



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

Rights of Man, part 1, 1791

Almost 200 years after his death, Thomas Paine continues to be controversial! He is the most famous - or should that be, infamous? - son of Thetford. From humble beginnings, he became the most widely read and influential pamphleteer of his day.

"Every man must, finally, see the necessity of protecting the rights of others, as the most effectual security for his own."

Having played an important role in both the American and French Revolutions, he was eventually hounded out of England - for daring to tell ordinary people that they had rights, for being a freethinker, a republican, and above all else, a democrat.



The Thomas Paine Society

The Society was founded in 1963 to counter the widespread misunderstanding of Paine's life and writings. One of its first acts was to support the preservation of 'Grey Gables', the reputed birthplace of Paine, which was threatened with demolition.

Its aims are "to promote the recognition of Thomas Paine's contribution to the cause of freedom, and to spread a knowledge of his works and activities with a view to encouraging the growth of a similar spirit of constructive criticism in every aspect of contemporary public life."

For more information, visit www.thomaspaine.org.uk

Thomas Paine Trail

www.exploretHetford.co.uk

>>> **1. Thomas Paine Hotel, White Hart Street**
The trail starts at the Thomas Paine Hotel, White Hart Street. There is a strong local tradition that the Paine home stood on the site now occupied by the Thomas Paine Hotel at the top end of Bridgegate, as White Hart Street was known in the 18th century. It is around here that Thomas Paine is believed to have been born on the 29th January 1737.



period. Paine would not recognise the bridge we see today; it was erected 20 years after his death. He surely would have approved of it though : after all, he returned to Europe in 1787 precisely to promote his

Take a moment to read the commemorative plaque on the outside of the hotel.

During World War 2, the hotel building was a private residence called "Grey Gables". The plaque was placed here as a tribute from the American aircrew of a B17 named "Thomas Paine", based at nearby Knettishall. The aircraft bore the legend "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered", - a quote from the first of Paine's American Crisis papers, which maintained American morale during the War of Independence. In these essays, Paine was the first to use the term "The United States of America".

Leave the hotel and proceed down White Hart Street. Some of the old coaching inns may still be recognised by their carriage entrances.

>>> **2. Ancient House Museum (re-opens late 2006)**
The museum has a small collection of Paine artifacts on display, including a copy of his death mask and a commemorative stone that was fixed in the base of a signpost which stood at the top of the road, close to the Thomas Paine Hotel, in the 1920s and 30s. This was Thetford's first memorial to Thomas Paine, who was then considered by many 'locals' to have been a traitor to his country of birth. There is also a short introductory film on Paine's life and works.

Leave the museum and continue to St Peter's Church at the bottom of the street.

- Note the church tower of black flint rebuilt in 1789, year of the French Revolution - a significant date in Paine's life!

Continue along Bridge Street to the Town Bridge.

>>> **3. Town Bridge**
In Paine's day, the Little Ouse River marked the county boundary. You would be about to cross from Norfolk into Suffolk. Thetford has moved its central focus several times; the main Anglo-Saxon town was on the "Suffolk" side, it migrated to the opposite bank by the early medieval



own design for a cast iron bridge!
Continue along Bridge Street to the Grammar School.

>>> **4. Grammar School**
The rectangular, flint building with the bell tower is the original school building where Thomas Paine was educated. The building to the right with the turreted entrance houses a small library dedicated to Thomas Paine. Thomas's father, Joseph Paine, a master stay or corset maker, was a freeman of the Borough of Thetford which entitled him to have his son educated at the Grammar School, at reduced fees. Thomas later wrote, "my parents were not able to give me a shilling beyond what they gave me in education, and to do this they distressed themselves." He probably attended the school between the ages of eight to thirteen years.

On leaving school, he was then apprenticed to his father. Given the state of educational provision at the time, this would have been quite a good start in life!

Retrace your steps and turn right into the public car park just before the Town Bridge. Cross the three-way footbridge at the joining of the rivers Thet and Little Ouse.

>>> **5. Footbridge**
In Paine's day, the area where you are now standing was surrounded by industry and trade that included malting houses, a tannery and the Anchor quay or wharf, from where large quantities of coal were off loaded from river barges.

Follow the riverside path to your right, alongside the car park (once the tannery yard) to the riverside kiosk - proceed across the carpark to the Thetford Library.

>>> **6. Thetford Library**
Inside the library, upstairs on the first floor, is one of the best collections of Thomas Paine material in the country and is available for study by prior appointment.
Continue for a few metres past the library and turn left into Cage Lane (formerly Old Meeting Lane).

>>> **7. Carnegie Room**
On your left is the Carnegie Room. Late in the 17th century the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers, had a thatched meeting house built here, under the shadow of the ancient



Guildhall. The meeting house was ruinous by the early years of the 20th century and was demolished soon afterwards: the site is now covered by the paved area in front of the Carnegie Room. "Paine's parents had an Anglican wedding, at nearby Euston, but Joseph Paine was a Quaker. The Friends community in Thetford was not very active at the time and it remains arguable how influential Joseph's Quakerism was upon his son." Continue your walk up Cage Lane and turn left into the Market Place.

>>> **8. Guildhall**
There have been several Guildhalls standing on this site since the first one was built in the 14th century. The present building was built in the early years of the 20th century. When Thomas Paine lived here it was 'a building of black flint' where the Corporation of Thetford held their 'halls' or assemblies and the annual Lent Assize, when serious crimes were tried before an itinerant judge appointed by the Crown, were held in the court room. It is certain that Paine's ideology was formed here - undoubtedly having witnessed the pomp and ceremony surrounding the assize and the harshness of 18th century justice administered there. Moreover, he would surely have joined in the crowds to view the hustings prior to the election of Borough Councillors and Thetford's Members of Parliament. Thomas Paine was fully aware that he lived in one of the most corrupt of the so-called 'rotten boroughs'. Thetford was represented by two Members of Parliament who were chosen by just thirty-one electors - the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors. In Paine's day, no-one else in the town of about 2,000 people had the vote!

Proceed to the opposite side of the Market Place towards St. Cuthbert's Church.

>>> **9. St Cuthbert's Church**
It may seem surprising that both of Paine's parents were buried here at St Cuthbert's - his father in 1786 and his mother in 1790. Why not at St Peter's, which was at the bottom of their road? The answer lies in the complex history of the town. A major religious centre,



Thetford had possibly thirteen separate parishes in the early medieval period. This couldn't possibly be maintained. Over several centuries, the parishes were gradually amalgamated, until just three remained. A map from 1807, drawn by the Town Clerk of the time, clearly shows that the top end of Bridgegate owed its tithes, and its allegiance, to St Cuthbert's - hence this church was the family resting place. Although not for Thomas!

Walk down King Street. At the bottom of the road, opposite the Bell Hotel, and in front of the King's House, we reach:

>>> **10. Thomas Paine Statue**
Erected in 1964, and designed by Sir Charles Wheeler, R.A. The suggestion that a statue to Paine should be erected in the town of his birth sparked an extraordinary controversy. The American Joseph Lewis, an ardent follower of Paine, decided to take literally the apocryphal attribution to Napoleon Bonaparte that a gold statue of Paine be erected in every city. At the time, it was clear that not every citizen of his birthplace agreed! The ensuing controversy made the pages of the national press, and led directly to the establishment of the Thomas Paine Society! Today Paine is gaining more acceptance from the residents of Thetford, so much so that the local 6th form has been named after him. Around the plinth you will find a selection of some of the best known quotes from Paine's writings.

Did you know?

Probably the most frequently asked question about the statue is: why is Paine holding Rights of Man upside down? No matter how you try to imagine the hand moving, the book remains the wrong way up! It has often been suggested that maybe the sculptor, Sir Charles Wheeler, was not a fan of Paine, and so he wanted to snub him by this device. In fact, the opposite is the case: Wheeler actually admitted that this was a deliberate trick to get people talking about the statue - and hence, about the subject himself!

