

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

Smith, Adam James ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3938-4836> (2022) The Newspaper, the Bookshop and the Radical Society: Joseph Gales' Hartshead Press and the "Reading and Thinking People of Sheffield". In: Smith, Adam James ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3938-4836>, Stenner, Rachel and Kramer, Kaley, (eds.) Print Culture, Agency and Regionality in the Handpress Era. New Directions in Book History . Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 71-89

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/5394/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88055-2\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88055-2_4)

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

# RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at [ray@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:ray@yorks.ac.uk)

## **The Newspaper, the Bookshop and the Radical Society: Joseph Gales’ Hartshead Press and the “Reading and Thinking People of Sheffield”.<sup>1</sup>**

**Adam James Smith, York St John University, a.smith3@yorks.j.ac.uk**

**Keywords:** Joseph Gales; James Montgomery; Sheffield; Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI); life-writing; regional newspapers; radicalism; regional history.

This chapter surveys the various activities and outputs of a late eighteenth-century press managed by Joseph Gales out of Hartshead Square, Sheffield. Founded in 1787, the press is best remembered for producing two radical newspapers, *The Sheffield Register*, edited by Gales, and *The Sheffield Iris*, edited by Gales’ protégé, James Montgomery. These papers are well recognised as making a significant contribution to the development of regional news culture. They are less well known for functioning as part of a broader business model which saw Gales’ wife, Winifred, managing a bookshop in Hartshead Square whilst Gales also used his press to furnish the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI) with books, pamphlets, appeals, and other items of political ephemera. In sourcing texts from London and reprinting or selling them in York, Gales actively shaped Sheffield’s literary and political culture. However, his output sees him perpetually obscuring his own agency, disguising a discrete strategy that prescribed as much as it described the character of his Sheffield readers.

\*

---

<sup>1</sup> The archival research used to produce this chapter was undertaken thanks to the generous support of the Printing Historical Society Grants programme.

Reflecting on the character of the native people of Sheffield, the city where he spent a long and varied career as a printer, newspaper editor, poet, politician, and philanthropist, James Montgomery wrote that ‘they were then, as they are now, and I hope they will ever be, a reading and thinking people’ (Montgomery in Holland 1854, 141). The consequences of this learned disposition, Montgomery concluded, were social, political, and progressive: ‘According to the knowledge that they had, therefore, they judged themselves on the questions of the reforms of parliament, liberty of speech, and of the press, the rights of man, and other egregious paradoxes, concerning the which the wisest and best of men have always been divided’ (Montgomery in Everett 1854, 141). Montgomery was far from alone in recognising and recording this seemingly exceptional characteristic amongst Sheffield’s citizens. On 13 June 1792, Colonel de Lancey, the Deputy Adjunct to the Secretary of State for War, wrote in a letter to his superior that at Sheffield he had ‘found that the seditious machinations of [Thomas] Paine and the factions who are endeavouring to disturb the peace of the country had extended to a degree very much beyond [his] conception’, concluding that ‘they seem with great judgement to have chosen this, [Sheffield], as the centre of their machinations’ (Aspinall 1949, 4). In his memoir, nineteenth-century Sheffield silversmith and social reformer Samuel Roberts observed that ‘to many, even professed ministers of the Gospel, [Thomas Paine] appeared to become dearer than the Bible, and their visits to their flocks were made with the *Rights of Man* in their pockets, to induce them to read it’ (Roberts in Price 2012, 10). Suffice it to say, by the time Roberts committed this memory to paper Sheffield had a formidable reputation for radicalism.

Montgomery humbly figures the opportunity to have provided print, poetry and journalism for such a hungry, critically engaged and inquisitive audience as a privilege he was happy to receive. He acknowledges that as custodian of Sheffield’s Hartshead Press<sup>2</sup>, inherited

---

<sup>2</sup> I will refer to the print business operated out of Hartshead Square by Joseph Gales and his successor, James Montgomery, as the ‘Hartshead Press.’ The press does not appear to have had consistent name during this

from his mentor, Joseph Gales, he had soon realised that he was in a ‘situation that should give him the opportunity of doing much evil or much good.’ Fortunately, though a ‘civil war of words [was] raging in the neighbourhood’ with ‘two parties [arrayed] on contrary extremes’ and ‘no moderation on either side’, Montgomery was able to forge a path by following the example of his predecessor, Gales, who he describes as the ‘generous, upright, disinterested [and] noble minded proprietor of *The Sheffield Register*’ (Montgomery in Everett 1854, 141). By adopting these principles, and respecting the intrinsic critical capacities of his Sheffield readers, Montgomery - according to his own account - had managed to steer the Hartshead press through the tumultuous first two decades of the nineteenth century, concluding that his own contribution to Sheffield’s culture was, in the grand scheme of things, simply to offer ‘an occasional rhyme here, paragraph, or essay in the newspaper, written rather for the purpose of showing my literary rather than my political qualifications’ (Montgomery in Everett 1854, 141). He is, of course, being far too modest, and deliberately underselling the role played by both his newspaper, and the press he inherited from Gales, in constructing Sheffield’s reputation for radicalism and for building the very community of ‘reading and thinking people’ he claims was always there. This tendency, to praise Sheffield’s innate exceptionalism whilst positioning the Hartshead Press as a facilitator rather than as an architect of Sheffield literary and political culture is one that characterises the editorial reflections of Gales, Montgomery, and their successor John Everett. It is also one, this chapter will argue, that actively obfuscates the press’s commercial strategies, the entrepreneurial zeal of its printers and the self-conscious and symbiotic mythologisation that the press effected during this period, both of Sheffield as a radical city and of the Hartshead Press itself.

---

period, though it was common for the front matter of texts published by the press to state that they were ‘printed in the Hartshead.’

## **Joseph Gales and the Hartshead Press**

The Hartshead Press was founded by Gales, who, following John Garnett, the first printer of books in Sheffield (from 1736), and Revill Homfray, his successor, became the city's third printer and bookseller (Raven 2016, 44). A directory of the town, produced by Gales and the engraver David Martin in 1787 and reprinted in 1889, describes Gales as a 'bookseller, stationer, print-seller, auctioneer, and agent of the Royal Fire Office' (Addy 1889, 59). Though born just outside of Sheffield, in the neighbouring town of Eckington, Gales had spent his adolescence in Manchester apprenticed to a Mr and Mrs Prescott, owners of a book and stationary store. After a legal dispute with the Prescotts, Gales received permission from the courts to complete his apprenticeship in the Nottinghamshire town of Newark. Here he worked for Mr Tomlinson who was primarily a printer and bookseller, but was also a dealer of carpets and wallpaper, an auctioneer and an appraiser, and the custodian of the circulating library through which Gales would meet his future wife, Winifred Marshall (Kay 2017, 6). Following this apprenticeship Gales set up his own printing business in Sheffield, using a combination of his own savings, Winifred's modest inheritance from her father and loans from contacts he had developed in London. Now married, Joseph and Winifred lived above the shop in Hartshead Square, which Arthur Jewitt described as being 'at the top of the narrow street leading from the Hartshead to Friends Meeting House' (Jewitt in Kay 2017, 6). In Montgomery's composite biography, John Holland and James Everett write that 'Mr Gales lived not in the main street, but in the more open part of a busy thoroughfare called "The Hartshead." The shop, however, was commodious, and the frontage, at that time, considered handsome, included a highly ornamental pair of bow windows, the first, we believed, which had been seen in the town' (Holland 1854, 144). According to Steven and Nell Kay, 'Winifred ran the shop, selling books, stationary and patent medicine, whilst Joseph ran the office, printing and auctioneering business' (Kay 2017, 7). In 1787 Gales launched *The Sheffield Register*, a newspaper which

ran until 1794.<sup>3</sup> At this point the Gales family emigrated to America, leaving the paper to be relaunched by James Montgomery as *The Sheffield Iris*.

Montgomery's description of Gales in the final issue of the *Iris* as being 'disinterested' would likely raise an eyebrow from readers with longer memories. They would recall that Montgomery only succeeded Gales as editor after he was charged with 'conspiracy against government' precisely because he was *not* disinterested, and actively involved both his paper and his press in partisan agitations for governmental reform (*Register* 27 June 1794). According to his wife, Winifred, it had always been Gales' ambition to provide a voice for workers and artisans in Sheffield; she claimed decades later in her private memoirs that readers were 'glad to find their grievances so moderately stated, and so respectfully submitted, and the printer was credited [first] for putting their demands into good language, and later for the propriety with which they were addressed' (W Gales in Ashton 1951, 205). According to Hannah Barker, Gales' newspaper is remembered not for its ambivalence, as Montgomery hints, but for its flagrant commitment to radical change on behalf of a readership it figured as downtrodden and disenfranchised: 'in Sheffield, a unique brand of radical politics was evident from before the French Revolution, whilst the *Sheffield Register*, under the editorship of Joseph Gales, was one of the most famous radical provincial newspapers during the 1790s' (Barker 2006, 15). Ian Haywood lists the *Register* as being one of 'the most significant cheap journals produced by middle class radicals' (Butler 1984, 152), whilst Marilyn Butler positions the *Register* as part of a broader commitment, from Gales, to 'popularise' radical ideas amidst the local community: 'Perhaps the most remarkable populariser for the masses was Joseph Gales of Sheffield, a Unitarian master-printer and bookseller, who ran two journals [...] both designed to disseminate radical opinion and information to a readership which would include

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the masthead, the paper's full title was *The Sheffield Register, Yorkshire, Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Universal Advertiser*. This long title was typical of the late eighteenth-century regional press, where such titles signalled the paper's intended circulation.

working men' (Butler 1984, 152). It was not, however, for the contents of his newspaper that Gales was ultimately charged, but for his connections (and, indeed, the connections of his press), to the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI).

Simon Maccoby has characterised the SSCI as being 'one of the most active and zealous of the radical societies' (Maccoby 1955, 66), an observation echoed by Albert Godwin who claims that it was 'probably the first British working-class reform association of any consequence' (Godwin 2016, 223). A handbill, printed by Gales on 14 March 1791, boasted that 'the Society, composed chiefly of the Manufacturers of Sheffield, began about Four Months ago, and is already increased to nearly two thousand members, and is daily increasing' (SSCI 1794, 1). The SSCI fostered connections with the London Society for Constitutional Information (LCS), linking its members to the LCS leadership, as well as such radical figures as Joel Barlow, Joseph Gerald, Joseph Priestly, Thomas Walker, and Henry Redhead Yorke (Daly 2011, 20). Its declared intention was to educate fellow citizens in their lost ancient liberties, as this 'resolution' goes on to explain:

Considering, as we do, that the want of knowledge and information in the general mass of the people has exposed them to numberless impositions and abuses, the exertions of this society are directed to the acquirement of useful knowledge, and to spread the same as far as our endeavours and abilities can extend (SSCI 1794, 1).

A primary means by which this was to be achieved was through the printing and dissemination of political texts and tracts. Sometimes this involved reprinting well-known texts, such as Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, which had first appeared in London a year earlier. According to the secretary of the SSCI, John Alcock, Gales received over 1400 subscriptions ahead of publishing a six pence edition of the *Rights of Man* for the society (Alcock in Goodwin 2016, 159). In her memoirs, Winifred Gales later claimed that 'we had sold hundreds of Paine's

works [...] and printed thousands by order of the Constitutional Society' (W Gales, 47). At other times, Gales furnished the SSCI with compilations of extracts from works by republican radicals, or with copies of texts produced by SSCI members themselves, such as the 'Address to Britons' discussed later in this chapter. As E. J. Hobsbawm colourfully describes, the SSCI's proclaimed intention in circulating this material was to demonstrate to its members 'that reason can cut like an axe through the undergrowth of custom which kept men enslaved' (1972, 4).

In the years following the establishment of the SSCI, however, the national mood had changed. When it was founded, many in England were watching the events of the French Revolution play out across the channel with a sense of optimism and excitement, the storming of the Bastille a new dawn of democratic possibility across all of Europe. When describing the reception of the French Revolution in England, David Duff writes that 'one modern commentator has spoken of "the dizzying sense of total possibility" during the early years of the revolution' (Duff 1999, 25). Robert Southey captured the mood well when he claimed that 'old things seemed to have passed away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race' (Southey in Dowden 1881, 52). In this climate, the parliamentary reform that the SSCI was agitating for seemed credible. By February of 1793, however, Louis XVI had been executed, war had broken out in France, and the British government came to view organised societies agitating for parliamentary reform with increasing hostility. Given the well-publicised activities of the SSCI, Sheffield was a site of particular concern: 'if any place was to be a Faubourg St Antoine to an English Revolution, it was surely Sheffield' (Armitage 1910, 131).

Throughout the summer of 1794, Gales' *Register* documented the arrest and subsequent trial and prosecution of five members of the SSCI who were arrested and taken to London where they were charged with sedition (Wigley, 174). These reports were accompanied by sympathetic editorials and letters of support, but whilst Gales publicly championed the cause of the SSCI, local antiquarian Joseph Hunter records that the society was considered by local



authorities to have ‘infected’ Sheffield with revolutionary principles (Hunter, 146). Eventually warrants were issued for the arrest of Henry Yorke, Richard Davison, and even Gales himself (Wigley, 174). Gales was first alleged to have been involved in offering to procure and provide ‘pikes’ to the LCS. Then, during the trial of London-based radical Thomas Hardy (again, a trial well covered in the pages of the *Register*), SSCI-member William Broomhead revealed during questioning that Gales had been printed materials for the SSCI and, along with Henry Yorke, chaired meetings for the society (Ramsey 1794, 173-180). Fearing a prison sentence or transportation, Gales and his family fled first to America and settled in Philadelphia where Gales once again built a career as a journalist. Within three months James Montgomery had rebranded and relaunched the *Register* as the *Iris*, and within a year he too was arrested and charged for treason, sedition and libel against the government.

In the still relatively limited scholarship that focuses on this episode in Sheffield’s radical history, it is Gales work on the *Register* has tended to take precedence for the highly legitimate reasons outlined above: it spoke explicitly to labouring, artisan readers; it found a broad and receptive readership; it used its editorials and advertisements to report on and make the case for the activities and interests of the SSCI; and it actively championed parliamentary reform and the cause of abolition. The newspaper, however, was one aspect of a broader project that encompassed both Gales’ bookshop and the SSCI, a strategy which intended to foster both a politicised, literary culture for Sheffield, and an engaged market of readers for texts printed and sold by the Hartshead Press. As Steven Kay has noted, Gales’ business model was already, necessarily, diverse, built as much on his auctioneering and the sale of patent medicines as it was on print and stationary. These seemingly disparate endeavours were symbiotically connected, however, as was typical for the period, ‘these things were a normal part of an integrated printing business: notices of auction being placed in newspapers and adverts for the medicines being a staple of newspaper’s advertising’ (Kay 2017, 7). In the same manner that

Gales used the *Register* to advertise the patent medicine stored in his shop, so too did he use the paper to sell and advertise subscriptions for books that he would print and sell in Hartshead Square. In his reading of Winifred Gales' *Reflections*, Michael Daly notes that according to his wife, Gales was particularly adept at making the most of his status as a printer to maximise the potential of these various endeavours (Daly, 43). Within this effective business model, however, there was also a discrete strategy that proved as prescriptive as it was descriptive. Newspaper advertising, editorials and the activities of the SSCI were means by which Gales could prescribe a certain political literacy and a set of reformist principles. Then, using newspaper editorials, reporting and the printing of poetry, pamphlets and addresses, he was able to describe the effects of these principles being disseminated into the community. As a result, he could promote a specific character for his Sheffield readers, and for the Sheffield region more generally, whilst at the same time downplaying his own roles as a facilitator in this process.

### **Concealing Agency: *The Register* as Reservoir**

The first issue of the *Sheffield Register* was published on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1787, making it the second newspaper to be in circulation in the city at the time. The other, *The Sheffield Public Advertiser*, which was published by Gales' rival printer William Ward, was long established and had followed two short-lived predecessors printed during the 1750s: *The Sheffield Weekly Journal* (which ran briefly in 1754) and *The Sheffield Weekly Register and Doncaster Flying Post* (1755), the second of which was founded by Revil Homfray, the previous incumbent of Hartshead Square. When describing the contents of these earlier papers, W.H.G. Armytage archly observes that they 'lived by advertising patent medicines of a type which today would raise a smile, discreet nursing homes where children could be delivered [and] the name of

runaway apprentices' (1951, 333). Though, as we have seen, Gales had no qualms about using the pages of his own *Register* to shift patent medicines, he made clear in his opening editorial that he had loftier ambitions as well, offering a somewhat poetic metaphor for what he considered to be the true function of the newspaper:

A newspaper may be compared to a reservoir of water, for the latter receives the beautiful springs of nature from all around it and distributes stream to supply the surrounding country so does the former receive its numerous articles of information from various sources, and, in its wide-extended circulation, furnishes the public with agreeable and interesting contents. It makes known the wants of and necessities of individuals and forms a link in the vast chain which connects mankind with one another (*Register*, 8 June 1787).

The most obvious way in which this metaphor functions is as an analogy for the newspaper's status as a repository, the various streams here a symbol for the processes of collation and syndication through which regional newspapers were ordinarily, predominantly constituted. However, it is also significant that the newspaper is figured not simply as a confluence, but specifically as a reservoir: a construct with which nature is managed for the benefit of mankind. The reservoir itself does not appear to signify agency, it is an inert body of water, and yet, its existence is the result of human design. Similarly, Gales disguises his own agency as editor when describing the newspaper: 'agreeable' information will wash up in its pages, by reading it the reader will become part of a 'vast chain' of readers, and the happy consequence of this activity is that the 'wants of and necessities of individuals' will come to light. And yet, like the architect of the reservoir, Gales' design will ultimately facilitate the collation, distribution and interpretation of this information.

Elsewhere in the editorial, Gales briefly acknowledges his role as editor: 'There is not perhaps any situation or profession amongst the mechanical part of mankind that is exposed to

so much observation and censure as the printer of a newspaper. The various tastes to which he has to please, the different opinions he has to combat and the trouble he must necessarily take, render it an arduous, difficult and extensive undertaking' (*Register*, 8 June 1787). Gales suggests that the printer of a newspaper enters willingly into an unwinnable paradox. On the one hand, the content of his paper is dictated by his readers. As a good editor it is his job to discern their tastes and please them. However, as printer he is also responsible for the paper's contents, and therefore for these very same tastes exhibited by his readers. In the model he presents he demonstrates limited agency but maximum culpability. A newspaper does not direct public opinion, he continues, but reflects it: 'We see displayed in a mirror, the patriotism of one man, and the intrepidity of another, the magnanimity of a third and the generous humanity of a fourth, and thus discover perfection which exalts the species and stimulates us to follow their example' (*Register*, 8 June 1787). The newspaper first imaged as a reservoir becomes the pool of water into which Narcissus, upon seeing his face reflected, stared for the rest of his life. Gales' implicit promise is that his readers will always see their own interests amidst the columns of the *Register*. In addition to flattering his readership, this metaphorical framework obscures Gales' influence and renders him almost entirely passive. The *Register* is not a mirror of his city and its people, but a portrait painted by Gales which prescribes a model of active citizenship and aspirational cultivation.

### **Masthead as Shop Window: Locke and the Rights of Man**

Though in his editorials Gales may have played down his role in shaping the interests of his readers, positioning his work as a response to the interests of his readers rather than a catalyst for stimulating those interests, the output of the Hartshead Press and the corresponding advertisements in the *Register* are strategic. They exhibit thinking that is closely aligned to the

SSCI's commitment to 'spread' useful 'information' to 'the general mass of people' unwittingly exposed to 'numberless impositions and abuses' (*Resolution* 1974, 1). An advertisement for *The Patriot*, a weekly 36-page periodical that promised to collate vital information for Sheffield readers, echoed once again the declared aims of the SSCI:

[I]t has long been a matter of complaint that means of information on that most important science, POLITICS, and the various branches of philosophy connected with it, are entirely out of the reach of the body of the people, from the vast expense of the works of these eminent writers (*Register*, 2 March 1792).

The reference here to the 'expense' of procuring approved editions of works by 'eminent writers' reminds us that the cost of such texts would still be considered a significant one for the *Register's* primary audience or cutlers and artisans.<sup>4</sup> *The Patriot* addresses this need by providing extracts from the works of such writers, who, we quickly learn, will include Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestly, and James Mackintosh. Though it immediately alleviated the cost of buying books for Sheffield readers by providing carefully curated passages, it also served to raise awareness of the full works, some of which were available to buy from Hartshead square, should the curious reader wish to learn more.

Gales' work as a publisher is less well attended to in recent scholarship, but significant nonetheless. As well as providing an outlet for local writers, such as Susanna Pearson (1790), whose poetry was printed in the *Register* and *Iris* before her full volumes were published and marketed by Gales and Montgomery, the Hartshead press also published worked with writers of national stature, such as Charles Dibben, a celebrated composer of nautical songs (Armytage 1951, 335). In 1788 Gales published a 400-page quarto edition of *The Musical Tour of Mr*

---

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of book pricing in the eighteenth century, and the implication of the House of Lords 1774 ruling in favour of limited copy, effectively authorising 'approved' works to be sold at substantially lower prices than had previously been possible, see J. E. Elliott. "The Cost of Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Auction Sale Catalogues and the Cheap Literature Hypothesis. 2010. *ELH*. 77.2: 353:384.

*Dibben*, which included a note from the author commending the printer: ‘I do not know how soon my friend Gales will make a fortune, which ultimately must inevitably happen if unwearied industry and fair dealing, the world’s regard, and a well-stocked head as well as a well-stocked shop, are the materials to procure it’ (Dibben 1788, 200). The bulk of this ‘stock’ was of a political nature.

The press regularly printed addresses, petitions, open letters and manifestos, whilst in the *Register* valuable advertising columns promoted general meetings and marketed accounts of treason trials in Sheffield and London. Gales’ use of Paine’s *Rights of Man* offers a useful example of how the *Register* and the bookshop were able to work in tandem, driving the educational agenda of Gales and the SSCI whilst also boosting the revenue of the Hartshead Press. As noted above, Paine’s text occupied a lucrative position in Gales’ catalogue, not least because it functions almost as a manifesto for the SSCI, who stated in their Resolution that they had ‘derived more true Knowledge from the Two Works of Mr. Thomas Paine, intituled “Rights of Man,” [...] than from any other Author or Subject’ (*Resolution 1792*, 1). In addition to printing this volume, Gales also ‘opened the columns of the *Register* for sympathetic quotations’, quickly establishing that not only was this a text that every Sheffield citizen should own, but one that was available to buy from his shop in Hartshead Square (Armytage 1951, 340). Similarly, between October 22 1790 and April 30 1791 Gales dedicated regular column inches to the serialization of Samuel Catlow’s philosophical advocacy of the need for a universal system of public education. These fragments were later collated and published by Gales as a small book titled *Observations on a Course of Instruction for Young Persons in the Middle Class of Life* (Catlow 1793).

In 1794, Gales ordered 500 copies of *Locke on Government* from H.P. Symonds of Paternoster Row (National Archives, HO 42/30/17), an investment that formed part of a broader strategy to educate readers on the events and aftermath of both the English Civil Wars

and the Glorious Revolution. This impulse is seen in *The People's Ancient and Justified Liberties Asserted* (1793), which reprints a seventeenth-century account of the trial of William Penn and William Mead, who were each accused of disturbing the peace by unlawfully assembling to defend the right of free worship in the wake of the Glorious Revolution. The account is prefaced by a new introduction, likely written by Gales, explicitly connecting the trail to present day attitudes and events: 'the Sheffield Constitutional Society cannot refrain from publishing this remarkable trial, hoping that the perusal of it may have a good effect in bringing back judges and juries to their proper sense' (quoted in Taylor 1940, 142). Of Gales' interest in promoting the works of Locke, Armytage writes the Locke offered an ideal 'stalking horse', preferable even to Thomas Paine (whose name was becoming increasingly associated with dangerous radicalism), given that Locke was 'respectable, philosophical, and eminently readable' (Armytage 1951, 354). Working with publicist and pamphleteer Henry Yorke, Gales also produced *The Spirit of John Locke*, a digest of Locke's *Treatise on Civil Government*, which claimed on its frontispiece to have been 'revived by the Constitutional Society of Sheffield' (Locke, 1794).

As well as reprinting books for local societies, Gales was also well positioned to use his press to offer other forms of practical support for causes he advocated. *The Register* reports that a meeting of the SSCI was held at the Bull and Mouth Inn to 'consider upon a proper mode of petitioning the House of Commons on the subject of parliamentary reform' (*Register*, 5 April 1793). A petition was produced and made available to sign at Gales' office in Hartshead Square. Armytage notes that Gales amplified the reach of the petition by printing and disseminating 5000 copies around the city, ensuring that citizens were aware of the petition and its contents. When it was eventually submitted a month later, it had 8000 signatures (Armytage 1951, 346). That Gales could effectively promote the activities of societies to whose causes he was sympathetic is also seen in his printing of addresses and appeals, such as 'An

Appeal to Britons’, a double-sided single sheet printed and circulated in 1794 reiterating the SSCI’s commitment to reform even ‘at a time when terror and alarm seem to have pervaded the ranks of people of this country’ (NA HO 42/41).

The same year, Gales stocked George Yorke’s *Thoughts on Civil Government* (1794), which appeared with the subtitle ‘addressed to the disenfranchised citizens of Sheffield.’ In many ways, this volume epitomises Gales’ output during this period. It was printed for Yorke, who spoke on behalf the Friends of Freedom, Justice and Humanity, a society for which he was chairman. It drew on the language of Locke with the deliberate intention of alerting Sheffield readers to the ancient legal rights it considered to be infringed by the current organisation of parliament, thus furthering precisely the aims of the SSCI by disseminating ‘useful information’ to the masses. And, just as Gales positioned the *Register*, the opening pages of this text positions the decision to go to press as reactive rather than proactive, meeting rather than instigating a demand: ‘People of Sheffield, to you I address myself – because I know your virtues, your constancy, your unshakable firmness and integrity. You hate tyrants, because you love justice; you adore liberty, because you cultivate reason’ (Yorke 1794, 1). Addressing his audience in the second person, Yorke here impresses a character upon his reader, telling them that they have a keen sense of justice and a lively sense of their own rights and entitlements and that they must, by implication, be interested in acquiring this text from Gales’ shop on the Hartshead.<sup>5</sup> A further consequence of this maneuverer, both as it is used by Yorke and Gales, is that it relocates the agency for the text’s publication away from the authors, printers and booksellers who, as we have seen, are self-consciously cultivating a deliberate political and literary climate, and attributes it to the enquiring Sheffield citizen, who is hopefully flattered into believing they are driving, rather than consuming, this cultural dialogue. What emerges is

---

<sup>5</sup> Yorke was himself tried for treason later that year. His account of the trial was published shortly (*The Trial of Henry Yorke, for a Conspiracy &c.* York. 1795).



an exceptional vision of the natural born Sheffielder who is, as Yorke describes, innately predisposed to seek out and defend freedom, justice and humanity.

### **Narrating Posterity, Forging Sheffield**

Not only is Gales' agency obfuscated in the ways he positioned the press, but in the accounts of his time as printer that circulated after he departed for America. This process of mythologization started early for, as we have seen, neither the *Register* nor the *Iris* were averse to reporting the events and activities in which their respective editors became embroiled. When James Montgomery was charged with treason, sedition, and libel, he published first a notice of the forthcoming trial, attesting his innocence (*Iris*, 16 Jan 1795). This was followed by an advert for his own account of the trial (*Iris*, 23 Jan 1795), which was still yet to happen, titled *The Trial of James Montgomery for a Libel on the War* (1795). In the event, this account was slightly pre-empted by a substantial report, again written by Montgomery, published in the *Iris* within a week of his prosecution, though readers were encouraged to buy *The Trial* if they still sought further detail (*Iris*, 6 Feb 1795). Following his conviction, the *Iris* regularly published letters of support for the paper's editor, who was positioned as the unfortunate and sympathetic victim. During his sentence in York Castle prison Montgomery wrote a series of poems about his imprisonment, which were regularly printed in the *Iris* whilst he was still in captivity and later published as a collected volume, *Prison Amusements*, printed by Montgomery and advertised in his paper (Smith 2020, 22). The result of this activity was that when Montgomery returned to Sheffield it was not as a dangerous radical, but as 'inglorious prey', unfairly targeted by a paranoid and needlessly punitive government. Once again, any agency this Sheffield printer had demonstrated in contributing to Sheffield's political climate was neatly side-

stepped. A few years earlier Gales had deployed these very same methods, only his redemption came in the form of a second career as a printer in Philadelphia.

By the time the arrest warrant for Gales went out, it had become common for the *Register* to report on the trials and convictions of known radicals, so it is not a surprise that the paper teased its editor's trial in the same manner. Gales of course absconded before the trial was held, but not before explaining in the *Register's* final editorial that he had always maintained a commitment to printing an 'impartial and truly independent newspaper' and that his 'endeavours, humble and limited as they may have been' were have intended to rescue his 'countrymen from the darkness of ignorance, and to awaken them to a sense of their privileges as human beings' (*Register*, 27 June 1794). His crime, according to this editorial, is not to have written a letter promising to send pikes to the LCS, but to have 'printed a newspaper which has so boldly dared to doubt the infallibility of ministers, and to investigate the justice and policy of their measures' (*Register*, 27 June 1794). This is a vision of Gales not as the man who chaired meetings of the SSCI, or reprinted and repositioned political philosophies as urgent appeals to the disenfranchised people of Sheffield, but instead as the 'generous, upright, disinterested [and] noble minded proprietor of *The Sheffield Register*' described in the final editorial of Montgomery's *Iris* (Montgomery in Everett 1854, 141). It is this Gales, too, who we find in both the composite biography of his successor, Montgomery, and the memoirs of his wife, Winifred.

James Everett and John Holland's *Memoirs of the Life and Writing of James Montgomery*, a seven-volume biography published between 1854-67, tells their subject's story using letters, editorials, and essays written and collected throughout Montgomery's life, some published previously, some seeing print here for the first time. When dealing with Montgomery's time as Gales' clerk and apprentice, his contributions to the *Register*, his editorship of the *Sheffield Iris* and the three decades Montgomery spent working out of

Hartshead Square, the biography doubles to a certain extent as a history of the press, and in doing so replicates many of the trends seen previously in the ways that Gales positioned the press during his time as printer. Gales himself is introduced into the narrative using that same editorial from Montgomery's final issue of the *Iris*, reiterating not only that Gales was 'generous, upright, disinterested and noble' but again reemphasising that the people of Sheffield were 'a reading and thinking people' (Everett 1854, 141). Of Gales' politics, Everett and Holland remain fairly enigmatic, deferring the matter to the reader's judgment: '[the] movement of the time embraced, collectively, all sorts of alterations in the existing system of government, from simple reform to downright revolution' (Everett 1854, 141). Of Gales' involvement in such agitations, they say simply that the reader must 'judge for himself' (Everett 1854, 141). If Gales' actions are deemed radical, the inference is that it is because he lived in radical times. Gales is not an instigator, or a facilitator; he has no role as an architect of this political climate, but is understood as part of a Sheffield community who acted 'collectively.'

Winifred Gale's *Recollections* take the form of a handwritten diary written between 1815 and 1839, with some annotations from her husband. Though adopting the reflective, confessional mode of life writing, Martin Hewitt reminds us that such diaries were written 'not so much to understand oneself but to manage the circulation of its history' (Hewitt 2006, 35). Daly characterises *Recollections* as an account written to justify the Gales' 'involvement in reform politics as moderates' (Daly, 46), in which Joseph is portrayed as 'cultured moderate whose concern was to quietly promote parliamentary reform and the rights of the working man' (Daly, 58). The *Sheffield Register*, meanwhile, is portrayed 'as a mild and reasonable voice for the grievances of the Sheffield artisans' (Daly, 47). Though Winifred does concede more agency to her husband than Holland and Everett do (who see him as just one man swept up in a movement), she represents him not as an instigator but as a 'good man' inspired to action

through sympathy, empathy and a keen sense of social justice. The extract below makes it evident that these were qualities that even his political opponents recognised in him:

“By what means has [Gales] obtained this dangerous influence?” One of his own political party answered. “By pleasing the poor man’s cause, by advocating equal representation. By treating them as brethren – Gales is a good man, a friend to the oppressed, and a most exemplary man in all his domestic relations.” Thus spoke a person, who, though opposed to Mr Gales, was too upright himself to withhold justice from another (Gales 1815-39, 45.).

Neither of these accounts recognise Gales’ proactive role in identifying, constructing and marketing to Sheffield readers a canon of political philosophy. Nor do they recognise that through his press he created a synergy between SSCI and the *Sheffield Register*, which not only brought that society’s ideas and principles to a large audience of readers, but directed those readers to the works upon which these ideas and principles were built.

## **Conclusion**

In his first editorial for the *Sheffield Register*, Gales fleetingly acknowledged the ‘small share’ of praise he might be eligible to claim as the paper’s printer:

The printer of a newspaper is entitled to some small share in the praise which is due to those who are serviceable to their species as his endeavours have a tendency to promote trade and commerce, convey useful and desirable information and rescue from oblivion acts and events which would be lost to the world but for such registers and means of communication as the press furnishes and the industry of man avails himself of.  
(*Register*, 8 June 1787)

Even here, however, Gale's agency takes the form of those invisible choices that lead to the collation of information which, once compiled and circulated, may prove beneficial to the 'industry of man.' Here, once again, the printer is a facilitator and the newspaper a reservoir, filled with information brought to him through the various tributaries of public information. The *Register* is again a mirror, reflecting the interests of its readers. We have seen, however, that as the printer of the Hartshead Press, Gales was responsible for far more than this, marshalling his resources as a printer to amplify the interests of the SSCI. A fine example of how, as a printer, Gales elided his connections and commitments to directly shape local political opinion presents itself in his reaction to an amendment passed to suppress further publication of Paine's *Rights of Man*, a text which was for Gales something of a best seller. This book had played a central part in the SSCI's manifesto and, in the pages of the *Register*, had come to function as a metonym of their cause. In response to the amendment Gales filled the Town Hall with Sheffield residents, at an assembly advertised in his paper, where a petition (which he printed) was signed for the text to remain in print; the whole event was later reported in the *Register* where it was accompanied by an account of a rousing rendition of 'Britons Awake' performed by factory worker and poet Joseph Mather (Kay and Windle 2017, 78). The story here was not, of course, that Gales had quickly organised a successful petition to reverse an amendment to ensure he could continue selling Paine's beloved text, but that the people of Sheffield demanded that the *Rights of Man* remain available in print.

Though, as I have suggested here, there were likely entrepreneurial reasons for Gales to minimise his role in shaping Sheffield's literary and political culture during the 1790s, the impossibility of anonymity in regional printing made it genuinely dangerous for Gales or Montgomery to be overly explicit about their intentions as printers, as both learnt to their cost. Consequently, this agency is relocated to the buying readers - the people of Sheffield - who in these narratives seek out such materials for they must have always been a 'reading and thinking

people.’ As the story of Gales and Montgomery was retold, often using primary print materials that they generated, the persistent erasure of their own agency came with the further bolstering of Sheffield’s reputation as a radical city of freethinking, its citizens instinctively alert to any infringement upon their natural liberties. However, reappraisal of Gales’ output and activities demonstrates that he proactively synthesised his work as a printer, newspaper editor, bookseller, and as a member of the SSCI, to prove that not only could he sell culture, but actively create it.

## **Bibliography**

*An Appeal to Britons* (National Archives HO 42/31).

*Sheffield Register, Yorkshire, Derbyshire & Nottingham Universal Advertiser*. 1787-1794.

Sheffield. Joseph Gales in the Hartshead.

Ashton, T. S. 1951. *Iron and Steel in the Industrial Revolution*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Aspinall, A. 1949. *The Early English Trade Unions*. London. Batchwell Press.

Armitage, Harold. 1910. *Chantrey Land*. London. Sampson Low, Marston & Co Ltd.

Addy, S. O. 1889. *Gales’ and Martin’s Directory of Sheffield*. Sheffield. Pawson and Brailsford.

Armytage, W. H. G. 1951. “The Editorial Experience of Joseph Gales, 1786-1794.” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 28.3: 332-361.

Barker, Hannah. 2006. *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1830*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

- Butler, Marilyn. 1984. *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolutionary Controversy*.  
Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Catlow, Simon. 1793. *Observations on a Course of Instruction, for Young Persons in the  
Middle Classes of Life*. Sheffield. Joseph Gales.
- Daly, Michael James. 2011. "From Sheffield to Raleigh: A Radical Publishing Network in  
the Age of Revolution." Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive.  
<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/4075>. Accessed 5 May 2020.
- Dibben, Charles. 1788. *The Musical Tour of Mr. Dibben*. Sheffield: Joseph Gales.
- Dowden Edward. 1881. *The Correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowes*.  
London. Hodges, Figgis & Co.
- Duff, David. 1999. *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*.  
Edited by Iain McCalman: 23-34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elliott, J. E. "The Cost of Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Auction Sale Catalogues  
and the Cheap Literature Hypothesis. 2010. *ELH*. 77.2: 353:384.
- Goodwin, Albert. 2016. *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the  
Age of the French Revolution: 3*. London. Routledge.
- Hewitt, Martin. 2006. "Diary, Autobiography and the Practice of Life History." *Life Writing  
and Victorian Culture*. Edited by David Amigoni: 21-39. Aldershot: Ashgate  
Publishing Ltd.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. 1972. *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of London*. 3<sup>rd</sup>. edition.

London: Weidenfield and Nicolson.

Holland, John and James Everett. 1854-56. *Memoirs of Life and Writings of James*

*Montgomery*. 7 vols. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman.

Hunter, Joseph. 1819. *Hallamshire. The History and Topography of the Parish of Sheffield in*

*the County of York: with Historical and Descriptive Notices of the Parishes of Ecclesfield, Hansworth, Treeton, and Whiston, and of the Chapelry of Bradfield.*

London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, and Jones.

Kay, Steven. 2017. *How Great a Crime to Speak the Truth*. Sheffield. 1889 Books.

Kay, Steven and Jack Windle. 2017. *Seditious Things: The Songs of Joseph Mather*.

Sheffield: 1889 Books.

Locke, John. 1794. *The Spirit of John Locke*. Sheffield. Joseph Gales.

Maccoby, Simon. 1955. *English Radicalism: 1786-1832*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Montgomery, James. 1795. *The Trial of James Montgomery for a Libel on the War*.

Sheffield: James Montgomery.

Pearson, Susanna. 1790. *Poems*. Sheffield: Joseph Gales.

Ramsey, William, *The Proceedings in cases of high treason, under a special commission of*

*oyer and terminer, which was first opened at Hicks's Hall, Oct. 2, 1794, and*

*afterwards continued at the Sessions House, in the Old Bailey. Taken in short hand,*

*by William Ramsey* (London: James Ridgeway and H. D. Symonds, 1794), 173-180.

Raven, James. 2016. "Non-Metropolitan Printing and Business in Britain and Ireland between



the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries.” *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*, edited by James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felenstein, Kenneth R. Hall and Robert G. Hall. Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press.

Taylor, J. 1940. “The Sheffield Constitutional Society.” *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*. 5: 133-146.

Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (SSCI). 1794. “Resolution of the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information.” Marxist Internet Archive.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/england/britdem/events/sheffield.htm>. Accessed 1 January 2021.

Smith, Adam James, “The ‘Crazy Clock’ of York: Collapsing Time and Unstable Reality in James Montgomery’s Urban Topographic Poetry.” *Time, the City and the Literary Imagination*, edited by Anne-Marie Evans and Kaley Kramer. London: Palgrave, 2020.

Yorke, George. 1794. *Thoughts on Civil Government*. London: Eaton.

Wigley, J. “James Montgomery and the ‘*Sheffield Iris*’, 1792-1825: A Study in the Weakness of Provincial Radicalism”, *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*. 10 (Sheffield, 1964): 173-181.