

BULLETIN

OF THE

THOMAS PAINE SOCIETY

250th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
BIRTH OF THOMAS PAINE



THOMAS PAINE.

Author of the "RIGHTS OF MAN," "COMMON SENSE," &c.

This issue of the TPS BULLETIN is dedicated to all those who have promoted Paine's ideas and defended him against the many who have attacked his reputation. This task is not finished.

TPS BULLETIN

The official newsletter of the Thomas Paine Society
No. 1. Spring 1987

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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.

THE ANNIVERSARY

BY the time you read this the 250th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine will either be almost on us or just past. This important event will be marked by several happenings in various parts of Britain and other countries, and it has been the task of the society to promote, encourage and organise these. Naturally work on this commenced a long time ago, although the workload increased dramatically during 1986.

You will find detailed in this issue particulars concerning many of the celebrations due to take place, and it is hoped that members will make every effort to participate in these, as well as perhaps organise something in their own localities. It gratified us that many of the events were organised by local groups, although this is as it should be for local knowledge and contacts are essential to success. The TPS wrote to more organisations, museums, libraries, educational establishments, government departments, societies and

groups than I care to think of, and this does not take into account similar bodies abroad. I hate to think of the costs involved in postage, but it had to be met. We also sent promotional materials to many university libraries, which brought a few subscriptions in, particularly from the United States. Extra copies of the *Bulletin* and *Journal of Radical History* were printed for free distribution, and a large number of folders on Paine also sent off.

As it was thought the anniversary to be of interest to tourists the British Tourist Board was approached to see if they would promote the event, and they said they would look into it. Whether they have done anything I do not know at the moment, perhaps overseas readers will report to the society on this.

Thomas Paine's ideas are still relevant to society, and still exert pressure, as was brought home rather unexpectedly to me recently, for a BBC broadcast on prisoners in the Maze Prison, Northern Ireland, who are studying for Open University qualifications, drew attention to copies of Paine's, *Rights of Man*, required by the "students" being banned, though this was later lifted. There are few political works published as long ago as 1791 which can be said to exert such influence now, and, one might add, the incident noted is far from being an isolated occurrence - a copy of the same book was seized by the customs when sent by us (under plain cover) to Chile last year, though I am happy to say the person who wanted it has now left that unhappy gangster run country. Paine's thoughts inspire lovers of freedom everywhere.

FOR SALE

The Society has for sale the following books, regrettably only one copy of each is available:-

MAN OF REASON, THE LIFE OF THOMAS PAINE by A.O. Aldridge, 348pp, 8vo. Cresset Press, London, 1960. Dustwrapper, £11.50. Dust wrapper slightly torn otherwise a very good copy of this valuable work.

THOMAS PAINE, HIS LIFE, WORK AND TIMES by Audrey Williamson. Illustrated, 296pp, 8vo. Allen & Unwin, London, 1973. Dust wrapper, £11.50. Ex-library copy lacking the rear end-paper (blank). Some minor library stamps but otherwise a very good, clean copy of this very good and extremely difficult to find work long out of print.

Prices include postage (estimated at £1.50 per book). Both books ordered together £21.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS IN 1987

This listing does not claim to be complete and the Secretary would be pleased to have particulars of any events not listed.

LEICESTER

Sunday 25 January, 1987. 6.30pm at the Secular Hall, Lumberstone Gate, Leicester. Meeting to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine. Speaker: Tony Mann, M.P. Admission by ticket - all members of the TPS should have received their ticket with this issue of the *Bulletin*.

ALFORD, LINCOLNSHIRE

Monday 26 January for a fortnight. Small Paine exhibition at the public library. Admission free.

NOTTINGHAM

Monday 26 January for a fortnight. Small Paine exhibition, including publications. Admission free.

THETFORD

Major Paine Exhibition at the Ancient House Museum, on until Autumn.

Thursday 29 January, Paine's Birthday Celebration. Assemble 12.30 at the town Council Chamber for sherry, then to the Thomas Paine Hotel for lunch, main speaker after lunch being Christopher Brunel. This will be followed by a ceremony at the Paine statue when floral tributes will be laid. Following this tea will be served in the Council Chamber.

Special terms have been offered in respect of the lunch and members wishing to attend should contact (AS SOON AS POSSIBLE) Sue Lloyd, Broom Cottage, Green Lane, Thetford, IP24 2BY.

April 25. Festival of Liberty. Details when ready.

LONDON

January 25 at 11.00am. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. Christopher Brunel will speak on Thomas Paine.

March 27. Tony Benn, M.P. on Paine at the Marx Memorial Library. Details later.

British Library - possibility of a small exhibition.

LEVES

Several events planned. No details to hand.

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y., USA.

January 29. Celebration Dinner at the Paine Memorial Museum. Guest of Honour, Sir Richard Attenborough.

SAN FRANCISCO, USA.

Irving Israel will present two special events to mark the Anniversary. First: *COMMON SENSE* on Wednesday, January 28 at 7.00pm. in The Playroom, 450 Geary. Second: *The Age of Reason* on January 29 at 6.30pm in The Library, Marina Branch, Chestnut and Webster Streets, San Francisco. Admission to both events free.

PARIS, FRANCE

Lecture on Thomas Paine by Professor Bernard Vincent at the American Embassy (at the invitation of the Ambassador), Paris.

A plaque to Paine will be set on the Bonneville's home in Paris to commemorate Paine when Professor Vincent's biography of him is published (see special item in this issue). Details when available.

LJNHO UNIVERSITY, PORTUGAL

Meeting on Paine organised by the Faculty of Arts.

LEMINGRAD, USSR

Exhibition at the Saltykor-Schedrin State Public Library, Sadoria St. 18, Leningrad. Opening date not yet known.

SHEFFIELD

Conference of Paine and his ideas and influence organised by the Society for the Study of Labour History, in Sheffield, April 10-12. Speakers:

Dr. Gregory Claeys: "Thomas Paine and the Problem of Moral Economy".

Dr. Malcolm Chase: "Paine, Spence and the 'Real Rights of Man'".

Dr. Edward Royle: "The Reception of Paine in the 19th Century".

Dr. Linda Kirk: title to be announced.

It is hoped to arrange for other speakers, including Dr. David Montgomery on "Paine in America", and another speaker to give a matching paper on Paine in France.

On Friday evening there will be a dinner with a guest speaker, probably Michael Foot, TPS President. There will be toasts and songs in the fashion of the various Paine dinners held in the 1820s and other times. Accommodation can be arranged. For further details and bookings please contact, John L. Halstead, Division of Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GJ.

Book Reviews

SON JESUS AND BIG FATHER, Alex Gardner, 145pp plus 49pp, New Horizon, Bognor Regis, 1984, £2. Distributed by Arthur Lawson, 22 Gerald Road, Bournemouth, BH3 7JZ.

FOR anyone who has read and appreciated *The Age of Reason* this book is a must. It presents a critique of biblical ideas in a true Paineite style, being at one and the same time scholarly, serious and amusing. I found it difficult to put down for it read so well, not that I agreed with all it's author says, but I am certainly at one with him in respect of the bulk of the work.

I am tempted to describe the book as representative of the best of Freethought biblical criticism, providing by this you take it as being presented at a popular level, for it is clearly intended for popular as distinct from academic study, although here I should add that its many insights and detailed points are worthy of academic study.

The book's controversial side (in so far as Freethinkers are concerned) rests in Mr. Gardner's conviction in survival after death, though in a scientific not religious sense. He criticises Freethinkers and atheists, who he describes as "nullifidians" for having "an odd tendency to treat all reports of occult happenings as either fraud or illusion, especially if they indicate a possibility of survival". He goes on to stress that to admit of such a possibility does not "concede the existence of Big Father" (his term for a god). Mr. Gardner suggests the reason why Freethinkers assume an argument for survival implies

belief in a god arose because spiritualists "have mainly cornered the market and hold their seances in a religious setting".

The book almost concludes with an item on Paine, who the author greatly admires (he is a member of the TPS), noting that while a bolt of lightning struck York Minster, it did not strike Paine's statue, even though the weather when it was unveiled was bad.

The title of the book is reflective of Orwellian ideas; "Big Father", writes the author, thanks to the carefully nurtured Christian conscience and an automatic trapdoor-mechanism which knocks any emerging doubt on the head, watches with an all-seeing eye that has no need of large posters and telescreens. From the faithful he reaps adoration no matter what dire epidemics or violent upheavals are in the process of mutilating believer and unbeliever, child and adult alike. From him", Mr. Gardner continues, "come, via Moses, the Ten Commandments, containing the cynical injunction not to kill and cited with modifications by Son Jesus. Accepting Moses as a saintly patriarch is *doublethink* since his atrocities are clearly described, and one could as well revere Genghis Khan or Idi Amin..." Some Jesus, the author notes, "is a chip off the old block, but also one with the block, and imbued with the essence of the block - to use the jargon of the Trinity", which the author correctly notes was "filched" from Mithraism.

This book is highly recommended. You might, or might not, agree with all the author says or claims, but he does seek to furnish hard facts to support these, and this makes them worthy of serious consideration. There is an inserted illustration showing a carving from a German church, which was the subject of correspondence between the author and Barbara Smoker which led to the caption being corrected - it is refreshing to find a writer admit he was in error.

RWM.

AN AUSTRALIAN ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS. Nigel H. Sinnott. Ellesmere Publications, 62, Powell Street, Yarraville, Victoria, Australia, 3013. \$3.00 (airmail USA \$3.50, Europe \$4.00 - payment by International Money Order or bank draft in Australian currency).

The author of this selection of poems once edited *The Freethinker*, but for some years has now resided in Australia. His poems reflect life and memories in both countries but above all else are imbued with a warm reflection of human life, values and nature in its various phases. The poems also reflect the writer's close interest in the history of freethought and the trials and tribulations of Freethinkers, perhaps best seen in the poem, "Epitaph for an Old-Fashioned Freethinker". Sharper, or if you like, a poem with fangs, is "The Sickening Season", which as it is about Christmas, and I write this short review then, is, I feel, most apt.

I am no poet, nor do I particularly like poetry, but I did like these verses and suspect you will also. So get hold of a copy - even by airmail the price is very modest.

RWM.

The Workers Esperanto Movement (29, Rarrance Road, Chadwell Heath, Essex, RM6 6EB) publish an Esperanto translation of Robert Morrell's, *Resurgence of Thomas Paine, La Relevigo de Tomaso Paine*. The latest issue of their journal gives details of some the Paine celebrations to be held in 1987 - in Esperanto of course.

NEW MEMBERS

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Robert Payne, 21, Tower Hill, Witney, Oxon.
A.J.Foster, 103, Markhouse Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 8DQ.
Chad Goodwin, Curator, Ancient House Museum, White Hart Street, Thetford, IP24 1AA.
Major Simeon G. Musonda MBIM., Private Bag E8, Lusaka, Zambia.
J.Hubbard, 3 Kings Road, Aylesham, Nr. Canterbury, Kent, CT3 3HD.
Mrs.V.Fuller, 28 Chelsworth Avenue, Gt.Cornard, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 0LS.
Miss Janice L. Evans, 8 Rosecroft Way, Thetford, IP24 2XB.
Ms. Susan M. Lloyd, Broom Cottage, Green Lane, Thetford, IP24 2EY.
George Anthony, 20 Durand Gardens, Stockwell, London, SW9 0PP.
Professor Bernard Vincent, 65 rue Claude Bernard, 75005, Paris, France.
Professor Abdus Salam, International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Miramare, P.O.B.586, Strada Costiera 11, Triest 34100, Italy.
Vincent Tovey, C/o 75, Ashville Avenue, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, B34 6NA.
Arthur Garrison, Five Kepplestone, King Edwards Parade, Eastbourne, BN20 7JY.
Alfred Anstock, 98, Fitzwilliam Street, Swinton, Mexborough, South Yorkshire, S64 8RW.
J.E.McGuine, 11, St. Georges Grove, Liverpool, L30 2NB.

Professor Salam won the Nobel Prize for his studies in particle physics.

OBITUARIES

IT is with deep regret that we have to report the deaths of the following members:

Gordon Hoile, Lewes, Sussex.
Arthur W. Thomas, Kenton, Middlesex.

GORDON HOILE was a Founder Member of the society, taking an active part in promoting it and our aims in the Lewes area, where he served on the Town Council.

He attended the inaugural meeting at Conway Hall in London, where he proposed the objective as printed on our membership folder. We will greatly miss him.

ARTHUR W. THOMAS, who died on January 20, 1986, just three months short of his 92nd birthday, was a Sussex man and a keen follower of Thomas Paine. His introduction to Paine was through the works of Arthur Findlay, and as he had a deep interest in the history of Lewes this brought Paine vividly to life for him. He was very active in promoting the TPS, and attended various functions, sadly, though, illness eventually made him housebound and his inability to get about was very upsetting to him, as he told me in several letters. Arthur Thomas was very generous to the society and always gave considerably more than the basic annual subscription, as well as paying for some of our earlier publications. I shall miss his informative and bright letters.

RWM

An interesting biography of Paine was written by G.N.Moyesevitch and published by Missile, Moscow, in 1969. This biography has escaped our notice until now and should any member have a copy he/she could donate or sell to the society we would like to hear from them.

The BBC does not seem very willing to repeat the TV programme, "The Most Valuable Englishman Ever", as many correspondents have written to tell us, having themselves contacted the Corporation requesting a repeat.