

THE IMPRISONMENT OF JAMES MONTGOMERY IN YORK CASTLE

By Charles Patmore



Montgomery, the great hymn writer, honoured outside Sheffield Cathedral

From York Castle's gaoled journalist to Sheffield's civic saint

On May 11th 1854 many shops and factories in Sheffield closed for the day and thousands of mourners, including all civic and religious dignitaries, gathered for the grand funeral of James Montgomery in Sheffield's fashionable new, 'neo-Egyptian' cemetery ¹. 'Christian poet', writer of over 400 hymns, campaigner against slavery and chimney sweep child labour, benefactor of popular education, Sunday Schools, hospitals, missionary work and general civic improvement – Montgomery received "such demonstrations of respect as never before were paid to any individual in Sheffield" ². In due course streets and public halls and even private houses became named after "this truly venerated man" ³. Yet the great hymn-writer was the same man who 60 years earlier had twice been gaoled in York Castle as a dangerous political subversive. How had the latter ever come about?

Would-be poet wanders into political hotspot

James Montgomery was born in 1771 in Scotland to parents who were committed to life as Moravian missionaries. The Moravians were a Protestant denomination, descended from refugees from Central Europe, who often lived in self-contained communities. When Montgomery was six years old, his parents placed him in the care of the Moravian community at Fulneck, near Leeds, then departed for missionary work in the West Indies. There, during Montgomery's teenage years, they died.

Montgomery was an unusual child, highly focused on poetry and not much else. Before he was 10 years old, he had written a little book of poems and by the age of 14 he was writing long ones⁴. Efforts were made to apprentice him as a baker, as a shopkeeper, but he would run away. At the age of 19 he turned up in London, trying to sell his writings to publishers. Despite rejections, he was hellbent on a literary life. So when, in 1792, he saw an advert for a book keeper's job at a Sheffield weekly newspaper, he applied for it simply as something closer to the world of writing.

Little did 21-year-old Montgomery know what a turbulent political hotspot he was stepping into. When she saw his job application, his new employer's wife "laughed heartily" at his naivete, for he had written on it "God Save the King" to impress the reader with his patriotism⁵. Among this particular newspaper's readers, however, were many people whose views about kings were broadly in line with those of the French Revolution. At the time, the French Revolution was heading towards an extremely violent phase and was polarising politics in Britain.

How the French Revolution divided Britain

The lengthy, multi-stage French Revolution began in 1789. For many dissidents in Britain initially it seemed an enlivening, exciting beacon of hope which offered a model for elected, representative government and rational reform of how society was organised. In parts of Britain there began annual 14th July celebrations of the 1789 storming of the Bastille prison. In his poem *The French Revolution as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement*, William Wordsworth described the feeling:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!"

But, particularly after the 1793-94 Reign of Terror developed in France, many other people prepared to do the utmost to halt anything like this happening in Britain – central and local government in particular.

The French Revolution struck a number of chords with people in Britain. Many middle-class and working-class people wanted a degree of democracy not provided by the 18th century British parliament.

This meant two things:

- Parliamentary seats which represented the new, expanded population of the growing industrial cities – which were barely represented in parliament.
- Extending voting rights to a much larger section of the population than the property owners who were currently permitted to vote.

Some people strove only for the first, some for both and there were many different shades of opinion. Militant campaigning on these issues was to continue long into the next century, to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and the Chartist movement, until later these aims were gradually achieved. In the 1790s the new elected assemblies in revolutionary France appeared a promising model for progress.

Working-class people were often seriously aggrieved as a result of the continuing enclosure of common land, the insecurities of labour in Britain's growing manufacturing industries, and bread shortages which could lead to riots. The upheavals in France could appear a blow for the rights of downtrodden citizens and for social justice.

In 1791 Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* was published and the book was bought on a huge scale in Britain. It attacked the whole idea of monarchy and aristocracy, affirmed a right to rebel, and argued for government programmes to increase equality and reduce poverty. Paine participated in both the American and French revolutions. While he had to flee Britain after his book was published, it provided a coherent ideology for many British radicals.

In 1792 Revolutionary France went to war with Austria and Prussia, which had been threatening to invade France to crush the revolution and restore the French monarchy. Support for France in this war became a part of the radicals' campaign for change in Britain. Then, in February 1793, Britain also entered the war against France. Opposition to the war or support for French political ideas could now be deemed treasonable alliance with a foreign enemy. This issue was to be the key to James Montgomery's first imprisonment.

British radicals faced local anti-revolutionary militants, often known as the 'Church and King party', who could receive a degree of government support. They could be very violent – as in a terrifying 1791 pogrom in Birmingham against Unitarians for celebrating Bastille Day. Radical and reform causes seemed in particular to attract Protestant denominations which were outside the Church of England - like the Unitarians. Not least because reformers sought an end to the exclusion from government jobs of people who were not Church of England.

The situation in Sheffield when Montgomery arrived

All the above applied to Sheffield – but very much more so.

Much of Sheffield's celebrated blade-making was in this period conducted on an erratic, self-employed, piecework basis, supplemented by subsistence farming which often utilised common land. From 1793, the war massively reduced income from this insecure manufacturing work ⁶.

A dominating figure in the town was the much feared 'boxing vicar' Rev. James Wilkinson, who was both a major landowner, magistrate, champion boxer, and the town's vicar ⁷. On both occasions, he was on the panel of magistrates which sent James Montgomery to prison. In 1791 Rev. Wilkinson directed large enclosures of common land in various parts of Sheffield. Widespread public resistance culminated in an attack on Wilkinson's mansion and the army was called in. Five alleged rioters were hauled off to York Castle and one was hanged there ⁸.

In 1791 some Sheffield workmen launched the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information. This workmen's radical club was organised in cells and rapidly acquired 2000 members. With Thomas Paine's permission, it printed a super-cheap, 15,000 copy edition of *The Rights of Man* ⁹.

In 1792 construction began of a new army barracks in Sheffield for a permanent garrison to maintain order in the turbulent town ¹⁰.

During 1792, Sheffield radicals celebrated French victories in the war against Austria and Prussia with public ox roasts ¹¹.

When Britain entered the war against France in 1793, many army recruiting parties appeared in Sheffield ¹². Out-of-work metal workers were now being offered a new source of income.

Sheffield became bitterly divided. Radicals held peace rallies while local army recruits and the 'Church and King' party celebrated British victories over France. Once the latter tried to attack Montgomery's employer's home but were blocked by hundreds of organised radicals ¹³.

Each side of the divide now had its own very partisan weekly newspaper. The 'Church and King' people had the new, harshly spoken *Sheffield Courant*. The radicals had the *Sheffield Register*. The *Sheffield Register* was where, in April 1792, the 21-year-old James Montgomery had come to work - with hopes of somehow advancing a career as a poet.

The *Sheffield Register* faces government wrath

The *Sheffield Register* was the successful five-year old creation of its editor, Joseph Gales, a dynamic radical (and Unitarian) in his early thirties ¹⁴. Four pages long, the first three pages respectively covered national news, London news and Sheffield news ¹⁵. On the fourth page Gales had created a section which Montgomery must have warmed to – what readers' letters called 'Poetry Corner' ¹⁶. Many poems here were

political – and hence anonymous – but not all of them. One early Montgomery poem of this period denounced the slave trade ¹⁷.

After Britain joined the war against France in February 1793, the *Register* and its staff increasingly fell foul of government clampdown on seditious utterance. The young Montgomery felt very much out of his depth and also dismayed by the extremity of positions adopted on both sides ¹⁸. The newspaper printed material by Paine and participated in two large public meetings – against the war and against slavery. Montgomery composed a mild pacifist hymn which was sung by thousands at one meeting and this brought him to government attention. Then arrests of radicals took place in Edinburgh and London and government investigators began arresting Sheffield people connected to them ¹⁹. In June 1794, Joseph Gales by chance avoided an attempt to arrest him. He then went into hiding outside Sheffield before fleeing via Hamburg to a new life in the newly independent United States.

James Montgomery becomes newspaper editor at the age of 23

After Gales fled, the *Sheffield Register* officially closed. But, with help from Gales' sisters and local backers, by July 1794 it had been swiftly replaced by a fresh weekly newspaper on the same premises. This was the *Sheffield Iris* and 23-year-old James Montgomery was its editor. "No young man ever embarked in life with fewer hopes or greater fears", he later said ²⁰.

Montgomery intended the *Iris* to be explicitly different from the *Register*. Whilst pro-reform, it was to be moderate, non-factional and with a "duty to state the reasonings on both sides" ²¹. Unsurprisingly, it contained even more poetry and Montgomery confessed that this might be a reason why circulation dropped early on ²². But Montgomery's moderation simply caused the government to change its tack in executing its plans for him.

First imprisonment

Just a few weeks after Montgomery had started as editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, an old street vendor of ballad sheets entered his office and asked him for reprints of a sheet he was holding, which had a political song on it. It was a song, written by a third party, which had been printed and sung at a Bastille Day celebration in 1792 and, it later transpired, had been reprinted without incident in at least three newspapers that year. He told Montgomery that the song had been previously printed in his current Sheffield premises and that the typeset was still present there. Montgomery found to his surprise that the latter was true, so he printed some copies for the street vendor to sell.

Two months later a policeman arrived with an arrest warrant. He said he had bought this song sheet from the ballad vendor and then noticed a verse:

"For should France be subdued, Europe's liberty ends
If she triumphs, the world shall be free".

Montgomery was charged with “seditious libel against the war”. The government was contending that, since Britain’s 1793 entry into the war with France, these 1792 words had subsequently become criminal ²³.

After an intensely hostile prosecution indictment, Montgomery was found guilty at a trial in Doncaster in January 1795. The judges wanted Montgomery declared guilty in unambiguous terms and had to send the jury back to rephrase their verdict in order to obtain this. Montgomery was sentenced to three months in York Castle’s gaol and a £20 fine. A judge told him he was lucky not to also get an hour in the pillory ²⁴.

Decades later, in 1839, Montgomery was given a package containing a letter which had been sent by the Home Secretary himself to a Sheffield magistrate, advising him on this prosecution and pledging funds to advance it. A brief to the prosecution stated explicitly that the government’s aim in prosecuting Montgomery was to check the “insolence” of radical political clubs in Sheffield, which it believed had been emboldened by some recent acquittals ²⁵.

It is not known whether the Sheffield officials, who arranged Montgomery’s arrest, were simply alert opportunists, who then involved the Home Office, or whether from the outset the ballad vendor was being directed by government agents. But it does seem clear that Montgomery was imprisoned on a carefully orchestrated pretext which had nothing to do with justice.

Second imprisonment

Almost exactly a year after his first imprisonment in York Castle, Montgomery was back there again. After release from his first sentence in April 1795, he returned as editor of the *Sheffield Iris*. In August 1795 he published a report on a riot in Sheffield on August 4th, when new local army recruits, backed by other Sheffield citizens, had demonstrated against the alleged withholding of a promised bonus for signing up. A local militia unit had been called in to enforce order. Some stones had been thrown at them. The episode had ended with soldiers firing on the crowd, killing two people.

Montgomery was prosecuted for libelling the local militia commander through his report. This militia commander had been one of the panel of five magistrates who had sent Montgomery to prison for reprinting the pro-French Revolution poem. Initially Montgomery was to be charged with undermining public order. Many years later the militia commander repeatedly stated that he had been pressured to make a personal charge of criminal libel ²⁶.

The charge centred on a key difference between Montgomery’s *Sheffield Iris* report and a report in the *York Courant*, which was apparently officially acceptable. The *Sheffield Iris* report stated that fairly early during the trouble the militia commander had drawn his sword and angrily ridden into the crowd, slashing indiscriminately at people. This was the alleged libel, for the officer denied that he had slashed anyone while waving his sword around. The *York Courant* report does not mention this incident ²⁷.

At his trial at Doncaster in January 1796, among Montgomery's witnesses was a woman who showed a scar on her arm from a blow from the militia commander's sword. But this seems ignored and the jury took just 15 minutes to find him guilty. He was sentenced to six months in York Castle plus a £30 fine and was bound over for good behaviour for two years for sureties of £300 ²⁸.

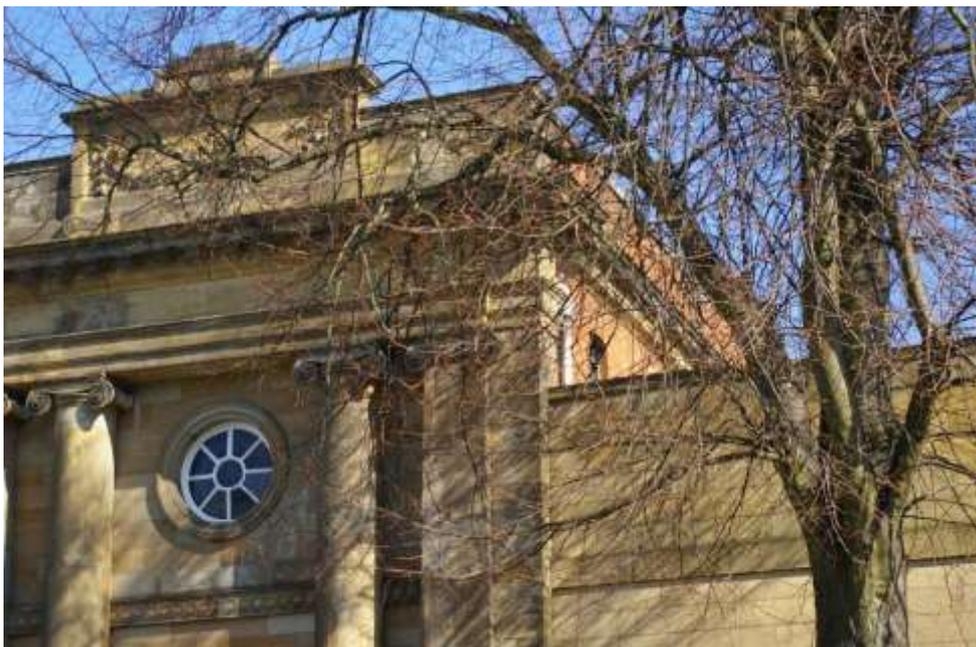
James Montgomery's experience of imprisonment in York Castle

Cell Location

During both imprisonments Montgomery ended up for most of his time with a reasonably comfortable cell to himself in what was then called the New Buildings, now called the Women's Prison, facing the Law Courts. It was high up, giving him views from the window which he enjoyed greatly. On his second imprisonment he had to wait some weeks before being placed there, because there were now so many more prisoners than a year earlier. But by March 1796 he was in "a snug and very comfortable apartment in the new building here...during the rest of my confinement...and every indulgence the condition of a prisoner will admit." He was now "removed from the noise of riot and revelry...in the Old Castle" though he had found the prisoners there pleasant and helpful to him ²⁹.

In 1828, during a visit to York, one of Montgomery's eventual biographers toured York Castle with Montgomery and asked him to point out his cell location. Referring to the New Buildings ('Women's Prison'), he left this record:

"The poet's apartment is indicated by the upper window between the pilasters, at the right-hand extremity of the prison. The other window (from which he used to watch the motion of the windmill in the direction of Bishopthorpe) is in the end of the building, and overlooks the Foss-mill bridge, from which it is distinctly seen." ³⁰



Montgomery's cell window in high brick wall on right in New Buildings / Women's Prison

Prison Companions

Possibly the New Buildings were being reserved for the more refined sort of prisoner, for Montgomery's companions comprised four "well-behaved persons" from "respectable circles" and the eight 'Lothersdale Quakers' ³¹. The latter were a *cause celebre* because of the evident injustice of their being imprisoned on an indefinite, possibly lifelong basis. Following their Quaker principles, they had refused to pay tithes. They could have been left at liberty while goods of equivalent value were confiscated instead. But they were being imprisoned indefinitely to make them abandon their principles.



Montgomery's cell window in the 'New Buildings', seen from near bridge over Foss

A prisoner with whom Montgomery formed a close, continuing relationship was Henry Wormall, an elderly member of these 'Lothersdale Quakers' ³². This was a true meeting of minds. Both left written records of how much they enjoyed each other's company. They wrote to each other at length after Montgomery's release and several letters survive. Wormall became a subscriber to Montgomery's newspaper. ⁵⁶ Another Quaker who made an impression on Montgomery was the dry-stone wall craftsman Joseph Browne, who emerged as the spiritual leader of the Lothersdale eight. Montgomery later wrote a poem about him. However, despite Montgomery's liking for all the Lothersdale Quakers, he never attended the Quaker Meetings which they held twice weekly in prison ³³.

A high-profile fellow prisoner was Henry Redhead Yorke, a mixed-race young radical born in Antigua, who was renowned for his charismatic oratory and his attractiveness to women. He was facing a treason charge after a speech at a Sheffield anti-slavery

rally in early 1794, in which Montgomery had also participated. He was the same age as Montgomery and, for his years, had forayed far into radical politics in France as well as in England. Montgomery described a conversation with him in York Castle ³⁴.

How Montgomery Spent his Time in Prison

Montgomery said he passed his time in a “smooth, easy fashion.”

He sent directions to the acting editor of the *Sheffield Iris*. He read. He chatted extensively with Henry Wormald.

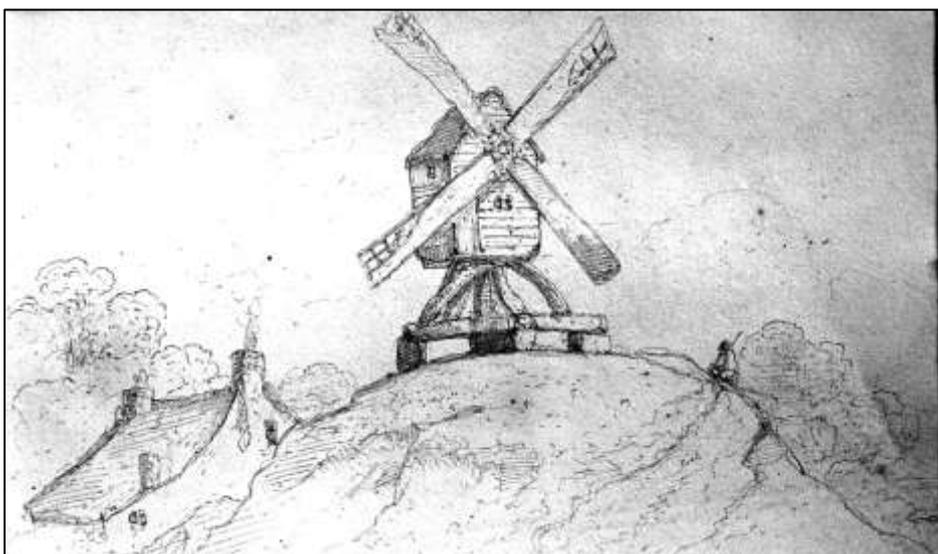
He also wrote quite a lot of poetry. His prison poems appeared in his collection ‘Prison Amusements’ ³⁵. This includes ‘The Pleasures of Imprisonment’, a poem explicitly about prison life in York Castle. Other poems draw on views of birds or skylines seen from his cell window. (In the Appendix is a prison poem with a punchline: ‘[A Soliloquy of a Water-wagtail on the Walls of York Castle](#)’.³⁶)

In prison Montgomery also rewrote a novel which he had written as a teenager, which a London publisher had rejected on account of the swear-words it contained ³⁷. However, after leaving prison he burned the revised manuscript.

Favourite Sight From his Prison Cell Window

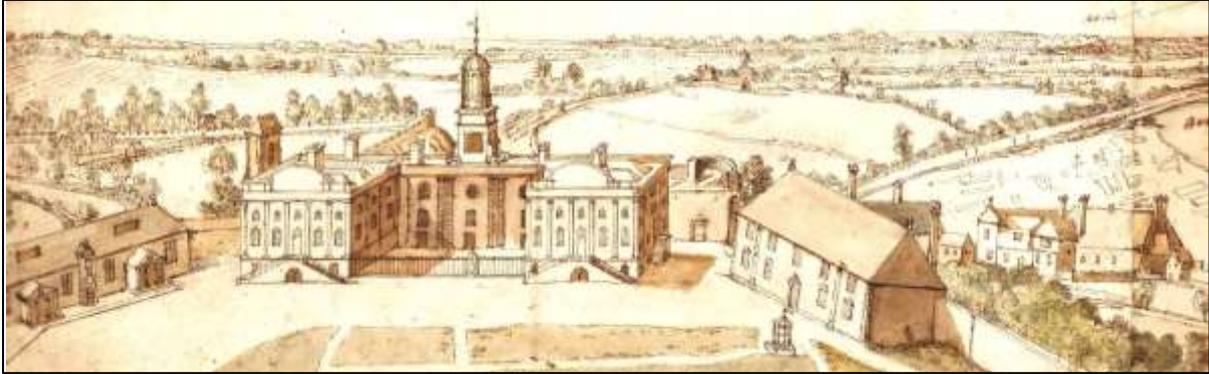
Montgomery seems also to have spent quite a lot of time looking out of the window. His favourite sight was in fields to the left of the far end of the New Walk, where was visible:

“A wooden windmill, propt upon one leg, on a little eminence, and the motion of whose arms...as the body was occasionally turned about east, west, north and south, to meet the wind...proved the source of very humble but very dear pleasure...the inspirer...of meditations on the vanity of the world and the flight of time.” ³⁸



***An 1826 view of a local windmill in the same direction as Montgomery’s view from his cell.
Drawn by William Nicholson. York Art Gallery***

Montgomery resolved one day to walk along the Ouse and take the path across the fields to reach this windmill. On the mid-April morning when he was released from his first prison term, this walk was the first thing he did ³⁹. A number of windmills have existed in the area viewable from Montgomery's cell window. It is an open question as to which windmill this was.



Looking south from York Castle across the prisons, by Francis Place, 1710. British Museum

Prison Conditions and the Impact of Prison

Montgomery seems to have had good access to pen and paper for his extensive prison writings. He believed that his letters from prison were not being read by the authorities, which would suggest the government did not genuinely fear him as seriously subversive ⁴⁰. He had access to walks in the Castle Yard and formed friendships with some animals who lived there – two deer and a mischievous raven were among these. For at least some of his imprisonment he had a little dog as a pet ⁴¹. This dog and the deer and raven are described in his prison poem 'The Pleasures of Imprisonment' ⁴².

A room to oneself, a good companion close by, opportunity to write poetry undisturbed, a pet dog, tame deer to feed, a cell with an inspiring view....and all this in a smart new building designed by celebrity architect John Carr. Considering the widely criticised conditions in prison in Britain in 2018, it is not impossible that Montgomery's circumstances were rather better than he would have enjoyed today.

Or did Montgomery over-emphasise the positive?

On the one hand, Montgomery repeatedly writes in an optimistic frame about making the best of his time in prison. He counts his blessings. He did get a lot of writing done. 'Paul Positive' had been his pen-name and he seems certainly to live up to it. On the other hand, he also wrote passages rather at variance with these positive sentiments.

For instance, concerning his prison poems:

"These pieces were composed in bitter moments, amid the horrors of a jail, under the pressure of sickness....The writer amused his imagination with attiring his sorrows in verse, that, under the romantic appearance of fiction, he might somehow forget that his misfortunes were real." ⁴³

In fact, a large chunk of Epistle I of 'The Pleasures of Imprisonment' describes escape to a fantasy world to transmute the everyday realities of prison.

Montgomery experienced substantial, unspecified health problems before and during his second imprisonment. On medical advice, he went for the new Scarborough seaside cure as soon as his second imprisonment ended.

Montgomery sometimes actually felt nostalgia for York Castle. But it was a bittersweet nostalgia. In 1808 he made an impromptu return visit, met some of the animals he used to feed and was delighted when his onetime pet dog greeted him enthusiastically. He wrote:

“Being summoned to attend a meeting of printers in Tadcaster, I could not resist the temptation of proceeding from thence to York, to revisit the place of my captivity....There is a tender, melancholy pleasure in reviewing past misfortunes and tracing the scenes where we have formerly suffered. I feel an affection for every spot of ground where I have been unhappy; an attachment even to the dungeon which I entered with horror ...but dear to my very soul is the snug little apartment which I occupied during the last five months of my captivity – the cage in which I sang of sorrow till sorrow became familiar and delightful.”⁴⁴

“Half-killed with engagements and harassed with homage”: Montgomery’s later career

Montgomery returned as editor of the *Iris* and continued this till 1825. His energies however moved towards writing poetry and hymns and philanthropic work. He steadily became much more conservative in his views. He also somehow gravitated towards a position in Sheffield opinion where, according to another local newspaper, he was seen as “unmixed with any party, but whom all parties equally respect for his talents and virtues”⁴⁵. Well, all parties from “the sober, respectable, intelligent and pious portion of the community”, that is⁴⁶.

In his church and Sunday School work he worked harmoniously with both his original Moravian church and with Methodists and many Anglicans and other denominations. His many hymns became used across denominations. He became the ideal person to chair grand public meetings or speak at civic dinners, to write and declaim to civic worthies an ode on Queen Victoria’s coronation, to lay the foundation stone to Sheffield’s cholera memorial, or to sit on boards for civic improvement – re hospitals, gas lighting, sanitation.

An 1835 article described him as “half-killed with engagements and harassed with homage”⁴⁷. Commissions for writing flowed in for similar reasons – to write forewords, epitaphs and funerary verses for example. For instance, in York in 1830 a public appeal raised funds for a memorial to the six children of the Riggs, owners of a large plant nursery in Fishergate, who had been drowned in a boating accident on the Ouse. Montgomery was then commissioned to write the epitaph⁴⁸. (Since the memorial’s

2017 restoration, the latter is now visible once more in St Lawrence's churchyard, Hull Road, York.)



Montgomery's epitaph to Rigg family, St Lawrence Churchyard, York

In both his poetry and his public works, Montgomery often still promoted causes which he had championed in his youth – against slavery, against abusive child labour, and promoting missionary work and measures to improve the lives of Sheffield's poor. Though sometimes his rhetoric for these causes now had a distinctly paternalist, establishment ring to it. A champion of street lighting, street sweeping and a less sooty Sheffield, in 1818 he wrote:

“Between filth and depravity, sloth and licentiousness, darkness and dishonesty, there is more alliance than many people imagine; half the vices of the poor, and more than half their misery, may be traced to their irregularity, negligence, want of economy, and want of cleanliness in their houses, their habits and their persons.”⁴⁹

James Montgomery: a rebel by accident?

Clearly it was by chance Montgomery stumbled into the Sheffield political arena. There, for a while, he acquired a degree of heroic status through his imprisonment. He did not seek it out. He was no Joseph Gales.

When, as the editor of the *Iris*, he had the opportunity to confront the government but he did not choose to do so. He was actually careful not to risk prosecution, which was why the authorities needed fraudulent tactics to get him to prison.

Montgomery actually disliked politics per se and early writings for the *Sheffield Register* show that sometimes he had poor rapport with common radical positions of the time⁵⁰. He viewed politics as a “dung cart dragging behind him” in his role as

newspaper editor, a role he felt he was personally unsuited for ⁵¹. He never even wanted to write about politics, let alone risk gaol for it.

Nevertheless, Montgomery resolutely embraced what he saw as his responsibilities in an unwelcome situation – as editor of a controversial political newspaper at the age of 23. He did not bow to the government any more than he believed he had to (not enough, as it turned out). Much as he disliked politics, he committed himself to always writing the *Iris*' weekly editorial himself, as part of taking responsibility for the newspaper. Unnatural as was his role for him, he seems to have undertaken it with an integrity which won him the support of Joseph Gales' sisters and others close to the *Iris*. Indeed he seems well-supported by Sheffield radicals throughout his imprisonments. At no time did he apologise or collude with the government but consistently defended what he had published. At his first trial he actually felt himself a "hero" and "a high degree of excitement" rather than fear ⁵².

Montgomery may have entered newspaper work just to get his youthful poems published. But, during his early years as *Iris* editor, he became for a short while a brave and principled journalist. In later years, when almost a caricature of a civic worthy, far from distancing himself from his prison days, he repeatedly kept mentioning them – repeatedly condemning the government's unjust behaviour towards him.

Some key themes in Montgomery's later life, like campaigning against slavery, against children working as chimney sweeps, and his pacifist horror at warfare, he shares with the radical reformist climate of the 1790s. But the way he advanced these causes became very different - presenting them in ways which could appeal to mainstream and establishment sentiments. This approach, it is clear, was much more personally congenial to Montgomery than militant campaigning. Whether more effective is an open question.

Appendix: [two poems by James Montgomery](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Patmore is a member of the Fishergate, Fulford & Heslington Local History Society. He researched this subject as a volunteer on York Castle Museum's 2017 / 2018 'Rebels' project, which studied people imprisoned on the York Castle site for political or religious reasons. His interest in James Montgomery began from having grown up in a house in Sheffield which was named after the poet and with other Montgomery mementoes nearby. He is also the author of the guidebook, 'Choice Guide to York, U.K.', available from Amazon: www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1521325251

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APPENDIX: TWO JAMES MONTGOMERY POEMS

'SOLILOQUY OF A WATER-WAGTAIL ON THE WALLS OF YORK CASTLE'

Written in York Castle gaol, April 15th 1796, one of Montgomery's 'Prison Amusements' poems.

On the walls that guard my prison
Swelling with fantastic pride,
Brisk and merry as the season,
I a feathered coxcomb spied;
When the little hopping elf
Gaily thus amused himself.

“Hear your sovereign’s proclamation,
All good subjects, young and old;
I’m the Lord of the Creation,
I a Water-Wagtail bold!
All around, and all you see,
All the world was made for ME!

“Yonder sun, so proudly shining,
Rises - when I leave my nest;
And, behind the hills declining,
Sets – when I return to rest;
Morn and evening, thus you see,
Day and night were made for ME!

“Vernal gales to love invite me
Summer sheds for me her beams;
Autumn’s jovial scenes delight me;
Winter paves with ice my streams;
All the year is mine, you see;
Seasons change, like moons, for ME!

“On the heads of giant mountains,
Or beneath the shady trees;
By the banks of warbling fountains,
I enjoy myself at ease.
Hills and valleys, thus you see,
Groves and rivers, made for ME!

“Boundless are my vast dominions;
I can hop or swim or fly;
When I please, my towering pinions
Trace my empire through the sky.
Air and elements, you see,
Heaven and earth were made for ME!

“Birds and insects, beasts and fishes,
All their humble distance keep;
Man, subservient to my wishes,
Sows the harvest which I reap.
Mighty man, himself you see,
All that breathe were made for ME!

“ ‘Twas for my accommodation
Nature rose when I was born;
Should I die – the whole creation
Back to nothing would return;
Sun, moon and stars, the world, you see,
Sprung - exist and fall with ME!”

Here the pretty prattler, ending,
Spread his wings to soar away;

But a cruel Hawk, descending,
Pounced him up – an helpless prey.
Couldst thou not, poor Wagtail, see
That the Hawk was made for THEE?

'PRAYER IS THE SOUL'S SINCERE DESIRE'

From Montgomery's monument outside Sheffield Cathedral, his best-known hymn, written in 1818 and published in over 750 collections of hymns

