

Thomas Paine in Lewes 1768 -1774 A Prelude to American Independence

This publication was borne out of the thrust of organising the Thomas Paine Festival in Lewes for 2009.

When the project was initiated it quickly became clear that very little was known about Paine's life in England prior to his departure to America. Even less was known about the time he spent in Lewes. A small team, Paul Myles, Dr Colin Brent and Dr Seth Gopin spent 16 months in research and regular discussions and to their surprise much came to light that had not been previously thoroughly probed. Paul as a recent psychology graduate, Colin the eminent local historian and Seth, the visiting art historian from New York formed an unusual group. The combination of different approaches has proved to be illuminating.

New stories have been found. We gained a sharper insight of why Lewes has always been so radical and thus proved to be a perfect place for Paine to develop his writing and debating skills.

Colin Brent reveals how Paine, and possibly America, owes a developmental debt to Lewes. Thomas Paine as national commentator through the offices of excise is a story that has not been well known before; the strands of this tale are pulled together in Paul's essay. Seth Gopin brought an American perspective to the challenge, and asked what now seems to be the obvious questions of how did Paine get to know so much, and was General Gage, the commander in Chief of the British forces, linked to Firle Place, just outside Lewes? Deborah Gage, a direct descendent of General Thomas Gage has written the third essay about the man who now rests, with his wife, in the family crypt at St Peters Church in Firle.

There is a rich visual component to the book, the front cover shows a largely previously unseen image of Paine painted in London in 1790. Rare images of Lewes by D Serres, marine painter to King George III painted in year Paine rode into town are shown, as well as a rare image of Paine's Lewes friend, Clio Rickman, by Hazlitt. These images are discussed with some history of Serres.

The Authors

Colin Brent, an Open Scholar of New College Oxford, gained a formal First in Modern History in 1961 and was awarded a DPhil by Sussex University in 1974. He has written erudite articles on aspects of Tudor, Stuart and Victorian Lewes. Colin also published *Pre Georgian Lewes* and *Georgian Lewes*, the most comprehensive relevant resources of local history that was available to us.

Deborah Gage is an Art Historian, and family historian. She has held a long interest in General Gage, and continues to research relevant archives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Paul Myles was a director of Lewes Festival in the mid 90's, a director of four major sculpture exhibitions in Lewes over the last ten years and latterly, the director of the Thomas Paine & Lewes Festival in 2009. Paul recently completed six years as a student at the University of Sussex in the discipline of psychology graduating as a Bachelor and then Master of Science. Paul is a part time lecturer at the local college, teaching access students and outreach courses in child psychology.