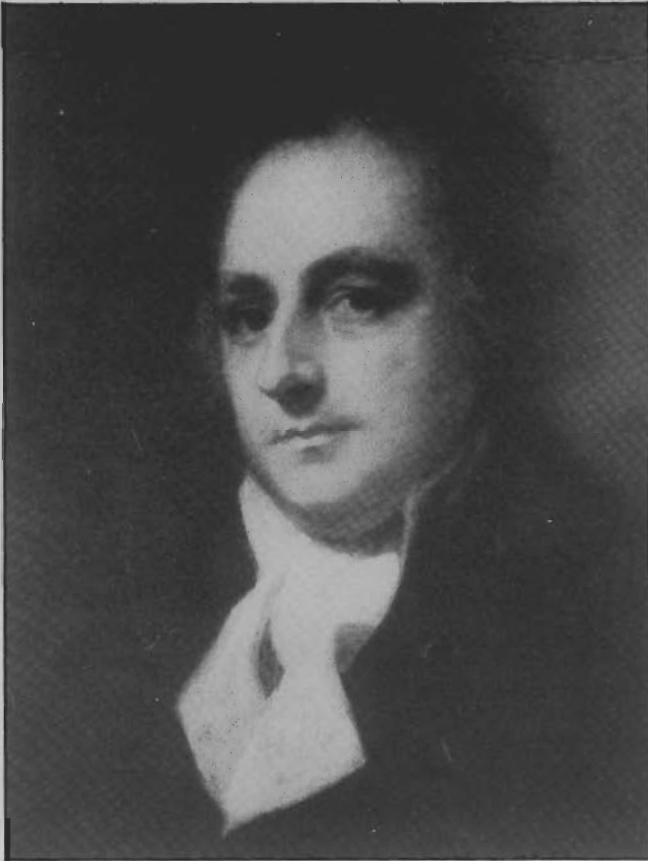


# COLLECTOMANIA

Edmund and Ruth Frow



Thomas Walker (by Romney)

In every book collection there are a few that are particularly appreciated because of their association with an event or a person. Often the evidence for this is in an inscription. When the Working Class Movement Library recently inherited the Brunel Thomas Paine collection<sup>1</sup> there were several volumes in this category, but one is of special interest.

It is a volume which belonged to the Manchester radical merchant, Thomas Walker<sup>2</sup> and it contains several works bound together which have obviously been used by Walker because he wrote comments beside the script in places. Moreover there is one important inscription on the *Trial of Thomas Paine* which the Defending Advocate, Thomas Erskine<sup>3</sup> sent to Thomas Walker.

The Thomas Paine collection was assembled by Adrian, Christopher and Margaret Brunel over a period of fifty years. It consists of books, pamphlets, prints and ephemera. The books are not only by and about Paine, but also reflect the contemporary scene of the 1790s in America, France and Britain in each of which Paine played a significant part.

Adrian Brunel laid the basis of the collection. As a writer and photographer, he travelled widely in connection with his work in the early film industry. Fortunately he was also a book collector and he took advantage of his travels to amass the largest collection in Europe of Thomas Paine's works. Christopher, his son, added to the books and enriched it with prints, pamphlets and tokens. He was also connected with the film industry, but he worked

as a journalist and editor of the *Cine-technician's Union Journal*. He was a founder member of the Thomas Paine Society and helped spread information about Paine throughout the world.

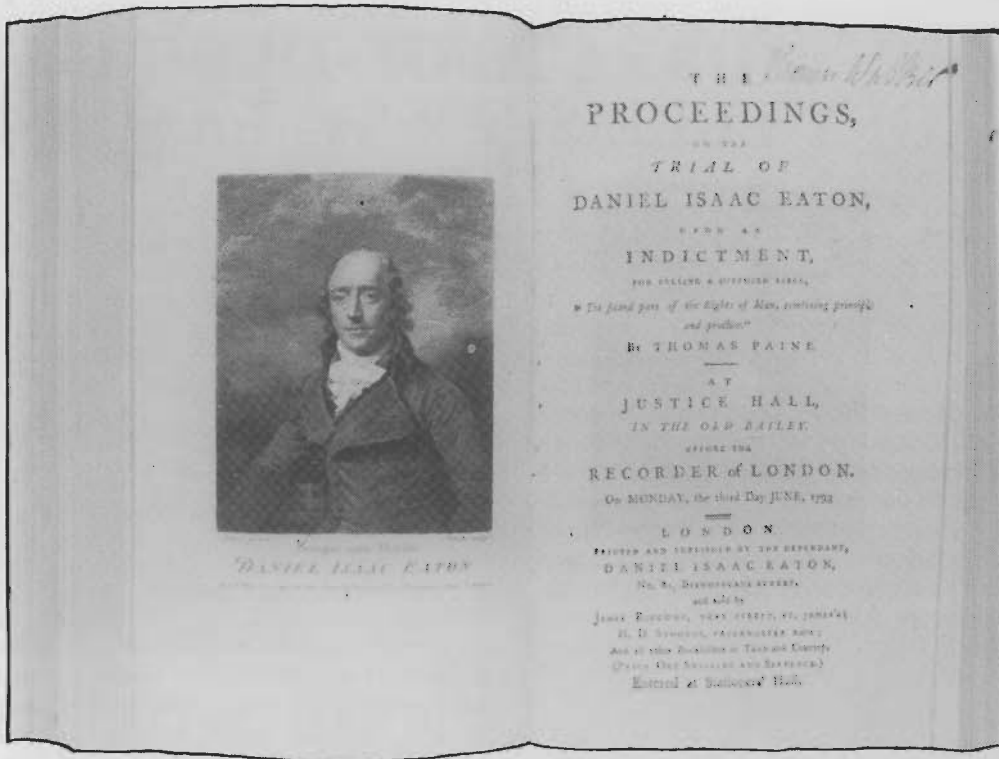
Thomas Walker was a merchant who became Borough Reeve of Manchester during the 1790s. He saw the need for a reform of Parliament which was still strongly influenced by the landed aristocracy in their interests. The franchise was limited to land-owners and many rapidly expanding and thriving towns, such as Manchester, had no representation. Thomas Walker was the leader of Manchester's Radicals who expressed strong sympathy for the people of France in their efforts to change their political system. There was a polarisation of opinion and the radicals were opposed by Anti-Jacobins who supported Church and King. Walker was at the head of the list of targets whom the Anti-Jacobins decided to attack. His home in the Parsonage where the Radical societies frequently met, was attacked by a large crowd who swarmed around the house intent on mischief. Neither the Magistrates nor the officers of the Court Leet attempted to interfere. When an attempt was made to enter the house, Walker fired a gun into the air and the immediate danger passed. However, Walker was arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the constitution. Although he was acquitted because there was insufficient evidence, his business suffered greatly during the years whilst he awaited trial.<sup>4</sup> His business failed and he went to live on Longford Farm in Stretford where he spent the remaining 22 years of his life. Whether it was he who had the items bound in the volume in the collection or whether it was his son, also Thomas, is not clear. But it is certain that each bound item was owned and used by Thomas Walker.

William Godwin<sup>5</sup> left a delightful description of the Walkers at home in their farmhouse. He described a visit made in April 1816 about a year before Walker died. He wrote,

*The venerable old gentleman lives at Longford and I spent a delightful day with him. His wife is not less intelligent, even not less ardent a patriot than himself. He was, at the period I referred to, the first manufacturer in Manchester, but was ruined in his business by the party spirit of the period. Felix Vaughan bequeathed him a property which had improved since so as to render him in his latter days an independent country gentleman.*<sup>6</sup>

In the volume there is *The Life of Thomas Paine* by Francis Oldys of the University of Pennsylvania. Oldys was a pseudonym and over the top, Walker wrote the real name of the author, 'George Chalmers', underneath which he wrote "BEAST". His comment was justified. It is a very antagonistic account of Paine's life. Characteristically, there is an artistic representation on the frontispiece showing Paine holding a volume of *The Rights of Man* and showing it to monkeys. Walker commented "What a compliment to the people to represent them as baboons".

Towards the end of the biography, Oldys refers to an incident when Paine was supposed to have been invited



Title page of Walker's copy of ...*Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton*...

by Walker to eat cold beef at Smithfield. G.H. Walker has added a comment, "False — if this, what then". This was most probably written by Walker's wife, Hannah. At the end, Walker added, "This miserable thing was paid for by Pitt — What a government to require such aid — What fools to be so cheated".

The second item in the volume is *The Whole Proceedings On The Trial Against Thomas Paine*. It was sent to Walker by Thomas Erskine, the Counsel for the Defence and inscribed, "To Mr Thos Walker Esq from the Honble Thomas Erskine". Walker drew attention to Paine's comment on the monarchy "The Hazard to which this office is exposed in all countries, is not from any thing that can happen to the man, but from what may happen to the nation — the danger of its coming to its senses". This was one of the remarks featured in the charge. At the end of the evidence for the Crown, Walker wrote, "How strange and unaccountable that men shall be punished and persecuted for writing such things as these — for if a man shall not investigate which is the best system of government as well as the best system of agriculture or anything else".

At the end of the trial when Paine had been pronounced 'Guilty', Walker wrote a comment,

*How internally and instinctively the supporters of despotism are that the whole system is fraud — wrong and error — if they were conscious that it was right they would court enquiry and investigation.*

He continued on the blank page opposite,

*When a man knows he is honest — he courts and asks for inquiry — he wishes for it — he is proud of it.*

Walker signed his name on both the copies of the *Trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton*.<sup>7</sup> One is of the trial in June, 1793 for selling the *Rights of Man* and the second a month later in the same year for selling *A Letter Addressed To The Addressers*.

The third trial of Eaton for selling *Hog's Wash*, and *The Case of Thomas Spence*<sup>8</sup> for selling the second part of Paine's *Rights of Man* are also bound in the volume. Thomas Walker obviously placed great importance on the struggles of the publishers and booksellers to ensure that radical ideas were disseminated. After his own trial, he no longer played an active part in politics, but he kept himself fully informed and read the trials with care and interest.

It is a great thrill to the collector to come across a volume like this. Handling it, one is aware of the politics of the period and can almost believe oneself to be a participant. History may not repeat itself, but many of the struggles of the past are still being fought today and reading Thomas Walker's comments forges a link between now and then that makes one realise what a debt is owed to the activists of the past.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Adrian Brunel *Nice Work: Thirty Years In British Films* (1949). This autobiography also contains references to Christopher Brunel.
- <sup>2</sup> Frida Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker* (1957).
- <sup>3</sup> Lloyd Paul Stryker, *For The Defence. Thomas Erskine The Most Enlightened Liberal of His Times, 1750-1823* (New York, 1949).
- <sup>4</sup> *The Trial of Thomas Walker for a Conspiracy To Overthrow The Constitution and Government and To Aid And Assist The French*. Joseph Gurney, Manchester 1794.
- <sup>5</sup> C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (1876).
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in Frida Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker* p.181.
- <sup>7</sup> Daniel Isaac Eaton was prosecuted many times for publishing Thomas Paine and other radical material. Although on the two trials included in the volume, he was acquitted, on another occasion he was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment and to be place in the pillory. But he continued publication.
- <sup>8</sup> P.M. Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence*. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1983).