language is not the defence of legitimately earned property but the defence of vested interests. Moreover, he would have asked the chartists to think long and hard about the condescension being offered to them. Such dismissive attitudes argue ordinary men and women are not discriminating, are capable of theoretical thought and indeed are spurned as a mob and populace or still worse Edmund Burke's swinish multitude. Paine would have asked bluntly whether parliament had bothered to read properly the Chartist Petition with any level of discrimination. Paine would argue that the quest for Annual Parliaments and the payment of M.P.'s made central authority more accountable. In the words of the petition, the role of an M.P. is a great and responsible position taking office 'When called upon to undertake the important business of the country'. This is Paine's own language about sharing power, taking responsibility for government and considering it a great (the greatest) calling.

If we move to study the great radical autodidacts of the 19th century Paine is again supremely valuable. He reminds us of the uses of the scowling crustiness and disdain for easy solutions that so characterised these people. Moreover, his work to demystify language was turned into a life's work for many who clearly saw the social and political power inherent in education – particularly if it was self realised. This was also the gospel of self-help in action showcasing the power of individual accomplishment to reaffirm that making the most of life was worth the effort.

Examining the radical history around another of my research subjects – blasphemy - will rapidly convince anyone that Paine stands as a colossus. He provides the foundation text which is

prosecuted endlessly by the authorities – *The Age of Reason* (a volume still producing converts to rationalism as late as the 1950s). Once again Paine is a good companion in this territory. We can feel him alongside Daniel Isaac Eaton and the defenceless shopmen brought before the bench who in this instance resemble clearly Blake's imposing tyrannical figure of Steelyard the Law Giver. However, it is also possible to feel Paine wincing alongside Richard Carlile as he embarks upon an exhaustive complete reading of *The Age of Reason* in the court room. But nonetheless Paine (as we do) would take some time to admire the fortitude of a man who would spend years of his life in prison and would regularly quote Diderot's epithet about strangling the last king with the entrails of the last priest.

Paine might have chided J.S. Mill for being too polite in *On Liberty* for his denunciation of the prosecution for blasphemy of the insane individual Thomas Pooley in 1857 which really cried out for more in the way of indignation. But more importantly still Paine's culture of speaking out influenced those who would blaspheme. To blaspheme was emphatically to speak out, to venture the unpopular opinion and not be afraid of retribution and its consequences whether it emanated from this world or the next. Moreover, it was a call to feel and admit within your very self that the spurious must be questioned even unto your last breath. Importantly, the introduction of fun and ribaldry into blasphemy in the 1880s had an important cultural purpose – to argue we should not take power seriously any more. This was the colossal achievement of the enlightenment no matter what the suspicious post modern theorists would say. Paine's favourite blasphemy might well have been Python's *Life of Brian*. Not because it was particularly erudite but because it was mainstream and popular and touched thousands. It was perpetrated by public figures with cult influence especially amongst the young. Christian doctrine might summon to the mind comic images as easily as sacred ones. Paine argued that the sovereignty of this opinion was paramount – preserving it and offering it to others – after all was how revolutions began – a global village is, after all, one that talks and shares values.

Looking at the British Empire also provides fertile ground for the implications of Paine's culture of questioning and indignation. To radicals it was a system of oppression – but one changed by the application of opinion and holding this up to the measure of a

civilised nation. Imperialism had, for radicals, originated in aristocratic tendencies and provided the playground for the worst tendencies of the 'armed banditti' let loose on a defenceless population. Paine's ideological heir Charles Bradlaugh carried on the fight against such practices becoming the unofficial parliamentary 'Member for India' in the 1880s in succession to the radical Henry Fawcett. He fought jobbery, flunkeyism and attacks on the indigenous desire to govern and participate. Bradlaugh's own visit to India in the 1880s, enabled him to envisage a risen people casting aside gods and princes in equal measure to embrace the enlightenment and reason. This dream was dashed for this generation by the growth of separatism and factionalism which moved Indian nationalism away from liberal, radical and rational solutions to the problem of government.

However, it is really, paradoxically in the realm of republicanism where Thomas Paine's influence is really not appreciated and perhaps a significant chunk of my own work has veered towards demonstrating a different history of republicanism in Britain. Paine's feelings on monarchy and the cultural power it wielded are often resurrected and often quoted. He communicates this in an obviously celebrated phrase that has profoundly affected the history and historiography of republicanism.

- 'I have always considered monarchy to be a silly, contemptible thing. I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity, but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to open, and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter'.

This is a wonderfully cinematic image and like any cinematic image, we tend to view it from one camera angle. Our instinct is to feel ourselves a part of the audience. Paine would argue we are encouraged to look at the contemptible show and see a mixture of bombastic over the top ham performances. He would also draw our attention to the sight of some who have trouble with their lines and other who try not to be in the performance at all. It would also not escape his eye that some cast members appear merely interested in their press notices. Whilst laughter is generated in radical circles by this the laughter fades and Paine would solemnly note that a new generation of indifferent performers and performances replaces the old. This particular reading of the English republican legacy is traditionally how history has seen English republicanism. It is deemed a failure because we are still supposedly enthralled by the performance and will continue to

watch it even if farce follows tragedy in the way Marx argued it would. No matter how much we as a nation allegedly lose respect we are nonetheless dismissed as addicted to the show.

But my own investigations into republicanism suggest our cinematic angle is wrong and Thomas Paine's contribution wider than simple invective. Paine intended us to focus on what the audience think – to watch for changes – and to make this audience progressively more discriminating. This was to be accomplished by the generation of opinion early on. From the spectacle of George IV's funeral cortège being pelted with excrement through the accession of William IV (a man dull people called dull), monarchy had scarcely distinguished itself in the nineteenth century. But Victoria however became the middle class darling. In response to this English Republicanism set about undoing the special relationship to make the middle classes feel uneasy about this new alliance. In doing this they drew on everything Thomas Paine told them about how new societies would operate. They would foster and promote talent, industry, attainment and merit. They would, in short, be enabling and have a lively and healthy public sphere which would enshrine the demonstration of virtue. English Republicans did not have to overthrow the monarchy but to show how it was the enemy of all these things. They hoped it would go quietly under the urging of parliament and civil society.

Monarchy was expensive - an intrinsic message of Charles Bradlaugh's *Impeachment of the House of Brunswick*. Moreover, its benefits were extended only graciously and were in the end arbitrary. The benefits of local government existed only as long as monarchy's charters were honoured; what had been graciously bestowed could be cynically withdrawn. Besides, monarchy's attachment to the middle classes was fleeting and dramatically went into freefall with the death of Prince Albert. Victoria neglected her public duties; her 'friendship' with John Brown provoked adverse comment whilst her attempts to massage the royal finances were an embarrassment to the government. The last discovery allowed opponents to argue that the monarchy was crooked – a real fear for the Victorian middle classes who came to view fraud as the cardinal sin.

Honour was scarcely satisfied by the succeeding generation since the Prince of Wales was shown to be deeply in debt. His less than distinguished performance in the Mordaunt divorce scandal and

accusations he had perjured himself in court showed monarchy riding roughshod over civil society. Republicans openly asked the people what they thought of this and the answer came from monarchy – it would remake itself. We in turn should ask ourselves why such a move was necessary if the institution was so prosperous. Ultimately monarchy was made into an institution and it has been in this straight jacket ever since. We can judge it on these criteria and assess its usefulness. In doing so we have acquired discretion, powers of evaluation and nobility of reason Paine wanted us all to have. He would have argued that it is the duty of succeeding generations to look into the eyes of other members of this audience and make them tire of even laughing at the show.

Paire has gained new relevance from some political scholars who have suggested that with the eclipse of socialism the radical agenda is up for grabs. If this is true it may be that we are living through a period in which ideology is becoming malleable. Not in some postmodernist flabby way but in asking individuals to draw upon their human resources and their own conceptions of worth and rights. This raw power can challenge governments and multi-nationals as effectively as older socialist critiques. Perhaps this should also be an occasion to re-examine the legacy of liberalism that came down to us shorn of at least some of its indignation. It should persuade us to look at how liberalism became polite and lost its potency. John Stewart Mill when he stood for parliament refused to canvass for votes assuming that right would triumph in the hearts, or more correctly, the minds of men. Would Thomas Paine have taken such an eventuality for chance? The polite New-Liberalism of John Robertson argued that empire should be dispensed with because it was an uncivilised burden. Paine would have used stronger language than this and would have echoed Bradlaugh's more strident criticism which saw republican virtue as the cause that would save the unfortunate peoples of an exploitative aristocratic empire.

But the work of indignation is never complete. Paine and his ideological descendents like Charles Bradlaugh taught us that whilst the ignoble elements of human awe and the debasing effects of charisma could still do their work we should never be free. Our duty (in their eyes) was to become discriminating. To tear down, even if only in our own minds, the pedestals that envy, superstition and tawdry admiration had erected before our eyes.

But to come full circle, the issue of enabling people and how privilege was a blight on this was emphasised by two events occurring during my own lifetime either end of the 1960s. The first of these was the expansion of the universities in which talent rather than the ability or means to pay merit an important social force. This waged, at least for a time what war it could on the bastilles of the word and of the mind. This gave us social history and history from below – forces empowering and inspiring talent. When the opportunities were closed down we subsequently acquired postmodernism with its attendant obfuscation, cleverness and elitism – our worst Bastille of the mind!

The second event was the Aberfan mine disaster and its appalling aftermath. This latter event prompted the radical songwriter Leon Rosselson to write his driven and scathing attack upon privilege and the destruction of opportunity 'Palaces of Gold'. It is no coincidence here that palaces were the enemies of the republic of opinion and of merit and our finest instincts.

The last verse reads as an indictment of accepting the condemnation of a previous generation and the failure to enable us all!

‘I’m not suggesting any kind of plot,
Everyone knows there’s not,
But you unborn millions might like to be warned
That if you don’t want to be buried alive by slagheaps.
Pitfalls and damp walls and rat traps and dead streets,
Arrange to be democratically born
The son of a company director
Or a judge’s fine and private daughter.

Buttons will be press,
Rules will be broken.
Strings will be pulled
And magic words spoken.
Invisible fingers will mould
Palaces of God.”

We all owe Thomas Paine for giving us and helping us to retain our indignation, may it remain and grow ever more righteous as time passes. AMEN!

PETER PORCUPINE AND THE BONES OF THOMAS PAINE

Leo A. Bressler

DURING the American Revolution the name of Thomas Paine was almost as well known to Americans as that of George Washington. His pamphlet *Common Sense* was directly responsible for bringing on the Declaration of Independence. The first number of *The Crisis*, which begins the famous sentence "These are the times that try men's souls", stirred the colonists from New England to Georgia. Written in December, 1776, when the cause of the colonies was at its darkest hour and American troops were deserting, *The Crisis* gave renewed hope and courage to Washington's ragged army. Succeeding numbers of *The Crisis* made Paine the official propagandist of the American cause and truly one of the Founding Fathers of the nation.

The fame which these writings brought to Thomas Paine during the Revolution is known to every school boy. Not so well known are the pathos and tragedy of the closing years of his life. A national hero at the end of the war, Paine saw his reputation swept away by the currents of reactionary politics and evangelistic religious enthusiasm. Once hailed as the "father of American Independence", his friendship cherished by the great figures of the Revolution – Washington, Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Lafayette, and many others – he spent his last days in obscure poverty, shunned by former friends and reviled by his enemies as an atheist! He was denied the right to vote because he was not a citizen. The government refused him the paltry pension he had been promised. And, finally, when he realised that death was approaching and he asked to be buried in the Quaker cemetery at New Rochelle, New York, even this request was denied.¹

Paine died in Greenwich Village on June 8, 1809. A cortege composed of six persons accompanied the body to the grave in a field on Paine's farm near New Rochelle. And yet the small group of mourners was in many ways a fitting one. In the processions were Madam Bonneville,² a French Catholic whom Paine had befriended, along with her children, when she was widowed. Madam Bonneville's two young sons, a Quaker minister Willett

Hicks, and two Negroes, who walked the twenty-five miles from New York to the burial place. To Paine, who had devoted his life to the cause of human equality and freedom, who had said, "The world is my country, and to do good is my religion", these attendants would have been eminently satisfactory. And he would no doubt have been gratified by Madam Bonneville's words, pronounced as the earth fell on the coffin, "Oh, Mr. Paine, my son stands here as testimony of the gratitude America, and I for France".³

Paine's isolated grave was neglected and all but forgotten until 1819. Then, by a strange irony, the man who had once been Paine's bitterest enemy, an Englishman by the name of William Cobbett, came to cry shame upon the United States for its shabby treatment of its great Revolutionary hero.

Cobbett had first come to the United States in 1792. He was then twenty-eight, a tall, heavy set man with a florid complexion and a tendency toward corpulency, characteristics which later prompted Carlyle to call him "the pattern John Bull of his century".⁴ He brought with him a letter of introduction to Thomas Jefferson from William Short, the American Ambassador at The Hague; but this gained him only an indefinite promise of future help from Jefferson. After working as a teacher and gardener at Wilmington, Delaware, for several years, Cobbett came to Philadelphia and soon became embroiled in political strife. Writing under the name of "Peter Porcupine", he became perhaps the most widely read pamphleteer of his time and was one of the founders of our party press.

Although he hoped to become an American citizen and to establish himself here, he remained an extremely loyal Englishman. Thus, when Britain was violently denounced in Philadelphia newspapers and effigies of Pitt, the British prime minister, were burned in the public square, he rushed to the defence of England. Allying himself with pro-British Federalists, he published scores of pamphlets and two newspapers, *The Political Censor* and *Porcupine's Gazette*, in which he defended the monarchy and lashed out at those who supported democratic ideas. His clear, direct, idiomatic style and his genius for nicknames and vituperation soon made him one of the foremost political journalists in the young republic.

Showing no respect for person or office, Peter Porcupine hurled his poisoned quills at random. Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Joseph Priestley, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and a host of

other notable public figures were the victims of his gifted and abusive pen.⁵

At various times he called Franklin a quack, a hypocrite, an infidel and a whoremaster. Frequently he referred to him as "Old Lightning Rod". In a venomous attack upon Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson of Franklin and editor of the Republican *Aurora*, Porcupine called Franklin "a lecherous old hypocrite of a grandfather, whose very statue seems to gloat on the wenches as they walk the State House yard".⁶ He called Dr. Rush, among other things, "Dr. Death" and "Dr. Quack", accusing him of having killed more people with his purging and blood-letting during the yellow fever epidemic than Samson slew Philistines.

But Porcupine directed his most vicious attacks against Thomas Paine and even wrote an abusive, slanderous biography of him.⁷ As no single epithet served to describe "the infamous Tom Paine", he called him a hypocritical monster, a sacrilegious monster, a seditionist, a rascal, a blasphemer, a wretch who beat his wife. "Like Judas", wrote Porcupine, "he will be remembered by posterity: men will learn to express all that is base, malignant, treacherous, unnatural, and blasphemous, by the single monosyllable, Paine".

Cobbett finally overreached himself and was sued for libel by Dr. Rush. After being ordered to pay \$5,000 damages – a very heavy penalty in those days – he decided that the United States had become too hot for him. With a final blast at Americans, democracy, and the government in a bitter farewell address, he sailed for England on May 30, 1800. Philip Freneau celebrated Cobbett's departure with a bit of doggerel that seems to have just a touch of regret in it:

Alack, alack, he might have stayed
And followed here the scribbling trade,
And lived without royal aid.

But democratic laws he hated,
Our government he so be-rated,
That his own projects he defeated.

He took his leave from Sandy Hook,
And parted with a surly look

That all observed and few mistook.

Back in England, Cobbett led a quiet life for a time, continuing his newspaper work. But he soon became disillusioned with the Tory class he had so staunchly defended in America. He saw the upper classes getting rich while the great mass of workers lived in poverty. He noted widespread political corruption. He saw British seamen brutally flogged in public. He saw hungry men riot and saw the riots cruelly put down. With characteristic vigour and fearlessness, Cobbett turned his pen against the evil and injustice about him. And when the Tory government refused to do anything to right these wrongs, he became a Radical and appealed to the labouring classes.

For his efforts Cobbett was fined, flogged,* and thrown into prison. But nothing silenced him. He was determined to better the condition of the workingman, whom he saw helpless before a growing industrial and financial power. Through pamphlets and through his cheap newspaper, the *Political Register*, he rallied the labouring classes to their own defence. His "twopenny trash", as his enemies called his newspaper, was read avidly in every workingmen's club and meeting place; and from it the workingmen got courage and a sense of strength.

As the popularity of Cobbett's writings grew, so did the wrath of his aristocratic and wealthy enemies. Feeling that he might incite a revolt among the workers, they assailed him from all sides until his very life was in danger. Thus, early in 1817, Cobbett was once more in flight – this time to America.

The Cobbett who returned to the United States in 1817 was not the Peter Porcupine who had denounced this nation and all democratic ideas. He now came in sackcloth and ashes, singing the praise of this country, its government, and its people. Here, said Cobbett, one saw no "hang-dog face of a tax-gatherer", no "long-sworded and bewhiskered Captains". The people were "the most moral and happy in the world"; nowhere else were people "so well-behaved, so orderly, so steady So obedient to law".⁸

Cobbett had change his mind not only about the United States, but

*There is no evidence that Cobbett was flogged – *Editor*.

Also about Thomas Paine. Indeed, he had become almost as much a crusader for human rights as Paine had been. During his stay in England he had read Paine's *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, a treatise which had correctly predicted the suspension of cash payments by the Bank of England. This completely changed his opinion of the man he had once pictured as a devil.⁹ Convinced that he had done Paine a great injustice in the slanderous biography he had written, Cobbett resolved to make amends.

Proclaiming that the United States had too long neglected the remains of Thomas Paine, he requested permission to disinter Paine's bones. After encountering some difficulty, he was granted permission in 1819. An account of the disinterment was published in Cobbett's *Political Register*.

'I have just done here a thing, which I have always, since coming to this country' vowed that I would do: that is, *taken up the remains of our famous countryman, Paine, in order to convey them to England*. The Quakers, even the Quakers, refused him a grave! I found him lying in the corner of a rugged, barren field! ... Our expedition set out from New York, in the middle of the night; got to the place (twenty-two miles off) at peep of day; took up the coffin entire; brought it off New York; and just as we found it, it goes to England. Let it be considered the act of the Reformers of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In their names we opened the grave and in their names will the tom be raised."¹⁰

After the bones had been put on a ship sailing for England, Cobbett wrote to an American friend:

"I have just performed a duty which has been too long delayed: you have neglected too long the remains of Thomas Paine. I have done myself the honour to disinter his bones.... They are now on their way to England. When I myself return, I shall cause them to speak the common sense of the great man; I shall gather together the people of Liverpool and Manchester in one assembly with those of London, and these bones will effect the reformation of England in Church and State".¹¹

The news of Cobbett's venture cause a great stir in the United States, but the excitement here was nothing compared to that in England when the bones arrived there on November 21, 1819. The town crier of Bolton was imprisoned for nine weeks for proclaiming the arrival of Thomas Paine's remains. Even the halls of

Parliament echoed with loud denunciations of Cobbett and Paine. English newspapers launched bitter attacks against Cobbett. One paper carried a cartoon picturing Cobbett seated on Paine's coffin, in a boat named, 'Rights of Man', rowed by Negro slaves. A pamphlet containing a cartoon of Cobbett carrying Paine's coffin on his back and copies of Peter Porcupine's *The Blood Buoy* and of his *Weekly Register*¹² in his pocket was so popular that it went into at least eight editions. Written in derisive doggerel, it imputed the basest of motives to Cobbett's bringing the bones of Thomas Paine to England:

This is
WILL COBBETT
With Thomas Paine's bones
A bag full of brick-bats, and
one full of stone,
With which he intends to discharge
the long Dept.
He owes to his friends, and Sir Francis Burdet:
'Tis Cobbett, the changeling,
the worthless and base.
Just arrived from New York,
with his impudent face,
Who comes to dispel our
political fogs,
And to add one more beast to
our Hampshire Hogs.
To mix with the RADICALS-
Friends of Reform,
Devising new Plots, for
Exiting a Storm....¹³

It actually took a great deal of courage for Cobbett to bring the remains of Paine to England. As a near contemporary of Cobbett's stated, Paine's reputation "among the governing and conventionally respectable classes ... was an abhorred thing".¹⁴ At about this time, Richard Carlile, a Rationalist publisher, spent nearly ten years in prison for publishing Paine's works. "To have brought home the bones of Paine amidst such a state of things was to put the public to the severest test. *The Times* and *Courier* newspapers attacked Cobbett with every species of vindictive scurrility.... 'Former friends', writes Cobbett, 'shrugged their shoulders and looked hard in my face, as if in wonder'.¹⁵

But courage was one thing Cobbett had never lacked, and he had long been accustomed to public abuse. Thus, soon after his arrival

in England he announced plans for honouring the memory of Thomas Paine: "If it please God to give us life, we will have a funeral worthy of the remains that are to be buried. I do not say when this will take place; but it shall be, if I live, in a season when twenty wagon-loads of flowers can be brought to strew the road before the hearse".¹⁶ He proposed to build a splendid mausoleum to house the bones of Paine. Funds for this project, he said, would be raised by public subscription. However, his idea was so poorly received that Cobbett never made any effort to collect the money.

He next announced plans for a great dinner to be held on Paine's birthday. But once again no one would take him seriously and the idea was abandoned. Finally, he had locks of Paine's hair soldered up in rings, which he hoped to sell – presumably to raise money for some memorial to Paine. But Cobbett found no buyers; he succeeded only in producing a great deal of amusement.¹⁷

Cobbett's noble project to honour the memory of Thomas Paine finally collapsed under a barrage of insult and ridicule.¹⁸ Hack writers and distinguished poets had an equal share in jeering at "Cobbey's Dream", as one versifier called it. Even Lord Byron contributed a quatrain to the general fun:

In digging up your bones, Tom Paine,
Will Cobbett has done well;
You visit him on earth again,
He'll visit you in hell.

Or, Byron suggested, these alternative lines might be used:
You come to him on earth again,
He'll go with you to Hell.¹⁹

Thus the mortal remains of Thomas Paine found no resting place in England. For a number of years they were shunted about Cobbett's house in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, London, where Cobbett had taken up residence. In January 1833, the bones were packed into a box and sent to Normandy Farm, Surrey, where Cobbett had taken up residence. A Mr. Benjamin Tilly, who served as Cobbett's secretary and companion in his last years, removed part of the brain from the skull as he was preparing the bones for shipping. Years later the following note from the souvenir-hunting Tilly was found among the Cobbett family papers: "On Tuesday, January 27, 1833, I went to 11 Bolt Court, Fleet Street, and there in the company of Mr. Antsell and Mr. Dean, I saw at the house of Mr. Cobbett the remains of Mr. Thomas Paine, when I procured

some of his hair, and from his skull I took a portion of his brain, which has become hard, and is almost black. – B. Tilly.²⁰

Upon Cobbett's death, on June 18, 1835, Cobbett's oldest son and sole executor took possession of the farm and also the remains of Paine, which had been packed into an old trunk.²¹ When Cobbett's effects were sold at auction in January 1836, the bones were not listed in the catalogue of the sale. Mr. Oldfield, Cobbett's publisher, requested that they should be sold, but his appeal was denied by the Lord Chancellor, who refused to regard the bones as part of Cobbett's estate. For a time the bones were in the possession of a day labourer by the name of George West. In 1844, West turned them over to Tilly, who had expressed his determination that Cobbett's intentions regarding the bones be carried out.²² From here the records are vague. In 1854, Robert Ainslee, a Unitarian clergyman, maintained that he owned the skull and right hand of Paine, but he refused to answer further inquiries.²³ Some time later, according to one source, a man by the name of Ginn told a visitor that he had the bones in a bag, but that he couldn't find them at the moment because his wife wasn't home. When Mrs. Ginn returned, she said that she had let the bones be carried away with some rubbish when she cleared out the room where Benjamin Tilly had died.²⁴ What eventually happened to the mortal remains of Thomas Paine – whether they were buried or whether they were simply knocked about until they crumbled to dust – no one knows.²⁵

The bones of Paine thus ended their long, restless journey in oblivion. And yet, William Cobbett's strange enterprise was perhaps not entirely a failure. As late as 1847 a society was formed in London for the purpose of collecting funds for raising a monument to the memory of Paine.²⁶ Three years after Cobbett's death the United States belatedly erected a monument to Paine at New Rochelle. In a sense his monument was also a tribute to William Cobbett, who first took Americans to task for failing to honour the memory of Thomas Paine.

Legend has it that when Cobbett took the bones of Paine to England, Paine's little finger was left in the United States.²⁷ This, as one biographer has written, is probably only a nicely contrived fable of Paine's "one small movement, now stronger than the loins of bigotry that refused him a vote or a grave in the land he so greatly served.

References and Notes

1. William Cobbett described the Quakers refusal of Paine's request with characteristic rashness, but also with essential truth: "Mr. Paine was the only man of distinguished talent produced amongst the Society of Quakers. His wish was to be buried in the Quaker burying ground in New York. This wish was expressed, I believe, to Mr. Willett Hicks, of that city. And what was the reason on which the Quakers founded their objection? Why this, that there were many who accused them of deism already; if they buried him in their ground, the accusation would have a circumstance to rest on. The reason was very mean, to say the best of it; and all the Quakers I have talked with on the subject, in America, will acknowledge that I reproached them with their cowardice; and their want of all feeling of honour, and with their casting from them the only great man their sect has ever produced". Quoted in, J. Watson, *A Brief History of the Remains of the Late Thomas Paine from the Time of Their Disinterment in 1799 by the late William Cobbett, M.P. down to the Year 1846*. London, 1847. p.2.
2. Mother of Capt. B. L. E. Bonneville, whose journal recounting his travels in the northwestern territory and his activities in the fur trade was published by Washington Irving under the title, *The Rocky Mountains in 1837*.
3. Quoted in William Cobbett's *Sketch of the Life of Thomas Paine*, which was written in collaboration with Madam Bonneville. The *Sketch* is appended to Moncure D. Conway's, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1909. pp.433-559.
4. Clark, M.E. *Peter Porcupine in America: The Career of William Cobbett, 1792-1800*. New York, 1939. p.5.
5. Cobbett's *Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Priestley*, was tremendously popular, going through four editions. Even more widely read was his pamphlet *The Bloody Buoy*, a piece of anti-revolutionary propaganda. This was read as late as 1825 and was even translated into German and published in Reading as *Die Blut Fahne*.
6. *Porcupine's Gazette*, July 13, 1797. See also the issue for Sept. 23, 1797.
7. 'Life of Thomas Paine' in *Political Censor*, September 1796.
8. Cobbett, W. *A Year's Residence in the United States*. Boston, Nd. pp.25, 154, 169, 181 and *passim*.
9. In *Paper Against Gold, and Glory Against Prosperity*, published in 1815, Cobbett wrote as follows: "In principle of finance, Mr. Paine was greatly skilled; and to his very great care and rare talents as a writer he added an uncommon degree of experience in the concerns of paper money, the rise and fall of which he witnessed in the United States and in France.... Events have proved the truth of his principles on the subject, and to point out that fact is no more than an act of justice, due to his talents, an act more particularly due at my hands, I have been one of his most violent assailants. Any man may fall into error, but a fool or a knave will seldom acknowledge it. Quoted in Watson, 4. See

- also William Reitzel, ed. *The Autobiography of William Cobbett*. London, 1933. pp.129-130.
10. Vol.XXXIV. London, 1920. p.382.
 11. From a letter to J.W.Francis published in Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Cobbett in England and America*. New York, 1913. II. P.116.
 12. Cobbett's paper underwent many changes of title, *Political Register* is the most familiar title.
 13. *The Real or Constitutional House That Jack Built*. London, 1819.
 14. 'Thomas Paine's Bones and their Owners', *South Place Magazine*. XIV. December, 1908. p.40. One piece of satirical versifying, in twelve stanzas, *Ode on the Bones of the Im-mortal Thomas Paine, newly transported from America to England by no less Im-mortal William Cobbett, Esq.* London, 1819, attacked Paine's Deism and those who supported it.

Now let a thousand cat-squalls sound
To tell the neighbouring kingdoms round;
Let England, Ireland, Scotland Ring,
Whilst Paean hosts of Deists sing,
"The bones of our Apostle PAINE
"Revisit England's happy shores again!"
 15. 'Thomas Paine's Bones and their Owners'. P.40.
 16. Quoted in Watson, p.7.
 17. Melville. II. P.118.
 18. Cobbett did not give up his project easily or immediately. In September 1821, he wrote: "as to the bones of Paine, they shall have their honourable burial and monument. There must be suitable preparation for this. The healing hand of time is working for his memory. The memory is in the care of the wise, the just, and the generous of mankind. His bones are in my care, and in due time they shall be deposited in a place and in a manner that are suitable to the mind that once animated the body, and set those bones in motion. If I shall die before this is accomplished, those who will be alive that will perform the sacred duty in my stead. Quoted in 'Thomas Paine's Bones and their Owners', p.24.
 19. Melville. II. P.116.
 20. 'Thomas Paine's Bones and their Owners', p.39. This article is based on statements made by a Mr.George Reynolds, who was at one time a Baptists minister at Stepney. Reynolds stated that he obtained a collection of manuscripts formerly belonging to Cobbett through a family named Ginn. These manuscripts, according to Reynolds, formerly belonged to Benjamin Tilly, who had given them to the Ginns for kindnesses they had paid him during the last days of his life. Reynolds maintained that he bought the manuscripts from the Ginns for twenty-five pounds, including the fragment of hair and Tilly's note.
 21. According to one source, Cobbett's son inscribed Cobbett's name "in several places on the skull and on most of the larger bones of the limbs, in order, we suppose, to the more easy verification of them in case of dispute..." Watson, pp.5-6.
 22. *Ibid.* p.7.

23. See Conway, p.427 (note).
24. See reference 19.
25. For further unverified reports of the later history of Thomas Paine's bones see, 'Thomas Paine's Bones and their Owners'.
26. Watson, p.2.
27. In an article published in the New York Sun, May 25, 1902, Moncure Conway wrote that, according to an item in the New York Beacon, for December 7, 1845, "a little finger of Paine was in the possession of a 'Friend', a Quaker of Long Island". In the same article Conway related how he had bought the fragment of Paine's brain from a London bookseller for five pounds and brought it to the United States for burial.
28. Conway, p.428.

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William Cobbett.

Book Review

CONTESTED SITES, Commemoration, Memorial and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell. 192pp. Illustrated. Hardbound. Ashgate, 2004. ISBN 0 7546 3229 6. £45.00

Britain's towns and cities are littered with memorials to those we are supposed to consider as the great and the good. Whether most of those they commemorate can really be described as great is debatable, while the designation as good is highly subjective. Amongst this mass of monuments are to be found a handful dedicated to radicals and reformers, many of whom suffered appallingly at the hands of the aforesaid "great and good". The accounts as to how these radical monuments came to be erected, or not erected, can be quite fascinating as the essays in this book show.

Contested Sites consists of seven essays compiled by Pickering and Tyrrell along with Michael David, Nicholas Mansfield and James Walvin, their titles being, 'Bearding the Tories: The Commemoration of the Scottish Political Martyrs of 1793-94'; 'A Grand Ossification: William Cobbett and the Commemoration of Tom Paine'; 'Radical Banners as Sites of Memory: The National Banner Survey'; 'The Chartist Rites of Passage: Commemorating Feargus O'Connor'; 'Preserving the Glory for Preston: The Campo Santo of the Preston Teetotallers', and, 'Whose History Is It? Memorialising Britain's Involvement in Slavery'. An opening chapter, 'The Public Memorial of Reform: Commemoration and Contestation', presents an overview of the book's theme.

Perhaps the chapter which will probably first attract those interested in Thomas Paine is that by Paul A. Pickering which presents an account of a failure by William Cobbett to carry through a plan to have a major monument erected in England commemorating Paine, which was his excuse for exhuming his remains. Pickering's detailed analysis of what occurred after the remains arrived in England and Cobbett's efforts to carry out his aim makes for absorbing reading. The author draws attention to Cobbett's hostility to many of Paine's ideas, notably his republicanism and views on religion, nor can the suspicion be escaped that he also used Paine's political reputation in furthering

his own reputation by finding a ready body of support amongst the radicals who had been inspired by Paine.

Pickering also mentions the reaction against Paine, even amongst those who shared his political ideas, created by *The Age of Reason*, stating, "most contemporaries (and historians, if they discuss it at all) agreed that it was Paine's hostile attitude to religion that doomed [Cobbett's] campaign to commemorate him with a monument to failure". There is a great deal of weight in this, as Chapman Cohen pointed out many years ago in a booklet he wrote about Paine, but Paine was not hostile to religion, and here I feel the author has managed to confuse his opposition to the concept of personal revelation and the use of the idea to establish a system of belief. In fact, Paine actually invented a religion, which he called Theophilanthropy.

There is a strong Painite element in the story of the five Scottish martyrs as told by Alex Tyrrell and Michael T. Davis in their essay about the events and ideas behind the plan for and eventual building of Edinburgh's Martyrs Memorial. Of the many interesting facts they record is that three of those commemorated were actually English! The authors say their contribution is an attempt to "rescue the Martyrs' Monument from neglect and misunderstanding by demonstrating its important symbolic role in the political struggles of the second quarter of the nineteenth century", and how it brought Scottish and English reformers together. Now, though, they suggest, "it is assuming a new form of symbolism, namely a stress on Scottish national identity". If they are correct, then I personally consider such a trend to be retrogressive.

There is another smaller memorial to the five, also an obelisk, in Nunhead Cemetery in London, which they illustrate with a 19th century engraving. This may be said to compliment the Edinburgh obelisk and also to transcend nationalism. Controversy surrounded the plans for the erection of the Edinburgh monument almost from the inception of the idea to have one, and this side of the saga is brought out in detail by the authors. The story of the controversy reminded me of that which broke out in Thetford in the early 1960s when a statue of Paine was offered to the town.

Perhaps the most unusual monument described in this book is the teetotallers' monument in Preston and its associated burial ground,

which is to be found in the town's General Cemetery, though it is hardly an inspiring sight now. Preston, it seems, had the reputation, if the author of the essay Alex Tyrrell, is to be believed, and I found no reason to doubt his contention, as being the national hub for the missionary endeavours of the teetotal movement, however, as I cannot really do justice to this chapter in a short review, I shall simply say his narrative reveals a somewhat strange saga that is likely to come as something of a surprise to many students of Britain's radical history.

In his essay on radical and trade union banners, Nicholas Mansfield presents details of a national survey, which seeks to locate and record the surviving banners. He discusses the reasons for them and their changing imagery. They were in essence a form of pictorial propaganda displayed proudly at demonstrations and parades. At one time May Day parades were awash with them, but now we see fewer and fewer of them, perhaps this is symptomatic of the decline in the number of trade union branches as the unions have centralise their organisational structures. The preservation and recording of surviving banners from our political past is important.

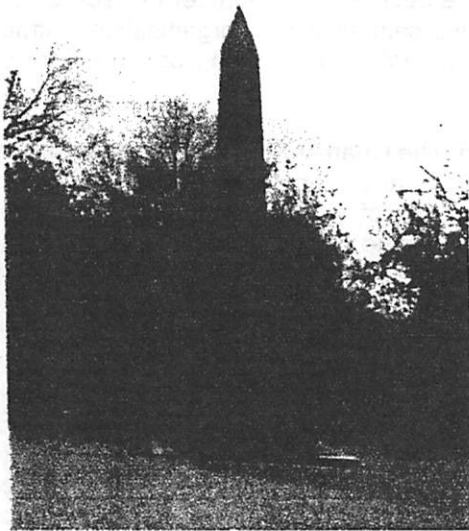
The chapter titled 'The Chartist Rites of Passage: Commemorating Feargus O'Connor', also contributed by Paul A. Pickering, is primarily a description of two monuments to him, one, a Gothic obelisk in London, the other a statue in Nottingham. The campaigns to raise the finance for them, particularly that in the capital, along with the inevitable controversies the proposed monuments gave rise to, are retailed in detail. In Nottingham, the opposition was political, but tactically concealed by being represented as concern over erecting it in a public park known as Arboretum. However, the statue was eventually placed there and can be seen to this day, although how many of those who use the park for recreation, or as a convenient right of way, know anything about the person commemorated, or of Chartism, is debatable.

The final essay commences with reference to the unveiling of a monument to Thomas Clarkson in Westminster Abbey, although Clarkson, as is pointed out by the authors, Alex Tyrrell and James Walvin, had no desire to be commemorated there. He was a radical whose reputation has been unjustly eclipsed by that of Wilberforce, for who he appears to have acted as a sort of researcher. His opinions were of the radical Quaker variety, and he

was the author of a three-volume work on Quakerism published in 1806. Nor was he, unlike Wilberforce, indifferent to the fate of the free white "slaves" labouring in English factories. In respect to Wilberforce, the authors quote approvingly E.P.Thompson's assertion that he, 'turned the humanitarian tradition into a counter-revolutionary creed and left it warped beyond recognition'.

Contested Sites deserves a wide readership. It contains much I found new and it has prompted me to wonder what other radical monuments lurk forgotten around the country and also what might be said to constitute one. Perhaps here we have a neglected area of research for local historians. If I have any reservations about this book it is the price, this may prevent many who would benefit from reading it doing so. One might hope, then, that public libraries will stock it, but tight local authority purse strings might well prevent many doing so.

Robert Morrell.



The Scottish Martyrs Memorial in Nunhead Cemetery
photographed in 2003.