A teal-colored engraving of Thomas Paine, showing him from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. He has curly hair and is looking slightly to the right.

THOMAS PAINE

CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

AN EXHIBITION BY THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT LIBRARY





THOMAS PAINE

WHY DOES HE MATTER?

WHO WAS THOMAS PAINE?

The world into which Thomas Paine was born in 1737 was dominated by corrupt monarchies with power in the hands of a few aristocrats. By the time of his death in 1809 his writings had helped to change the course of history, encouraging the American and French Revolutions and championing the cause of democracy and the rights of the common people.

It was in America that Paine started to write the prose that was to help to change the world. He was a man ahead of his time and his work has inspired radical movements for over 200 years.

How did the son of a staymaker from Thetford in Norfolk make such a dramatic impact on the world?

It is always a struggle to preserve freedom and fairness in the way society is run. It is even more difficult to establish these values in a state that denies their merit.

Few men have contributed more to this struggle than Thomas Paine, the son of a humble Norfolk artisan. In a courageous and adventurous life, this brilliant writer and campaigner played a crucial role in the fight for American independence. He then witnessed part of the French Revolution, becoming a member of the National Convention, nearly losing his life in the Reign of Terror.

His most famous book, *Rights of Man*, became an international bestseller and an inspiration to generations of fighters for democracy in Britain.

Many aspects of today's modern world would shock him. He would be surprised that Britain still has a monarchy, unelected peers and no written constitution. He would be dismayed that the problem of world peace remains as intractable as ever.

He might have also been surprised by how long it took for some of his ideas and campaigns to achieve success – universal suffrage, the abolition of slavery, free universal education, old age pensions. Some things that we take for granted took decades to become established.

EARLY LIFE

Paine had an unusual childhood. Exposure to the conventional doctrines of the Anglican Church by his mother was countered by the dissenting Quaker views of his father. After completing his apprenticeship as a staymaker, his early working life took him away from Thetford and eventually led him to Lewes in Sussex as an exciseman. There he became involved in a debating club, developing close ties with several radical thinkers.

A trip to London to campaign for better pay for his fellow workers resulted in dismissal from the Excise and a meeting with the renowned American scientist and politician, Benjamin Franklin. Enlightenment thinkers like Paine and Franklin believed that the expansion of knowledge, reason and science would result in the progress of humanity. With Franklin's encouragement the unemployed Paine set off for the New World.



Thomas Paine's birthplace, Thetford



PAINE AT GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Thomas Paine's parents must have been very committed to educating their only child because, as he later reported, they had to "distress" themselves to find the two shillings and sixpence fee plus the cost of books, quills and inks to send seven year old Thomas to Thetford Grammar School.

Here he had a practical education in reading, writing and mathematics at which he excelled, as well as poetry which he loved. He was excluded from the classical education group because his Quaker father would not allow him to learn Latin.

Inspired by the adventure stories told by his teacher, the Reverend William Knowles, who had served on a man-of-war in his earlier life, Thomas longed to go to sea himself. It must have seemed an anti-climax when, at the age of 12, he had to leave school to learn the trade of making women's stays as his father's apprentice.

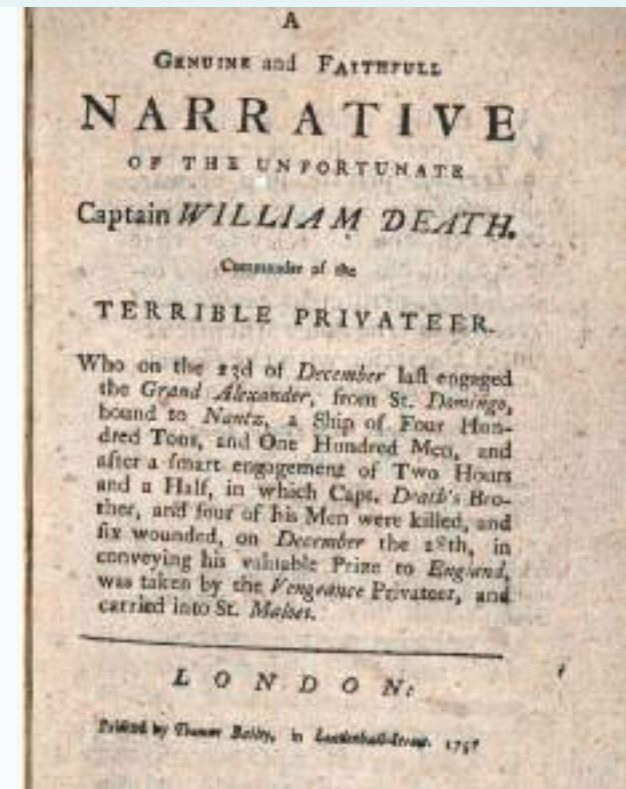
NARROW ESCAPES 1

CAPTAIN DEATH AND THE TERRIBLE

Thomas Paine completed his apprenticeship as a staymaker in 1756 but the trade was in decline. Britain and France were at war, and the 20 year old decided to run away to sea to a more adventurous and lucrative life.

Secretly, he signed to serve on a ship called The Terrible under Captain William Death. At sea, The Terrible met a French ship and after a three hour battle, most of the crew, including Captain Death, were dead.

Fortunately, Paine's father had found him only hours before embarkation, and persuaded him to abandon his plans and so Thomas Paine lived to return to making stays.



Title page of *A genuine and faithfull narrative of the unfortunate Captain William Death* by Joseph Hart

THE DUKE OF GRAFTON

The main landowner in Thetford was the Duke of Grafton, whose estates dominated the local countryside. This family had also supplied all the town's members of parliament for almost a hundred years. Of the population of 2,000, only 30 men were entitled to vote, and they elected two MPs.

Many jobs depended on the Graftons and withdrawal of their patronage could result in severe poverty. This was an age where agricultural developments made farming very profitable, and common land, used by many people for grazing a few animals or growing subsistence crops, was disappearing as landlords enclosed it. As a result, rural poverty was increasing rapidly.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIBBET

When Thomas Paine was born in 1737, Thetford in Norfolk was a prosperous market town, situated at the junction of several main roads and surrounded by 400 square miles of heath. Its busiest time of year was in spring, when the local Assize Court sat and hundreds of visitors flocked to the town for a few days of revelling.

Street stalls were set up, horse racing and hunting were staged, and theatre troupes played to large audiences in the pubs. However, the week was not so pleasant for those accused of wrongdoing. Petty crime, such as stealing a hat, could lead to transportation; a woman accused of being a

scold could be ducked in the River Thet; other minor misdemeanours could lead to being branded or put in the pillory.

Petty criminals who came before the court accused of stealing goods worth one pound were often sentenced to death without being given the chance to defend themselves. Public executions followed the next day. The execution ground, called The Wilderness, was very close to Thomas Paine's home. As a child he would not have been able to avoid seeing the corpses which were left hanging for several hours. This may explain why he was so fiercely opposed to capital punishment.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The period known as The Enlightenment was a time of great scientific advance, expanding commerce and flourishing political debate, when Europeans were trying to escape from superstition and authoritarianism and the horrifying memories of religious conflict. There was widespread optimism that by applying reason life could be improved.

It was not a movement in itself but the term is useful shorthand for describing an environment in which debate, including political debate, flourished increasingly. Nor was it confined only to the wealthy. Artisans tried their hand at inventing, and in Lancashire some handloom weavers became highly proficient in botany and mathematics.

French thinkers like Voltaire had been envious of what they perceived as the greater liberty of the British. By the 1770s this picture looked more and more tarnished especially as the rift with the Americans deepened. Men like Dr Richard Price, a Unitarian minister whose sermons influenced Mary Wollstonecraft, and Major John Cartwright, the parliamentary reformer, began to prepare the seedbed for Paine; if the Americans and then the French could throw off their shackles, why not the British?



In the frontispiece to Voltaire's book on Newton's philosophy, Émilie du Châtelet appears as Voltaire's muse, reflecting Newton's heavenly insights down to Voltaire.

PAINE IN ENLIGHTENMENT LONDON

For a while, after his father had persuaded him not to go to sea, Thomas Paine worked as a journeyman staymaker in London. However, his need for adventure was perhaps too powerful and three months later he sailed on another privateer, The King of Prussia.

Several skirmishes and brushes with death later, he disembarked with his share of the spoils, about £30, equivalent to about £6,500 of buying power at today's prices. As a wealthy young 20 year old, unattached and at liberty in London, he might have been expected to lose his fortune in taverns and brothels or perhaps set himself up in business. Paine did neither.

Instead he began to further his education. He bought a pair of globes, probably from Benjamin Martin, a renowned mathematician and maker of globes and spectacles, and paid for lessons in their use from the famous Scottish astronomer, James Ferguson. He became a close friend of both of these influential men.

Martin and Ferguson were highly respected itinerant lecturers, examining topics such as Newton's general philosophy and the behaviour of pendulums, comets and light. Paine attended their talks alongside other self-educating men and women, mainly artisans and dissenters who were



excluded from university education. He eagerly absorbed Enlightenment ideas, such as the importance of the power of reason as opposed to that of tradition and custom, which would shape his thinking for the rest of his life.

Six months later he ran out of money and had to return to staymaking.

THOMAS PAINE & WOMEN

Thomas Paine was married twice. His first wife died after giving birth to a stillborn baby and the second marriage was not successful. Whilst living in lodgings in Lewes, his landlord died and Paine helped his widow to run the family business and married her daughter, Elizabeth. The business failed, possibly through his neglect during his period in London, adding to their personal problems. Bankruptcy and a formal separation followed. Divorce could only be obtained by Act of Parliament, which for poor people was impossible. It was also socially unacceptable, especially for a woman.

Their lives diverged. Elizabeth was left to a life of obscurity and penury. Paine returned to London, met Benjamin Franklin and went on to change the course of history.



LEWES

When Thomas Paine moved to Lewes in Sussex to work as an exciseman, he took lodgings at Bull House above a tobacco shop. His landlord, Samuel Ollive, was a town constable, a similar job to that of a mayor. The town was run by The Society of Twelve, who nominated the town's officials. Paine quickly became a member. It is possible that this experience contributed to his growing republican and egalitarian principles.

The Vestry was attached to the local church. It collected parish taxes and distributed them to the poor and Paine was soon involved in this too. His experiences here may have suggested the welfare provisions which he later outlined in *Rights of man*. He also joined The Headstrong Club, a debating society which discussed both local and international matters and it was here that Paine first started to write.



Satan smiting Job with sore boils by William Blake. Paine befriended the controversial poet and artist William Blake when he was living in London. Blake helped Paine to escape to France when he was threatened with arrest.

COMMON SENSE

"WE HAVE IT IN OUR POWER
TO BEGIN THE WORLD OVER AGAIN"

After the failure of Thomas Paine's marriage he had a small amount of money but no occupation. Following a conversation with Benjamin Franklin he decided to change his life by buying a passage to America. In September 1774 he set off for Philadelphia, with a letter of introduction to Franklin's son-in-law and some examples of his own written work.

When he arrived in America, discontent with British rule was rising fast. The British Government restricted the Colonies to the land between the eastern seaboard and the Appalachian Mountains. This protected the Native American hunting grounds. The settlers wanted to expand westwards and opposed British constraints. They also deeply resented paying taxes imposed by a parliament where they had no representatives. Paine disembarked in Philadelphia in November 1774, just after the first Continental Congress had finished.

At first Paine supported reconciliation but he was absolutely appalled when British soldiers fired without orders on American militiamen at Lexington claiming "It was time for every man to stir". He personally "stirred" to produce *Common sense*, perhaps the most effective political pamphlet that has ever been written. Published in January 1776 it argued powerfully and passionately for independence for the United States of America, a title Paine invented.

The pamphlet dismissed the very idea of government by any monarchy as nonsensical, particularly the British one descended as it was from William the Conqueror, "a French bastard landing with an armed banditti". Finally, it systematically rebutted every possible objection to a break with Britain.

Common sense sold an amazing quarter of a million copies winning over the doubters, including George Washington, and confirming the rebels in their resolve to break away from British rule. According to Benjamin Rush "It was read by public men, repeated in clubs, spouted in schools and in one instance delivered from a pulpit instead of a sermon." Six months later, on July 4th, Congress declared independence and seven years after that the war ended in an American victory.



Ague & fever, 1788, by Thomas Rowlandson depicting a patient (left), a doctor (right) and a fever as a furry monster.

NARROW ESCAPES 2

PUTRID FEVER

When Thomas Paine's ship arrived in America in November 1774 he was so ill that he had to be carried into his new life on a stretcher. An attack of "putrid fever", probably typhus, had affected almost all of the 120 passengers. This illness was often fatal. Paine was so weak that he could not turn over in bed unaided. Fortunately, he was acquainted with the Captain from his days as an exciseman in Lewes and, once on land, the Captain's family nursed him back to health in their own home.

AMERICA IN 1774

In the 18th century America offered the seductive prospect of a new life with limitless freedoms and unlimited opportunities. The British Isles was the origin of most of its two and a half million people but there were also immigrants from every part of Europe, half a million slaves, plus diminishing numbers of marginalised and dispossessed indigenous Americans.

There were thirteen separate crown colonies, each with its own assembly whose members came from elite landowning, professional and mercantile families. They were accountable to a wide electorate of small property owners. As Paine left England for America in September 1774, representatives from twelve of these colonies were meeting in the First Continental Congress. United by mounting grievances at the crippling taxes imposed on them by Parliament, they agreed to boycott goods from Britain, Ireland and the West Indies until they obtained satisfaction.



FROM THE NEW WORLD TO THE OLD

After the War of Independence ended in 1783 Paine returned to his first love, natural science, and developed and tested a design for a single span iron bridge to cross even the widest of America's rivers. The first iron bridge in the world had been built in England at Coalbrookdale four years earlier. It was one hundred feet wide and made to a design that would be difficult to adapt for a wider gap. Paine believed that his design could span 300 feet and more. Unable to persuade anyone to use his innovative design in America he decided to try elsewhere.

In April 1787 he crossed the Atlantic with another letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, addressed to French academicians and politicians and he took with him the design for the iron bridge,

Because France was in the throes of an economic crisis, his bridge received praise but found no backers and a year later Paine tried his luck in England. For the next five years he crossed the English Channel regularly, promoting his bridge designs in England, visiting friends in France and witnessing at first hand the unfolding events of the French Revolution.

NARROW ESCAPES 3

STORMY WEATHER

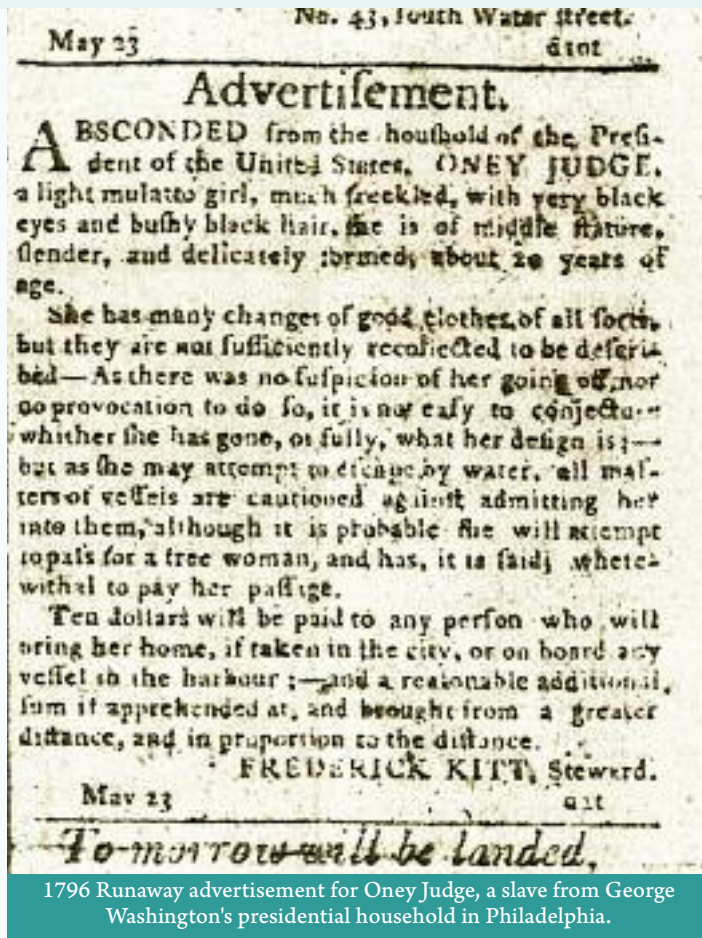
During the American War of Independence, Thomas Paine accompanied John Laurens to Paris to help to raise money for the fledgling republic. Five days out of Boston his ship, the Alliance, ran into a flotilla of massive icebergs. For several hours the ship was buffeted by the ice and blown about by gale force winds. The mainsail mast was broken in half and the ship

drifted uncontrolled throughout the night. When the storm abated the crew managed to make some running repairs and the Alliance reached France safely.

SLAVERY

In March 1775, four months after Paine's arrival in America, he wrote an essay condemning the African slave trade on which much of its economy was based. This was published in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, and, as a result, in April 1775 the first American anti-slavery society was founded. Paine believed that slavery was "contrary to every principle of justice and humanity."

When the Pennsylvania Assembly was formed in October 1779 Paine was given the job of Clerk to the Assembly. Shortly afterwards the legislature passed the first law in the world to start the gradual abolition of slavery.



1796 Runaway advertisement for Oney Judge, a slave from George Washington's presidential household in Philadelphia.

PHILADELPHIA

The Quaker William Penn founded Philadelphia in 1682. He intended it to be a place where people of all faiths could live together in peace and harmony.

When Paine arrived almost a hundred years later it was the largest and most populous city in America and the cultural and financial centre of the continent. Society was still stratified as in England with rich merchants taking the place of the landed gentry. 50% of the wealth was owned by 10% of the population.

Half of the male population were craftsmen working at home or in small shops, generally with the help of apprentices and servants. Educated and literate, these men often led the fight for the extension of political rights.

Paine would, however, be all too aware of the city's dark side since his rented room overlooked the auction shed of the local slave market.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

THOMAS PAINE AND RIGHTS OF MAN

Paine wrote *Rights of man* in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the revolution in France*. Burke was concerned that the revolutions in France and America would spread "contagion" to Britain. Burke wrote the work as a warning to those people who would not like "to have their mansions pulled down and pillaged, their persons abused, insulted and destroyed." These words came as a comfort for the rulers of Britain. He referred back to the so called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, when King James II was overthrown by Parliament and pointed out that the nation "kept the same ranks, the same orders, the same privileges, the same franchises, the same rules for property."

Burke portrayed Britain as a country which, although going through the occasional drastic change, was one which operated on continuity. Therefore he opposed the view that people had any right to establish a government for themselves. The government that was now in operation was a "partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

Burke patronised people like Paine and said his own work was protecting "masculine morality" from the "swinish multitude." He wrote in a patronising way about ordinary people when he asked "how can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough?"

Burke saw the hereditary nature of power "as a benefit, not as a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not as a badge of servitude." He portrayed Britain as a country in which "we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility."

Above all, Burke saw the events in France as leading to the heresy that "a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman."

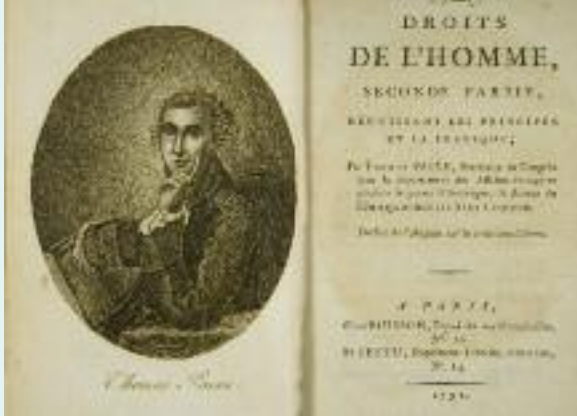
Burke doubted that the people would ever be able to choose their own government. He described such an idea as "enough to fill us with disgust and horror."

NARROW ESCAPES 4

INTO EXILE

The summons for seditious libel had been hanging over Thomas Paine for four months when his friend William Blake warned him that a warrant had been issued for his arrest. Capture would mean the death sentence and so, with two friends he set out for France. On arrival at Dover they were subjected to the ordeal of Excise officials searching their luggage before they were allowed to leave.

At dawn on September 13th 1792 a rowdy, hostile crowd watched them board the Packet for Calais. In spite of threats to duck or "tar and feather" Paine they managed to escape to France where they received a rapturous welcome.



WOMEN IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

As in many of the world's great historical events the role played by women in the French Revolution is difficult to gauge. Although the women's march on Versailles is regarded as the protest that started the Revolution, men subsequently took over the leadership, which was inevitable at a time when women had no political rights and were regarded as being of secondary importance in society.

Some women emerge from this obscurity and yet, in historical memory, they tend to fall into the usual stereotypes. On the one hand villainous, interfering and sinister such as the infamous tricoteuses who sat below the guillotine, knitting and counting the falling heads, or Queen Marie Antoinette (who didn't say "let them eat cake") supposed lightheaded and foolish, yet blamed for scheming and plotting. The woman who stands behind an unpopular leader frequently gets the blame. And on the other hand there are the romantic heroines, some royalist and some revolutionary, especially if they met a tragic end.

Paine's attitude concerning the political and social roles of women appears to have been sadly lacking the radical approach he brought to other issues. Although he seems to have known about the reforming ideas of other writers he didn't show any influence derived from those who proposed to set women free from their traditional roles. Despite the years he spent in France among radical politicians he did not adopt the progressive views about women to be found in writers such as Louis de Jaucourt, Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Nicolas de Condorcet.

In the months following the publication of part one of *Rights of man* Thomas Paine was the principal author of an *Address and declaration* which once more praised the French Revolution and argued that every nation has a "right to establish such government for itself, as best accords with its disposition, interest and happiness."

Meetings due to be held to discuss both *Rights of man* and *Address and declaration* were either banned or disrupted. In some parts of Britain effigies of Thomas Paine were being burned. But this did not deter him and in February 1792 he published part II of *Rights of man*. This led to further burnings and mock executions and in May 1792 he received a summons to be tried for his "wicked and seditious writings."



Thomas Paine decided that he would reply in plain language so that ordinary readers could understand what was wrong with the ideas of Edmund Burke. He was aware that Burke's use of clever phrases and Latin quotations seemed impressive but he wanted instead to present his reply in a clear and open fashion.

He replied by analysing Britain as being subject to despotic rule: "The original hereditary despotism resident in the person of the King, divides and subdivides itself into a thousand shapes and forms."

Although Burke saw Britain as a stable society

NARROW ESCAPES 5

"ARISTOCRAT! A LA LANTERNE!"

On the day that Louis XVI tried to escape from France Thomas Paine was visiting Paris. With two friends he joined a hushed crowd listening to a public reading from the National Assembly. A member of the crowd noticed that Paine was not displaying a cockade on his hat to show loyalty to the Revolution. The cry went up, "Aristocrat! A la lanterne!" as they began to drag Paine off to hang the "aristocrat" from the nearest lamp post. Fortunately, the crowd was convinced that he was an innocent American and so he escaped the hanging and dismembering which many others suffered that day.



where authority was respected Thomas Paine wrote of a thoroughly despotic system where people could not speak out. The consequence of such a tyranny was that

"The rich became richer, and desperate, sometimes violent struggles between classes erupt."

The other main consequence of the tyranny was that it made it look as if war was inevitable. He wrote that despotic governments become degraded, exercise arbitrary power and create large numbers of the poor. Constant war follows from despotism and war is "the art of conquering at home." Despotic Governments are always preparing for the next war.

Thomas Paine was one of the first writers who not only challenged the view that war was an inevitable part of human life, he also put forward an analysis of how governments become involved for their own reasons.

Paine argued for a republic based on reason and argued that "the existence of a hereditary monarchy helps to prop up all the privilege and patronage that corrupts our country."

Paine wrote that all individuals are born equal and have natural rights which have to be strengthened by further rights. To do this a written constitution is needed and citizens have to be the source of sovereignty.

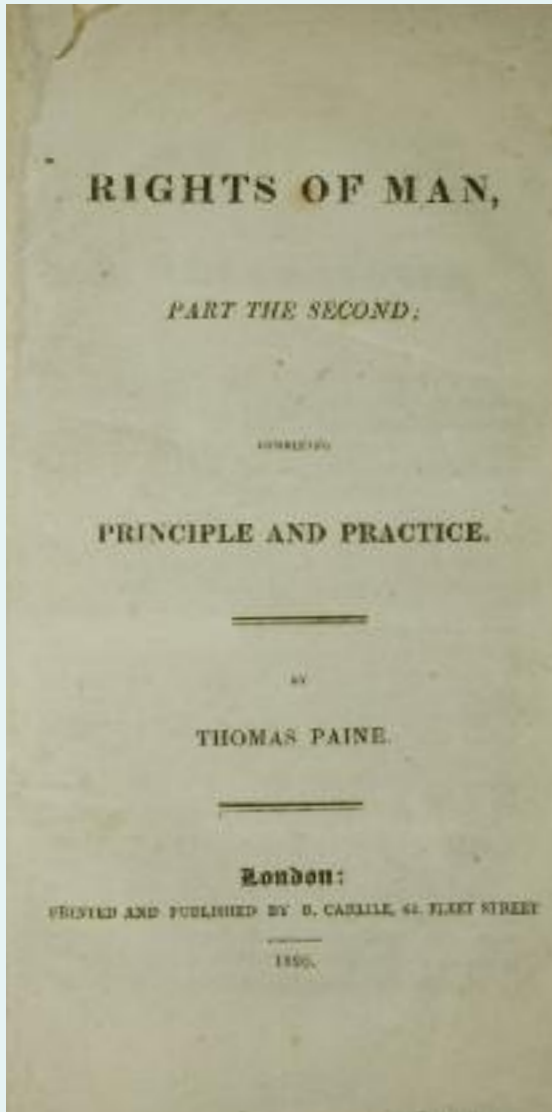
He returned to the prose of Edmund Burke and pointed out that although he was fluent in expressing himself, there was "not one glance of compassion, not one commiserating reflection, that I can find throughout his book, has he bestowed on those who lingered out the most wretched of lives, a life without hope."

Burke and writers like him are concerned only with maintaining hereditary government as a way of protecting the wealth and position of the rich. Paine saw that Burke "is not affected by the reality of distress."

"He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird."

RIGHTS OF MAN

PART II



Thomas Paine wrote that he had held off writing Part II because he was waiting for a dialogue with Edmund Burke, but Burke's reply never arrived. He presented those who accepted Burke's argument as "a set of childish thinkers and half-way politicians born in the last century; men who went no farther with any principle than as it suited their purpose as a party." Part II was designed to address the fact that British people had never been given the chance to discuss the future in a fair manner. "They have been imposed upon by parties, and by men assuming the character of leaders."

In Chapter I Thomas Paine established that no individual can supply their own wants and needs and it is necessary for there to be a fully functioning society. Allied to an active society meeting human needs throughout their life spans it is also the case little formal government is required. Simply put, "all the great laws of society are laws of nature," people can work mutually without the intrusion of government. On the other hand, Paine contends, Edmund Burke considers that people "are as a herd of beings that must be governed by fraud, effigy and shew."

Paine considered that "The role of the State was to be a guarantor of universal peace, civilisation and commerce."

He accepted that moving towards setting up a democratic government is difficult because despotism can still rule from the grave and cause disruption. The solution is to establish series of rights for citizens and to develop welfare institutions. Because citizens have social rights then the elderly, widows, the newly married and those with children should be given allowances. Education should become widespread and part of an approach which rids the country of poverty.

Paine wrote that workers should be allowed to retire with a pension and that help should be provided for the unemployed and the poor. He wrote that "it is painful to see old age working itself to death, in what are called civilised countries, for daily bread."

ALL SHOULD RECEIVE A DECENT BURIAL.

The State should be simple, cheap and open. Visible, simple and honest. The more a civil society develops, then the less the people need the State. War could be avoided by setting up an international confederation, with mechanisms to ensure peace.

Thomas Paine believed that democratically run countries would be able to move on from the horrors of war working mutually and granting independence to other democratic states. Britain operated abroad "destitute of principle and robbed and tortured the world they were incapable of enjoying." He considered that it might be possible for all the governments of Europe that operated democratically to "become acquainted, and the animosities and prejudices fomented by the intrigue and artifice of courts, will cease."

Part II was welcomed widely because it opened up the prospect of a peaceful caring future. "In Britain *Rights of man* proved to be one of those rare books that outlive their time and place of birth."



Wollstonecraft also attacked Burke on his view of women; he had seen the essence of femininity as "littleness and weakness." Could only men have morals? Mary wanted equal participation by both men and women. However different their lives might be there should be common rights and duties.

Mary Wollstonecraft followed up by writing *A vindication of the rights of women* which was published in 1792. She pointed out the long line of writing by women which challenged the view that women are without reason. Education was needed so that the "truth must be common to all." All have rights and duties.

She attributed the false position of women to the education of men, who, "considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers . . . the civilised women of this present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect."

"Let women share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man."

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN

Some names stand out among the many revolutionary women of that time. Olympe de Gouges wrote *The declaration of the rights of women and the female citizen*, published in 1791. Madame Roland created a political club that admitted women on equal terms, but was executed by the Jacobins, thus fulfilling the romantic tragic role; as did Charlotte Corday, the assassin of Jean-Paul Marat, blaming him for the savagery of the Terror. Pauline Leon, Claire Lacombe and Theroigne de Mericourt were leaders of the feminism that emerged in Paris demanding equality with men and then an end to male domination.

The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women campaigned with meetings, speeches and

pamphlets, but when the Jacobins seized power they abolished all the women's clubs in October 1793 and arrested their leaders. The movement was crushed. Some historians believe that the shadow of Marie Antoinette haunted even the revolutionary attempts at female leadership. A decade later the Napoleonic Code confirmed and perpetuated women's second class status.



Olympe de Gouges

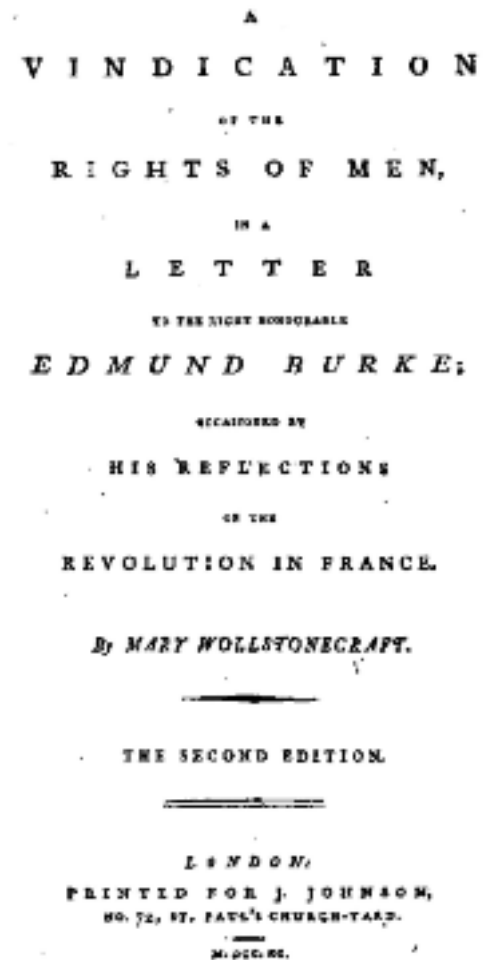


Théroigne de Méricourt

The Government and the ruling class understood that the concentration on what was possible in a republican future was highly dangerous. Effigies of Paine were burned, mock executions held and the Government spread false stories about him. Many critics wrote about the coarseness of his language rather than examine his arguments.

In May 1792 Paine was served with a summons to stand trial for "wicked and seditious writings."

Although proceedings were postponed it became clear to Thomas Paine that he had to move abroad. Before he did so, he wrote *Letter addressed to the addressers* calling for the writing of a republican constitution.



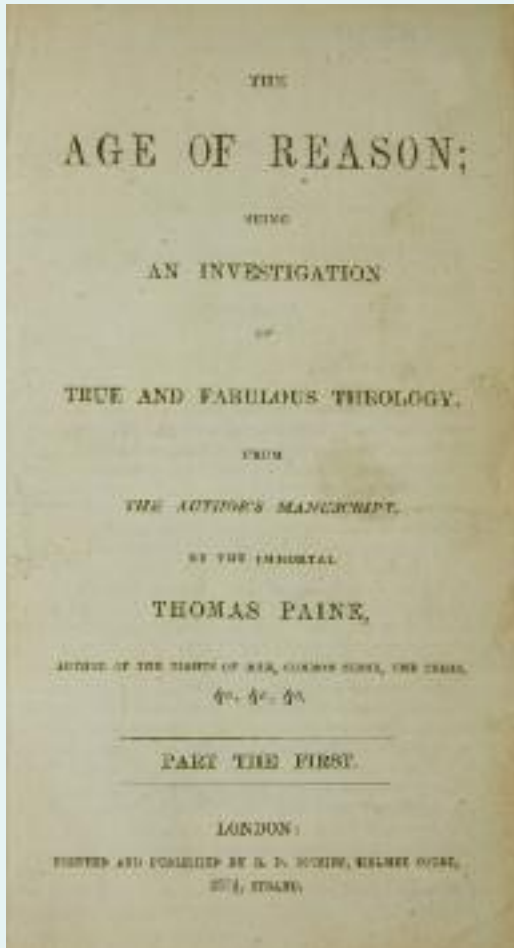
MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MEN

The vindication of the rights of men appeared earlier than that of the first part of *Rights of man* with Mary Wollstonecraft writing of Burke that "you have an antipathy to reason"; she attacked the laws of hereditary property and saw the laws of the country as having come from the plunder of the past.

The society that Burke defended had undergone change, through initiative, invention and demand for reform. She said of him that, "You seem to consider the poor as only the livestock of an estate, the feather of the hereditary nobility."

Mary reminded Burke of parliamentary corruption but did not attack the monarchy as Paine had. She did attack the institutional corruption of the church. Burke argued that society had developed under the influence of religion but she wrote that "You have turned over the historic page; have been hackneyed in the ways of men, and must know that private cabals and public feuds, private virtues and vices, religion and superstition, have all concurred to foment the mass and swell it to its present form." She was clear in writing that the church was not there for the people; "the sermons which they hear are to them almost as unintelligible as if they were preached in a foreign tongue."

THE AGE OF REASON



“The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason. I have never used any other, and I trust I never shall.”

Paine risked his own life by his fierce opposition to the execution of the French king. Other opponents had already been sent to the guillotine, and he, too, expected to die at any time. Throughout the autumn of 1793 he worked on *The age of reason*. He knew that the subject would be so controversial that he intended to publish only when his life was near its end.

He put the finishing touches to the manuscript of *The age of reason* on December 23rd 1793, celebrated with his friends on Christmas Eve and was arrested in the early hours of Christmas Day. The book was both a highly critical analysis of all organised religions and a plea for Deism, a religion based on reason applied to close observation of the natural world. It opens with a statement of his personal creed:

“I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

I do not believe in the creed professed . . . by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.”

Part One was first published in February 1794 by his loyal friend, Joel Barlow, while Paine was still in prison. Part Two which proceeded, by chapter and verse, to debunk the Bible as a work of fables and myths, was published a year later. Although it was popular among working class radicals in England the government declared it blasphemous and it turned many of his friends against him, particularly in America where a Christian revival had followed the end of the war. Unable to go back to England safely, he returned to America in 1802 where he was widely reviled as a “lying, drunken, brutal infidel”. Thomas Jefferson persuaded him not to publish Part Three. Paine waited five years before publishing privately. Over a hundred years after his death, Theodore Roosevelt still referred to him as “that filthy little atheist”.

In *The age of reason*, Paine cut through to the very role of religion in society. The world’s rulers have never wanted people to hear this truth. “All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolise power and profit.”

Man-made religion helped create the inequalities examined in *Common sense* and in *Rights of man*. Paine was particularly critical of Christianity. “Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice, it renders the heart torpid, or produces only atheists and fanatics. As an engine of power it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests; but so far as respects the good of man in general, it leads to nothing here or hereafter.”

PAINE AND SCIENCE

Paine was a man of his time, interested in scientific discoveries and curious to understand how the world worked.

“It is a fraud of the Christian system to call the sciences “human inventions”; it is only the application of them that is human. Every science has for its basis a system of principles as fixed and unalterable as those by which the universe is regulated and governed. Man cannot make principles; he can only discover them.”

He had very high expectations of every person but never sought to impose his beliefs on others. “I do not mean . . . to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself.



An experiment on a bird in the air pump, 1768, by Joseph Wright. The painting depicts a natural philosopher recreating one of Robert Boyle's air pump experiments, in which a bird is deprived of air, before a varied group of onlookers.



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THE VERMIN

That gnaw the Wealth,
 That fly in the House,
 That eat the flesh.

The Vermin. *The political house that Jack built* was written and published by William Hone in 1819 in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre. Hone identified the rich clergy and aristocrats as the vermin scrounging off the downtrodden people.

DEISM - THE CREATION WE BEHOLD

Whilst much of *The age of reason* is concerned with detailed analysis of the Bible, Paine very clearly offers the alternative, his own belief of Deism, an alternative which misses out the middle men of prophets and interpreters: "But some perhaps will say - are we to have no word of God - no revelation? I answer Yes; there is a word of God - there is a revelation. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE CREATION WE BEHOLD and it is in this word that no human invention can counterfeit or alter that God speaketh universally to man.

The creation speaketh a universal language. It is an ever-existing original which every man can read. It cannot be forged, it cannot be counterfeited, it cannot be lost, it cannot be altered, it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend on the will of man whether it shall be published or not, it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other."

"The true Deist has but one Deity, and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavouring to imitate him in everything moral, scientific, and mechanical."

OPPOSING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT



A George Cruikshank cartoon attacking Paine; The caption reads: "The Age of Reason; or, the World turned Topsy-turvy exemplified in Tom Paine's Works!"



Thomas Paine was passionately opposed to all forms of capital punishment. In *Rights of man* he claimed that by carrying out executions themselves, governments instruct men in "how to punish when power falls into their hands." He urged "Lay then the axe to the root, and teach Governments humanity. It is their sanguinary punishments which corrupt mankind."

He desperately tried to dissuade the French Assembly from passing the death sentence on Louis XVI pleading that "As France has been the first of European nations to abolish royalty, let her also be the first to abolish the punishment of death."

Actually Austria had already been the first European country to abolish the death penalty in 1786 while France did not abolish it until 1981, twelve years after Britain. His beloved America, almost alone among developed countries, has not yet abolished it.

THE NATIONAL CONVENTION SEPT 1792 - 95

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very Heaven!”

Wordsworth, *The prelude*

Led by Lafayette, the National Assembly began a programme of revolutionary reform. It abolished feudalism and serfdom, removed privileges from the nobles and clergy and began to develop a written constitution for a constitutional monarchy. The Assembly attempted to allow some powers to Louis XVI but public opinion became increasingly republican. An election by universal male suffrage elected a National Convention to write a new constitution.

Thomas Paine was one of the delegates to the Assembly which met in September 1792 and unanimously voted to abolish the monarchy. Four months later, in spite of Paine's passionate opposition, the same body sent Louis to the guillotine for treason. In October 1793, his wife Marie Antoinette was also executed.



The uprising of the Parisian sans-culottes, 1793. The scene takes place in front of the Deputies Chamber in the Tuileries



The Fall of Robespierre in the Convention on 27 July 1794 by Max Adamo, 1870

THE REIGN OF TERROR

During 1793 the more moderate, Girondin-dominated government struggled increasingly with bitterly warring factions and jealousies within its ranks. Outside it was further destabilised by raging inflation, food shortages, riots and wars. In May a more radical, Jacobin insurrection, led by Robespierre and backed by 80,000 sans-culottes, ousted the Girondins from the Convention.

In July a year-long campaign of state-sanctioned terrorism began where anyone suspected of

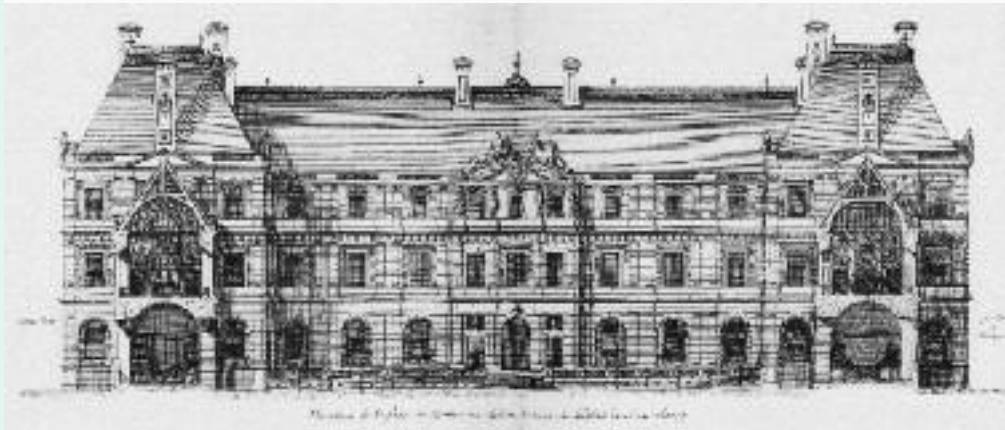
being a counter-revolutionary was denounced and executed. Up to 40,000 people perished before a further coup ousted Robespierre, guillotined him and 100 other Jacobins and brought the “Reign of Terror” to an end. Any opposition was ruthlessly suppressed and a new Constitution in 1795 established yet another ruling body, The Directorate. Finally, in 1799 Napoleon declared the Revolution over.

NARROW ESCAPES 6

THE DEATH SQUAD MOVES ON

On July 25th 1794 Paine was a prisoner sharing a cell in the Luxembourg Prison with three others. As he was dangerously ill he was allowed to have the cell door open to cool his fever. Early in that morning a number had been chalked on the open door to indicate that all four inmates were to go to the guillotine.

Later in the day the door was closed. The number was now on the inside of the cell. Then the death squad arrived. The other inmates held their breaths and one of them put a hand over the mouth of a delirious Paine as they heard the squad hesitate outside their door – and move on to the next cell.



The entrance court of the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris

FREE AT LAST!

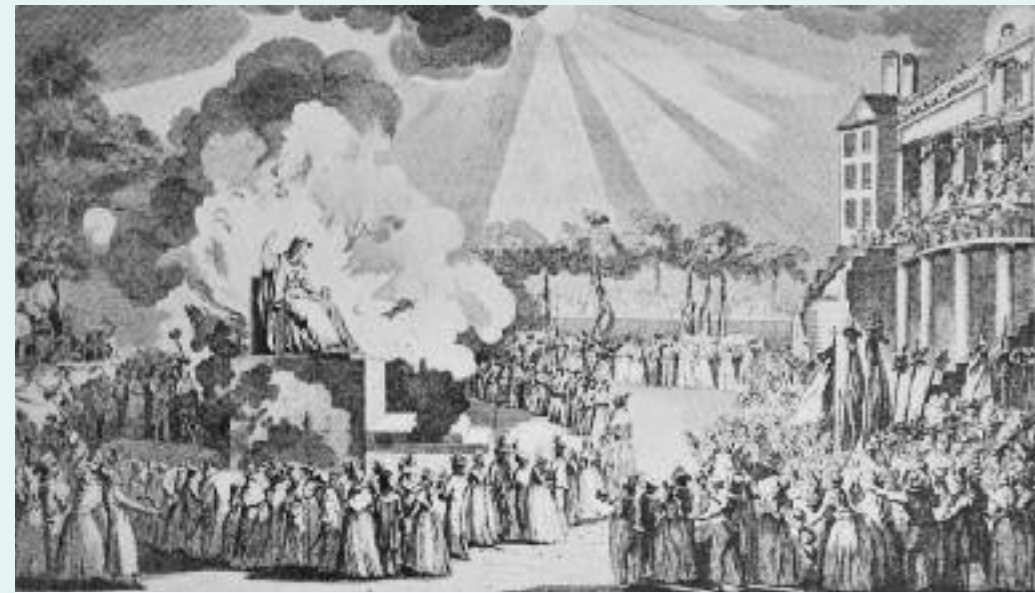
As an American citizen, Thomas Paine hoped to be released from the Luxembourg Prison through the efforts of his friends, as two earlier American prisoners had been. His hopes were raised in August 1794 when Governor Morris, the American minister in Paris who was an old enemy of Paine's, was replaced by James Monroe.

Paine wrote increasingly desperate letters to Monroe, but received nothing in return other than the news, in September, that Monroe had received no orders from the Washington government which considered him to be a French citizen. Finally, in November, Monroe did secure his release and took him to his own home.

Although he felt deeply disappointed that Washington had seemingly done nothing to free

his old friend Paine was dissuaded from writing to the president until his resentment overflowed in a bitter letter which said that he would think Washington treacherous towards himself "till you give me cause to think otherwise".

When no reply came, his bitterness deepened until finally, in July 1796 he sent a vituperative open letter to Washington, accusing him of having a character incapable of true friendship and being driven by prudence instead of principle. This did not endear Paine to most Americans who by this time had turned Washington into a national hero.



REMODELLING A NATION

For centuries all European countries had officially identified themselves with some form of Christianity.

September 22nd 1792 became the first day of the new republican calendar. The months and days were named for seasonal weather, flowers or fruits. The working people of France held a deep resentment and sense of injustice against the French Church for its wealth, tax exemptions, tithes and power of censorship and the revolutionaries saw the opportunity to strip away the trappings of the old religious regime.

They couldn't decide if there should be a Festival of Reason or, as Robespierre insisted, a Festival of the Supreme Being. Not everyone agreed there was a Supreme Being.

Paine did believe there was a Supreme Being, but opposed any attempts to impose religious observance.

In Britain there certainly were religious freethinkers prominent among radical reformers, but Christianity remained central to the ideas of many reformers.

PAINÉ'S LAST DAYS

PAINÉ AND WILLIAM COBBETT

On his return to America in 1802, Paine lived mainly on his farm in New Rochelle. After the publicity surrounding *The age of reason*, many old friends shunned him. His greatest work was behind him, he was getting old, and poverty was always a problem. By 1806 his physical condition was deteriorating so much that friends took him to live in New York. Although he was still writing, his health was poor, especially after he had a stroke.

He died on June 8th 1809. He wanted to be buried in the Quaker churchyard, but they refused, so he was buried in New Rochelle, “in a little hole under the grass and weeds of an obscure farm in America”. These are the words of the journalist William Cobbett, writing in his weekly paper, the *Political Register*. After receiving news of Peterloo, Cobbett was so incensed by this massacre of working people who were demonstrating for their rights that he illegally exhumed Paine’s body. “They found it in a coffin, hewn out of mahogany: it was in a perfect state” claimed Cobbett’s friend, William Benbow.

Cobbett wanted to return the bones to England for a proper burial and commemoration. Many people were appalled by this act. One Huddersfield newspaper wrote, “What! Remove the bones of a revolutionary patriot, from the soil which he eminently assisted in liberating, and send them to moulder in a land of slavery! “

On Cobbett’s arrival at Liverpool Customs officers were shown the “mortal remains of the

immortal Tom Paine”, along with the coffin plate inscribed with the words *Thomas Paine, aged 74, died 8th June, 1809.*

Cobbett and Paine’s bones were greeted by large crowds in Liverpool. At a meeting in Clayton Square the reformers were reportedly well behaved, but, according to the *Liverpool Mercury* newspaper, their opponents “were most disgracefully conspicuous in their attempts to create a riot, and their conduct formed a most striking contrast to the great majority of the people, who after enduring every species of provocation, contented themselves with merely shouldering some of the most obnoxious disturbers out of the square, and silencing the rest.”

Cobbett wanted to take Paine’s bones into Manchester and after a few days rest he started his journey to attend a celebratory dinner there on November 29th. He first stopped in Bolton, then carried on to an inn in Irlam, where he was met by the news that the local magistrates had warned him against continuing with his proposed visit.

According to the *Liverpool Mercury* on December 3rd, posters had been put up all over Manchester warning people to keep off the streets, but they had been ignored. The road from Eccles to Manchester was lined with thousands wanting to catch a glimpse of “their champion”.

Troops were once more gathering in central Manchester. The regular army were backed up by the Manchester Yeomanry who were armed and prepared “for mighty deeds. . .again to receive the thanks of the Regent, his ministers and their Parliament”. *The Times* reported that “two field pieces were stationed near to the New Bailey” – the prison on what is now Bridge Street.

Cobbett, fearing another massacre, decided to return to Warrington.

The monument planned by Cobbett was never erected, and over the years Paine’s bones were lost.



B STANDS FOR BONES,
that “nothing new,”
But such as these, I was,
(If what I’m telling you be true),
Were never heard or seen

Old Satan had a darling boy,
Full equal he to Cain;
Bare peace and order to destroy;
His name was—THOMAS PAINE.

“The Revolutions of America and France have thrown a beam of light over the world, which reaches into man. The enormous expense of Governments has provoked people to think, by making them feel; and when once the veil begins to rend, it admits not of repair. Ignorance is of a peculiar nature: and once dispelled, it is impossible to re-establish it.”

From *Common sense*

“Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered: yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly.”

From *Agrarian justice*

“The interment was a scene to affect and to wound any sensible heart. Contemplating who it was, what man it was, that we were committing to an obscure grave on an open and disregarded bit of land, I could not help feeling most acutely. Before the earth was thrown down upon the coffin, I, placing myself at the east end of the grave, said to my son, Benjamin, “stand you there, at the other end, as a witness for grateful America” Looking round me, and beholding a small group of spectators, I exclaimed, as the earth was tumbled into the grave, “Oh, Mr Paine! My son stands here as testimony of the gratitude of America, and I, for France!” This was the funeral ceremony of this great politician and philosopher!”

Quote From Madame de Bonneville,
Paine’s housekeeper

BONES OF PAIN

MISSING. PRESUMED DANGEROUS

CREATING A NEW & ARTISTIC ENDING
FOR A 200 YEAR OLD STORY



In November 1819 the bones of Thomas Paine were brought to Salford (dug up from their original resting place in New York by campaigning journalist William Cobbett), only to be refused entry to Manchester by the authorities, with the horrors of Peterloo still fresh... And then the bones disappeared.

To mark the bicentenary of this bizarre event and to celebrate Paine's revolutionary writings and ideas the Working Class Movement Library and Walk the Plank are working together to deliver a project which mixes the traditional with the contemporary, and the unusual with the familiar.

www.wcml.org.uk/BonesOfPaine

“... were an estimate to be made of the charge of aristocracy to a nation, it will be found nearly equal to that of supporting the poor. The Duke of Richmond alone... takes away as much for himself as would maintain two thousand poor and aged persons.”

From *Rights of man*

“The parties were always of the class of courtiers, and whatever was their rage for reformation, they carefully preserved the fraud of the profession. In all cases they took care to represent government as a thing made up of mysteries, which only themselves understood; and they hid from the understanding of the nation, the only thing that was beneficial to know, namely is nothing more than a national association acting on the principles of society.”

From *Rights of man*



“A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody, ought not to be trusted by anybody.”

From *Rights of man*

“The present state of civilization is as odious as it is unjust. It is absolutely the opposite of what it should be, and it is necessary that a revolution should be made in it. The contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually meeting and offending to the eye is like dead and living bodies chained together.”

From *Rights of man*

PUBLISH AND BE... ...CONDEMNED

STILL CONTROVERSIAL

During the bicentennial celebrations in Thetford, Thomas Paine's birthplace, while the majority of people supported the celebrations, some residents criticised them as they still regard him as a traitor for his republican views, his involvement in the French Revolution and the fact that he deserted England for America. He would have been proud of that.



Who wants me by Isaac Cruikshank. Beneath the title is etched: 'I am Ready & Willing to offer my Services to any Nation or People under heaven who are Desirous of Liberty & Equality Vide Paines Letter to the Convention.' 26 December 1792.

Thomas Paine wrote the texts but his voice would never have been heard if it were not for the men and women who suffered imprisonment and financial ruin to make his works public.

Richard Carlile's tenacious efforts in the period 1817 - 1825 to ensure that Paine's words would reach all levels of society made him the most persecuted of the publishers. Carlile spent six years in prison for publishing and distributing Paine's works. He was joined by his wife Jane and sister Mary for similar offences but carried on his work with the help of great numbers of supporters.

Some tried to avoid prosecution. John Almon was the first to publish *Common sense* in Great Britain after its huge success in America but he took out the bits that criticised the king and the British government. He had already served time for a charge of seditious libel. Jeremiah Samuel Jordan published *Rights of man* in 1791 after Joseph Johnson turned it down. Jordan was arrested and prosecuted; Johnson went ahead and published a second edition.

Thomas Williams was sentenced to a year's hard labour breaking rocks for his publication of *The age of reason Part 2* in 1797. Daniel Isaac Eaton was active in the London Corresponding Society and a fearless publisher of radical pamphlets. Paine recognised his commitment by authorising him to publish the official version of *The age of reason, Parts 1 and 2*. Eaton spent periods in exile in America, in solitary confinement in Newgate gaol whilst thousands of pounds worth of his books were publicly burnt. He carried on publishing and printing *The age of reason, Part 3* in 1811 which got

him a sentence of eighteen months with a day to be spent in the pillory each month. On his first and only appearance, instead of pelting him with rotten vegetables, the crowd cheered him and offered him food.

A repressive state legislated and bribed, victimised and intimidated to try to prevent the words of Paine reaching the population but could not stop thousands of copies of cheap pamphlets being produced and circulated, discussed and absorbed.

TAKING PAINE'S IDEAS TO THE PEOPLE

Thomas Paine wanted his ideas to reach everybody. Unlike the typical political writer of his day he wrote in a plain, accessible, language using metaphors from everyday life rather than from classical literature. He also made his books more affordable by using his income from royalties to keep their prices down. Some publishers printed



Michael Foot visiting the statue of Thomas Paine in Thetford

individual chapters of the books in cheap leaflets.

Over the 200 years since his death many individuals have promoted Paine's ideas, from William Cobbett who, in 1819, tried to give him a memorial in England to the modern historian of working class history, E P Thompson.

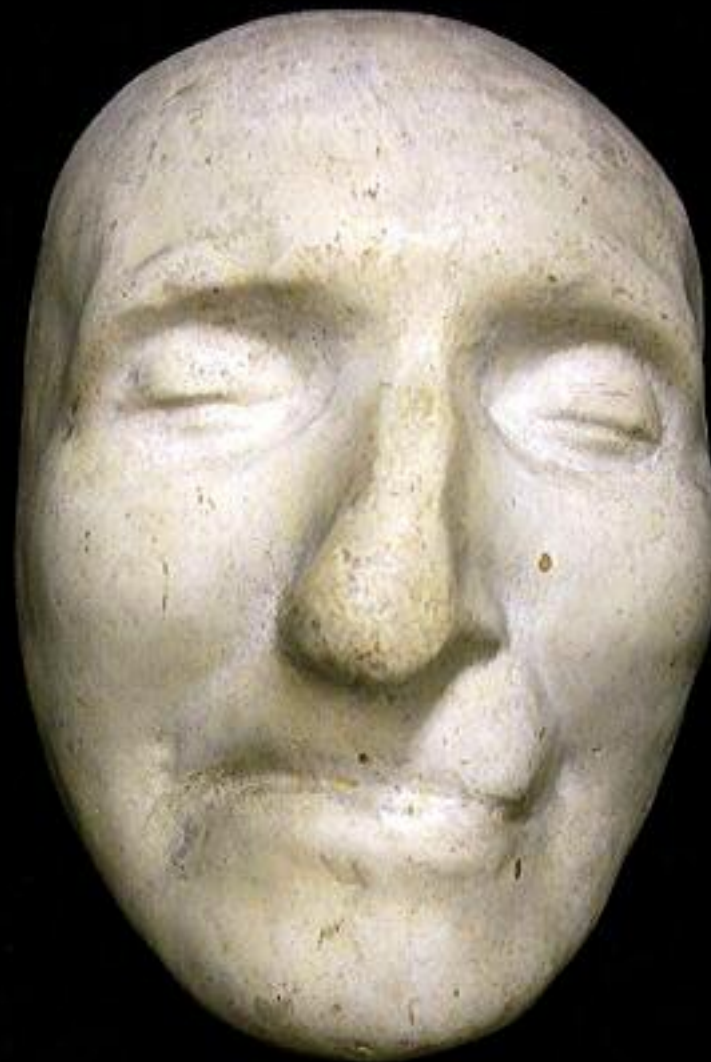
Adrian Brunel and his son, Christopher, amassed their own Thomas Paine collection and deposited it in the Working Class Movement Library. The aims of Ruth and Edmund Frow, the founders of this library, were in perfect harmony with Paine's and so it is now freely accessible to all in Jubilee House.

TIME FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE!

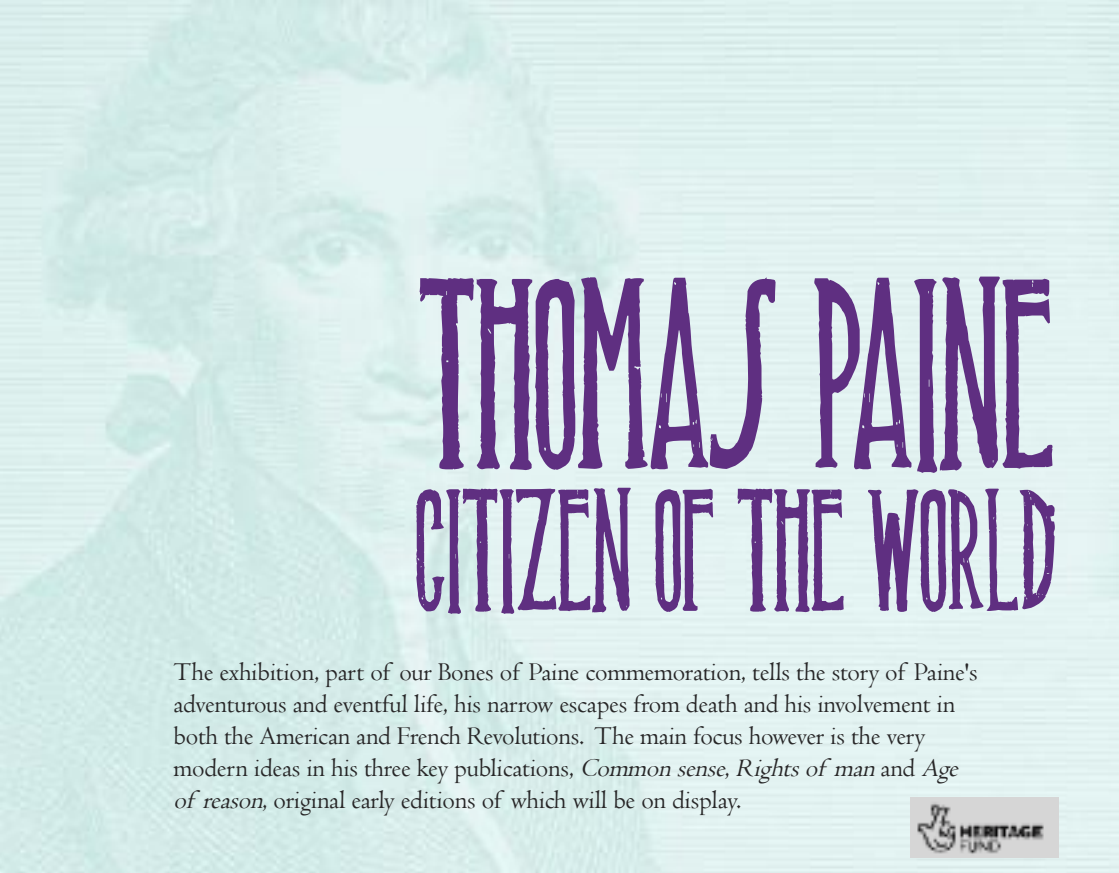
Thomas Paine's *Rights of man* has provided an inspiration to would-be reformers of governments for over 200 years. In it he stated his belief that the most fundamental principle for good government is that it should be based on a written constitution which sets out in detail "everything that relates to the complete organisation of a civil Government, and the principles on which it shall act, and by which it shall be bound."

In this country we apply this rule to virtually every organisation from the local amateur football team to the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Without a written constitution, no institution, however worthy, would obtain charitable status or government funding. In spite of this, here, in the United Kingdom, we are one of only a handful of countries without a written constitution.

Parliament itself is suffering from a crisis based on a lack of clear regulations and the demands from many electors for parliament to be reformed are rising. Perhaps, at last, it is time to have a Paineite National Convention to produce a written constitution that will lay down in black and white the rules by which we are all governed.



Death mask of Thomas Paine made by Paine's friend John Wesley Jarvis



THOMAS PAINE

CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

The exhibition, part of our Bones of Paine commemoration, tells the story of Paine's adventurous and eventful life, his narrow escapes from death and his involvement in both the American and French Revolutions. The main focus however is the very modern ideas in his three key publications, *Common sense*, *Rights of man* and *Age of reason*, original early editions of which will be on display.



EXPLORE THE PAST CHANGE THE FUTURE

Working Class Movement Library

OPENING TIMES

Ground floor exhibition area open Wednesday -
Friday 1pm-5pm

Reading room open by appointment Tuesday -
Friday 10am-5pm & first Saturday each month
10am-4pm

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