

**BRITISH SUPPORTERS OF
THE AMERICAN
REVOLUTION, 1775-1783**

**The Role of the 'Middling-Level'
Activists**

Sheldon S. Cohen

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America's Declaration of Independence, while endeavoring to justify a break with Great Britain, simultaneously proclaimed that the colonists had not been "wanting in attention to our British brethren," but, in response, they had "been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity." This overstatement has since been modified in comprehensive histories of the American Revolution. Presently, a more balanced portrait of British attitudes toward the imperial conflict has emerged. In particular, scholarly studies of pro-American Britons, including Charles James Fox, Henry Conway, David Hartley, and Joseph Priestley – principally symbolizing the small upper-class minority – have exemplified this fact.

In contrast, this work focuses on five unrenowned men, all of whom represented the diverse although significant members of Britain's "middling orders." These individuals, two merchants, two non-conformist clergymen, and an apothecary, actively endeavored to aid the American cause. Their personal efforts, often unlawful, brought them into contact with Benjamin Franklin, for whom they befriended rebel seamen confined in British gaols. For all their exertions, however, these unsung Britons received mixed recognition from the United States. Nonetheless, their stories – rendered here – will hopefully produce new studies involving the effects of the American War on this middling segment of Britain's eighteenth-century social structure.

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Preface

The intertwined sections of America's Declaration of Independence (July 1776) have drawn historians' scrutiny ever since the signing of this renowned document. Perhaps this fact has been most evident in the tendency of scholars to emphasize certain segments of the Declaration over others. This has been evident particularly in the attention given to the initial paragraph of the document highlighting the Lockean compact theory of government and the basis for a people to rebel against their rulers. It may also be observed in the considerable heed given to the next part, a list of grievances leveled against King George III, and to the concluding paragraph, in which the colonists' separation from Britain is firmly enunciated. Often overlooked, however, is the next to last paragraph, in which the signers assert that the colonists "had not been wanting in our attention to our British brethren," but that in response, their fellow subjects in the Mother Country have been deaf to "the voice of justice and consanguinity."

This blanket censure of all Britons was, however, an unfair generalization. Scholars have long shown that there were, in fact, many individuals in the British Isles who, before and during the years of armed conflict in America (1775–1783), had displayed their sympathies for the Americans and their opposition to alleged attempts to repress them. But the studies of these British friends of America have largely centered upon the more prosperous or prominent men in that nation. The individuals who have received this attention would include Whig politicians Charles James Fox, David Hartley, Thomas Brand Hollis, Sir George Savile, John Wilkes, and Edmund Burke, and intellectuals such as Richard Price and Joseph Priestley. While these men have certainly merited scholarly attention, they in fact represented a distinct minority of the British populace. What remains lacking is a study offering insights into the less well-known but more numerous Britons from the "middling levels" of the eighteenth-century Georgian social order and those among them who provided assistance of various sorts to the American dissidents.

During and after the bicentennial observances of the American War of Independence, United States historians, in particular, have published a great many works that have concentrated their attention on the responses of the ordinary, less visible colonists to the complex and divisive upheaval that encompassed the break with Great Britain. Examples of more general studies

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have appeared in Ray Raphael's *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence* (2001), John Shy's *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (1976), Jack P. Greene's *The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits* (1987), and Steven Russworm's *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the "Lower Sort" during the American Revolution* (1987).

In addition, within this recent time frame, American scholars have published many works with fascinating personal accounts of quite commonplace Americans who participated in the multifaceted conflict with Great Britain. Two such notable books are John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered; Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (1990), and Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (1999). Young's volume is conspicuous for its incisive and marvelously researched study of George Robert Twelves Hewes, a little-known, albeit engrossing Boston cordwainer (shoemaker) who enthusiastically subscribed to and served the dissenting American cause before and during the Revolution.

Portrayals of ordinary Britons reacting to the American Rebellion do exist, but they are far fewer in number than those of their American counterparts, and are often mixed into general surveys of the Georgian period. In addition, the authors often concentrate their studies on one or possibly two locales, and they tend to downplay the matter of social class. One such is John Sainsbury's praiseworthy book, *Disaffected Patriots; London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (1987). As indicated by its title, this treatise focuses on the British capital, and the individuals it portrays represent primarily the city's favored social classes and its intelligentsia. Primary and secondary source items concerning those who could be considered commonplace Britons are understandably more time consuming or difficult to uncover, but contemporary social historians have shown how much of it can be accomplished. Consequently, this work will attempt to delineate the characters of these unheralded men and their activities on behalf of the transatlantic rebels to the Crown.

In pursuing such an objective, this work concentrates on five inconspicuous and unsung Britons who took it upon themselves to provide assistance in various forms to the American rebels – many of whom had been incarcerated in Britain's wartime prisons. All five men fell into what could be broadly classified as Britain's middle classes, although William Hodgson and Reuben Harvey had, most likely, reached the upper level of this social grouping and Griffith Williams its bottom layer. Likewise, only Hodgson had apparently earned the suffrage for British Parliamentary elections. Furthermore, all five of these men could be categorized as "British," although they included one Irishman and one Welshman. Two of their number were merchants, two were clergymen, and one was an apothecary. (During the American Rebellion, Robert Heath also worked as a tradesman.) All five men provided assistance to the American dissidents, and in the process established varying levels of contact with Benjamin Franklin, then an American Commissioner in Paris.

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But in conducting their actions, only one, Robert Heath, never accompanied his aid with any proclaimed attachment to American independence. From the standpoint of religious affiliation, two of these men, William Hodgson and Griffith Williams, were communicants in the established Church of England, while the others were attached to dissenting Protestant sects.

The five “middling-level” Britons portrayed in this discourse also exhibited characteristics that differentiated them from many of the privileged Whig politicians and prominent intellectuals who also expressed support for the American dissidents. None of these five, for example, cited concern that the turmoil in America had occurred in part as the result of an alleged conspiracy by Tory ministers to suppress colonial liberties as part of a larger scheme that would later be repeated in Great Britain. Noted contemporary scholars in America such as Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood have recently expounded on this conspiratorial fear among leading colonial dissidents. Eighteenth-century parliamentarians such as David Hartley, Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox, John Wilkes, Richard Fitzpatrick, and other Whigs registered their own concerns about such an alleged conspiracy; dissenting clergyman and political theorist Richard Price also made oblique references to it in his writings; and a suspected Tory-inspired plot against English liberties influenced the reform movement in 1779 of the Reverend Christopher Wyvill in Yorkshire.

Yet none of the five subjects portrayed here ever mentioned concerns over any such conspiracy. In fact, as noted above, Robert Heath of Plymouth never mentioned any support for American freedom. In addition, unlike the prosperous upper-crust Whigs who sympathized in word or print with the American rebels but do not appear to have undertaken any illegal anti-governmental actions, at least four of these five Britons were involved in activities that did contravene the law of the land. (Even in the case of Deacon Robert Heath, circumstantial facts indicate that he was himself aware of unlawful activities on behalf of American captives.) And perhaps the best documented example of such undertakings was the collusion between William Hodgson and Benjamin Franklin in Paris to facilitate the repeated escape attempts of American rebel prisoners in British gaols.

In any group supporting a broad and complex political endeavor such as the colonial cause, a multiplicity of motives could be expected. That is clearly the case with the five Britons in this study.

Among the diverse motivations of these five advocates of the American rebel cause, there was definitely a humanitarian impulse. This was demonstrated in the benevolent regard most of them showed to the captive Americans – mostly seamen – incarcerated in British gaols. All of them, with the apparent exception of Griffith Williams, did their best to materially alleviate the physical sufferings of these fellow English-speaking detainees. (Circumstances, primarily financial limitations, hindered Williams’s ability to mitigate the bodily deficiencies experienced by the prisoners during their confinement.) Such beneficent endeavors clearly reflected progressive precepts of the Enlightenment. Similarly, a spiritual stimulus, most likely connected to

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contemporary English religious revivalism and to the “Great Awakening” in the American colonies, may also be detected in the repeated religious exhortations to the confined seamen by clerics Robert Heath and Thomas Wren.

There was also a mundane and self-interested motivation for some. As peace negotiations in Paris in 1782 pointed to Britain’s reluctant acknowledgment of American independence, both William Hodgson and Reuben Harvey sought to obtain potentially lucrative commercial appointments as American consuls in London and Cork, respectively. The American Congress, however, denied their expectations, bringing tragic results in the case of Hodgson, who killed himself.

This study will concentrate separately on the careers of each of the five individuals: William Hodgson, Thomas Wren, Reuben Harvey, Robert Heath, and Griffith Williams. In doing so, it will attempt to offer readers a deeper look and more enlightening glimpses into how “ordinary” men in their particular time and place in history reacted to a momentous event.

Acknowledgments

The often labeled “Revolutionary Decades” (1763–1783) in American history are replete with numerous and varied features that offer researchers examining the period a surfeit of new and revealing avenues for study. Supporting these quests there are countless repositories, both small and large, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland, that, together with qualified searchers, can provide assistance to facilitate obtaining materials requisite to completing a final work.

In my own research and writing concerning these five Britons, I have employed many of these available tools for finishing this study. Without such a welcome, and varied “support system,” my final text could not have been completed. So with this fact in mind, I now give them their rightful credit.

In the United States, I found my principal source for both manuscript materials, as well as guidance, at the office of the Papers of Benjamin Franklin located at the Sterling Memorial Library of Yale University. Franklin, in his role as one of the American Commissioners in Paris, had contacts with the subjects of this work along with many other individuals in Great Britain. Editors Barbara Oberg and Ellen Cohn, and Assistant Editor Kate Ohno, provided me with innumerable manuscript documents and some very fine advice on pursuing my topic. Yale’s Bienecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library helped to augment information I had obtained in the Sterling Library. Other sites in Connecticut supplying relevant data were the Connecticut State Library and the Connecticut Historical Society, both located in Hartford.

In neighboring Massachusetts, two main locations providing me with information were Boston’s Massachusetts Historical Society and Harvard’s Widner Library in Cambridge. The former institution, under the Director William Fowler and Librarian Peter Drimmey, furnished me with substantial primary and secondary source material that related to the individuals described in this work. The Widner Library produced primary source items, including British newspapers and pamphlets that appeared during the Revolutionary decades. Also in the Bay State, the Library of the Peabody Essex Museum at Salem divulged facts concerning many of the New Englanders who were held captive in Britain. Also from this region, special individual credit is given to Mr. Richard L. Carl originally from Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, for his sound advice and judgments.

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Moving to the Mid-Atlantic states, my principal source of material was the venerable Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Reuben Harvey and William Hodgson had commercial dealings with this colonial seaport, and records of this fact exist at the Society. The Philadelphia Maritime Museum also held documents relating to that city's commerce with Great Britain. The Princeton University Library in New Jersey has manuscripts dealing with that Presbyterian school's relationship with the Reverend Thomas Wren.

In Washington, D.C., the prestigious Library of Congress supplied me with primary and secondary source writings related to my work. Also, in our nation's capital, I should extend my gratitude to Dr. Michael Crawford at the Naval Historical Center, who is editor of the multi-volume series, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. Thanks should also be given to Michael's wife Elva for her generous searches in the library of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Repositories from the southern United States should also receive due recognition. In Virginia, my appreciation goes to the Virginia Historical Society and the Virginia State Library, both located in Richmond. Reuben Harvey, one of my subjects, had a limited, albeit enlightening correspondence with that state's George Washington. The Henry Laurens Papers at the University of South Carolina contained useful information regarding this wealthy plantation owner who was President of the Continental Congress. Laurens had been captured at sea on a mission to Europe in 1780 and was subsequently imprisoned in the Tower of London. The Hodgson sketch will elaborate on how this London merchant worked to obtain his release.

The most essential as well as the largest amount of data to complete this study understandably was obtained from sources in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. From within these countries, the majority of my research efforts were achieved in England, and there, primarily in metropolis London. Inside that urban area, the Public Record Office in Kew, and its newspaper branch in Colindale, with their extensive manuscript holdings, became the most lucrative repositories employed during my research efforts. The British Library and the Guildhall Library also provided me with data. Other sites in London furnishing informative details were the Family Records Centre, the Wellcome Institute for the Study of Medicine, the London Metropolitan Archives, the National Maritime Museum, and the London Society of Genealogists. The staff of Dr. Williams's Library in Gordon Square helped guide my investigations into the careers of dissenting clerics Robert Heath and Thomas Wren. Significant details concerning the life of Griffith Williams were uncovered by Ms. Deborah Stock, Research Fellow at the University of London. Finally, information communicated by Ms. Tina Craig at the Royal College of Surgeons of England and Ms. Dee Cook from the Society of Apothecaries proved invaluable in unlocking much about the professional activities of Griffith Williams.

Outside of London, my foremost acknowledgments should be given to two long-standing and generous friends in Hampshire, Mrs. Sarah Quail and her

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husband Anthony. Mrs. Quail, Head of Arts, Libraries, Museums and Records for Portsmouth City Council, and Anthony, who also works for the City Council, have continually provided this uncertain, often confused American with assistance and advice in his research endeavors. They also put me in contact with Mr. Gervase Belfield, a professional researcher in Winchester, who carefully ferreted out many worthwhile facts concerning the London career of Griffith Williams.

Several other venues in England merit credit. The Berkshire Record Office in Reading held manuscript records concerning the friendship of David Hartley and Thomas Wren, mainly regarding prisoner relief. Mr. Robin Hartley Russell, a resident of the county and a descendant of David Hartley, kindly permitted me to examine many of the extant papers of his ancestor. Ms. Elisabeth Stuart and Mr. Paul Brough of Plymouth's West Devon Record Office and the Devon Record Office in Exeter provided me with facts relating to Robert Heath and his labors. Mr. L.C. Jarman of Keswick, the Cumbria Library in Keswick, and the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle provided me with materials that dealt with the family background and early life of Thomas Wren. Other locales in England from which I gleaned information were the Yorkshire West Riding Office and Archive services in Wakefield and Bradford, the Bodleian Library Oxford, the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford, and Norfolk Record Office in Norwich, and the Suffolk Record Office in Ipswich.

My acknowledgments in Ireland would begin in the counties of Northern Ireland. There, Mr. John McCabe of Stoneyford proved a valuable guide for using the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in nearby Belfast. To the south, in the Republic of Ireland, I obtained very rewarding data regarding the family background and career of Reuben Harvey from the Religious Society of Friends Library in Dublin. Also in Dublin, pursuing the same search, I consulted the National Library of Ireland and the Public Record Office of Ireland. Further information concerning Mr. Harvey and the Irish Quakers of his day was received from the Cork County Library and the Cork Genealogical Society in Cork City.

My sources in Wales were used for obtaining materials relating to the somewhat indistinct early life of Griffith Williams. There, I would offer thanks to Mr. E.A. Hackett of the Dyfed Family History Society for helping me narrow down Williams's identity since the name was rather common in eighteenth-century Wales. My other sources for related information in this locale were the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, the Dyfed Record Office in Carmarthen, and the Dyfed Archives in Carmarthenshire.

My concluding credits should be directed to institutions and individuals in the Chicago area who facilitated my endeavors. At Loyola University Chicago, my appreciation is directed to the staff of the Cudahy Library and the many members of the Loyola history department who offered advice and constructive criticism. Similar appreciation is given to the venerable and richly stocked Newberry Library. Their holdings proved extremely valuable in my research. The Chicago branch of the National Archives and Record Service supplied

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me with primary source documents, many of them through their microfilm collection of the Papers of the Continental Congress. Evanston's Northwestern University Library and the library of Garrett Theological Seminary, located on the university campus, kindly allowed my rummaging through their holdings. The staff of the Family History Center, located in Wilmette's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and their tie-in with the Salt Lake City, Utah Mormon genealogical services, proved a marvelous tool in tracking family backgrounds of some of my subjects. Also in Wilmette, thanks to Mrs. Natalie F. Hector for her most generous work and support in typing this manuscript.

The aforementioned research facilities, the individuals providing me with investigative services, and my helpful academic colleagues aside, I would especially wish to offer my gratitude on a more personal level. My inquiries and writings concerning the careers of these five inconspicuous, "middling-level" Britons who befriended the American rebel cause was accomplished intermittently over a two-decade period. During these years, I experienced the rewarding feeling of obtaining insights into not only their lives, but the period in which they lived in Britain. But simultaneously, the outside world in which I lived witnessed the growth of two fine sons into manhood. For this more rewarding fact, my wife Kayla deserves the greatest credit. And it was chiefly through her assistance, insightful criticism, patience, and understanding that this project has reached completion. And whatever its merits, this work is deservedly dedicated to her.

The setting

In August 1782, a rather ordinary, middle-aged English merchant left the building that served as his combination home and business office on the city of London's bustling Coleman Street. This same William Hodgson was heading toward Paris. Hodgson was then Director of William Hodgson and Company, a decade-old firm that dabbled in trade, storage, and finance. At the time, the merchant appeared to be rather well-off, and his excursion to France seemed to reflect his affluent situation.¹

If we use Laurence Sterne's popular descriptive monograph *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) as a travel guide, we can obtain a glimpse of the route that William Hodgson probably followed on his long journey. Initially, he most likely traveled by one of the regular horse-drawn coaches that operated between Britain's capital and Dover – or possibly Folkstone – in Kent. From one of these sea coast towns, he subsequently boarded one of the numerous smaller vessels that commonly plied their way across the English Channel to Calais. From this closest French entry port, Hodgson would have had to satisfy customs officials before booking another coach to transport him to his final destination. On his journey he likely traveled through the dusty, cultivated countryside, perhaps stopping briefly in such picturesque, venerable communities as Montreuil, Abbeville, Amiens, Creil, and Chantilly, before reaching the cosmopolitan and culturally vibrant French capital. As an Englishman, he was probably received more favorably than he would have been one year earlier when France and Britain were in a state of declared war. But now in the more open, amenable summer of 1782, peace negotiations among all the belligerents had already commenced in Paris so that travelers could feel more at ease.²

¹ Sheldon S. Cohen, "William Hodgson: An English Merchant and Unsung Friend to American Revolutionary Captives," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 123: 1/2 (1999), 59–60.

² Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (London, 1768), 2–22; Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 267–314; Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, 1989), 137–46.

Image not available

Plate 1.1 Association meeting at York, April 6, 1780. The Reverend Christopher Wyvill chaired this assemblage of reformers who also pushed for reconciliation between Britain and America.

Source: Courtesy of the British Museum and British Library

It was also probable that, once in Paris, William Hodgson conducted dealings with his French commercial counterparts – especially since peace seemed almost at hand. This particular English merchant, however, had an even more important matter on his agenda. His most pressing motivation was a meeting with an old and respected friend, a regular correspondent, and a fellow clubman from his prewar London days. This was the illustrious and widely admired Dr. Benjamin Franklin, who was then an American Peace Commissioner in Paris, and who was lodging at Passy, just outside the city.³ Several years before the American Revolution had erupted in April 1775, Franklin had been an American colonial agent in London. There, the upwardly mobile British tradesman had established a close personal and intellectual relationship, albeit one in which Hodgson was probably overshadowed by his Philadelphia counterpart. Their mutual interests had been preserved, irrespective of the transatlantic hostilities, and when Dr. Franklin was appointed by the

³ Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 2002), 245–46; H.W. Brands, *The First American. The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 2000), 527–36, 550–51.

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Continental Congress as one of the American rebels' wartime commissioners in Paris, their communications resumed on a more regular basis.⁴

From his post in France, the venerable Dr. Franklin had little difficulty enlisting Hodgson's help in matters of benefit to the American rebel cause. Now, in the final stages of this long and divisive conflict, the two former confidants were meeting again with the Briton still in awe of his old, though still eminent, colonial companion. An example of William Hodgson's adulation for the American commissioner was contained in a letter dispatched days before he had departed London. In this note, he proclaimed prophetically that part of his friend's legacy would be, "a person of whom the World thought & [now] think [sic] so highly."⁵

William Hodgson's conversations with Dr. Franklin apparently were not protracted, and the merchant soon returned to his Coleman Street residence. From there, he sent the American commissioner a follow-up letter dated August 26. Obviously, not everything in their discussions in Paris was set down. For one thing, personal gossip likely exchanged between them was omitted, and the exact details of their entire dialogue still remain unknown. More pertinent, however, Hodgson sensed a need for discretion in the face of prevalent intelligence-gathering practices. Franklin had already been warned of such surveillance by Arthur Lee, another London friend, who had told him of practices such as mail-opening.⁶ This concern for judiciousness was apparent in a notation to Franklin that "soon after my return . . . a Minister [apparently Lord Shelburne] was much upon the *Fish* [digging out information] to know why I had paid you a Visit." The merchant then tactfully declared that he told the government official that he and the American commissioner merely "had a long acct. [account] to settle." From this private exchange, and further discussions, Hodgson told Franklin, in the conclusion of his letter, that it was his personal belief that the Minister (Shelburne) "was determined to push for the recognition of American Independence despite opposition in government circles." Shelburne's assertion, in itself, was correct, though it failed to give a complete picture. As head of a "peace ministry," he was willing to accept freedom for the United States, but only if existing obligations to Britain were honored.⁷

⁴ Thomas J. Fleming, *The Man Who Dared the Lightning: A New Look at Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1971), 347–63; Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 153–96; Cohen, "William Hodgson," 60–62.

⁵ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, July 13, 1782, Ms Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University; Cohen, "William Hodgson," 65–76.

⁶ Thomas Thompson to American commissioners in Paris, December 29, 1777; William B. Willcox, Douglas Arnold, Dorothy Bridgwater, et al., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1986), 25, 366; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, August, 26 1782, Ms Papers of Benjamin Franklin; Juliana Ritchie to Benjamin Franklin, January 19, 1777; *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23, 211.

⁷ Hodgson to Franklin, August 26, 1782; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 291–96, 329, 367–73, 429; Dull, *Diplomatic History*, 143–61.

Hodgson's letter concluded with updated details involving the final repatriation of remaining American prisoners in Britain to their homes in America. William Hodgson, along with other pro-Americans in Britain, had been supplying Dr. Franklin with their observations on British government policies, but this matter of assisting the captives was perhaps the chief service that William Hodgson had rendered to the Paris commissioners. Prior to 1782, the London merchant had acted as a financial benefactor to the detainees – almost all of them seamen. He had also served as an intermediary in the arrangement and promulgation of prisoner exchanges involving these internees. It was only during the previous spring that these forlorn captives were finally granted prisoner-of-war status by the British government. Hodgson's letter revealed that he still had considerable work to do before this problem was finally resolved and the men were allowed to go home.⁸

On its surface, the August 1782 meeting and the ensuing discussions between Benjamin Franklin and William Hodgson would appear merely an innocuous or perhaps trivial event within the context of the American commissioner's celebrated residence in France. There, Franklin's achievements have been repeatedly and justifiably extolled by historians and by his biographers.⁹ On the other hand, however, historians have almost entirely overlooked not only William Hodgson, but several other less visible and in several aspects ordinary Britons who performed both intriguing and effectual services on behalf of the rebellious Americans.

William Hodgson and those other unheralded Britons were members of that nation's diversified middle class, although Hodgson himself would have ranked within its topmost level. During the eighteenth century, the numbers and societal functions of this middle class had grown, and had become more influential as well as more vocal. The outbreak and the ensuing events of the American Revolution impacted them and they responded to this insurrection in different ways. In order to understand the actions of unsung men such as William Hodgson, who espoused the rebel cause, we need to observe them within the framework of the society in which they lived. This would include a general description of Britain's class structure along with remarks concerning the disparate attitudes that members of these social classes displayed toward the combatants in this overseas conflict.¹⁰ More material

⁸ Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 154–60, 172–75, 192–96, 198–206; Cohen, "William Hodgson", 62–75.

⁹ Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 690–93; Brands, *The First American*, 544–633; Fleming, *The Man Who Dared the Lightning*, 347–456; Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 242–92.

¹⁰ Lewis B. Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1930), 6–13; Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1982), 70–89; Peter Mathias,

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exists which portrays the former of these two topics. From it, the author has relied primarily on four sources from which he depicts social class characteristics: William A. Speck, *Stability and Strife, England, 1714–1760* (1977); Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1982); Lewis B. Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (1930), and Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People; England, 1727–1783* (1989).

In 1775, Britain's landed gentry were still the pre-eminent element in the nation's rigid class structure. From their dominant perch, and through use of a pervasive patronage system, this largely inbred group along with their fellow aristocrats in the clergy and at Court, comprising less than 3 percent of the total population, controlled the government. Parliament, whether Tory or Whig, generally served their interests. Individuals such as Sir Robert Walpole, the Duke of Grafton, or the Earl of Sandwich were among the titled personages in this landed aristocracy, although by this time, less notable country squires could also be included in this category. The governmental preference or favors which they received extended to lucrative posts in the civil service, the royal household, and the hierarchy of the established Church of England. The last of these instances was evident in the elevated temporal offices held by Bishops Brownlow North, Benjamin Hoadley, Thomas Sherlock, Richard Watson, and Archbishops Francis Hare and John Gilbert. Advancement in the higher military and naval ranks also extended to those in this select circle.¹¹

On the economic scene, Britain's landed gentry had shown a long-standing disdain for business entrepreneurs. By this latter part of the eighteenth century, however, the evident wealth and splendor which many of these on-the-go men had acquired had resulted in several examples of intermarriages between these elite landowner sons and female offspring of merchant grandees.¹²

From the onset of the American Revolution, its costs were borne increasingly by the landed gentry. But in the short-term aftermath of the April 1775 skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, the great majority of this privileged group were largely united in their desire to uphold the doctrine of Royal Supremacy and to crush the nascent insurrection in America. The hierarchy of the Church of England, which had long been employed by the state to sustain and endorse civil conformity, also stood with the landed gentry. Their corroborative sentiments were echoed, for example, by Chester's Bishop Beilby Porteus (later Bishop of London) in early 1776 when he delivered a

"The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century, A Calculation by Joseph Massie," *Economic History Review*, 10:1 (1957), 30–45.

¹¹ W.A. Speck, *Stability and Strife, England 1714–60* (London, 1927), 36–42; Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, 13–28; G.E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1963), 1–288; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 49–70; Mathias, "The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century," 42–49.

¹² J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III, 1760–1815* (Oxford, 1960), 41–42; Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1934), 148–96.

vigorous sermon justifying the British government's action to suppress the American rebellion.¹³ This was evident as well in the hierarchy's promulgating Fast Day sermons to be offered at regular Sunday services in which theological justifications and importunings were presented to the parishioners endorsing the cause of the Crown against the American rebels. And in this same respect, during this early phase of conflict, a majority of both landowners and leading Episcopal Churchmen rallied behind George III's 23 August 1775 "Proclamation for Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition." Its ominous wording did not indicate any mood for conciliation:

Whereas many of our subjects in diverse parts of our colonies and plantations in North America, misled by dangerous and ill-designing men, and forgetting the allegiance which they owe to the power that has protected and sustained them, after various disorderly acts committed in disturbance of the public peace, to the obstruction of lawful commerce and to the oppression of our loyal subjects carrying on the same, have at length proceeded to an open and avowed rebellion by arraying themselves in hostile manner to withstand the execution of the law, and traitorously preparing, ordering, and levying war against us; and whereas there is reason to apprehend that such rebellion hath been much promoted and encouraged by the traitorous correspondence, counsels, and comfort of divers wicked and desperate persons within this realm; to the end therefore that none of our subjects may neglect or violate their duty through ignorance thereof, or through any doubt of the protection which the law will afford to their loyalty and zeal; we have thought fit, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, to issue this our royal proclamation, hereby declaring that not only all our officers, civil and military, are obliged to exert their utmost endeavours to suppress such rebellion and to bring the traitors to justice; but that all our subjects of this realm and the dominions thereunto belonging are bound by law to be aiding and assisting in the suppression of such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all traitorous conspiracies and attempts against us, our Crown, and dignity; and we do accordingly strictly charge and command all our officers, as well civil as military, and all other our obedient and loyal subjects, to use their utmost endeavours to withstand and suppress such rebellion, and to disclose and make known all treasons and traitorous conspiracies which they shall know to be against us, our Crown and dignity.¹⁴

Despite this hard-line proclamation and the strong pro-government, patriotic stance toward the "American War" adopted by most members of the established order, some members of this privileged class dissented from official

¹³ Henry P. Ippel, "British Sermons and the American Revolution," *The Journal of Religious History*, 12 (December 1982), 193; James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism; Non-Conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1980), 129; Sykes, *Church and State in England*, 173–83.

¹⁴ Merrill Jensen, ed., *English Historical Documents: American Colonial Documents to 1776*, IX (London, 1955), 850–51.

policies toward America, both in 1775 and afterward. Influential Members of Parliament, including General Henry Conway, the Marquess of Rockingham, and Charles James Fox, had opposed Britain's restrictive policies toward the American colonies – policies which they felt had precipitated the conflict. The number of these anti-administration voices fluctuated during the course of the war; their disillusionment, however, was especially evident in the speeches against the North Ministry that Fox and other anti-war Whigs, such as David Hartley, delivered in the House of Commons during the later phases of the conflict.¹⁵

Other examples of such opposition from the upper classes came in the form of printed newspaper comments, pamphlets, or other polemic tracts. Charles Polhill, a member of the large landholding Kent gentry, published one such dissenting work in January 1783 entitled *The Chronicle of the Kingdom of the Cassiterides . . .*, which in the fashion of a Swiftian allegory recapitulated the errors that allegedly had brought God's punishment to Britain as it has to ancient Israel. Major John Cartwright, although, strictly speaking, not within this aristocratic circle, was a substantial landholder in Nottinghamshire and had contact with many of the county's elite. Because of his contacts and relationships, he tried to push his own agendas of internal reform in Britain to members of the aristocracy. In his writings, he also advocated the recognition of American independence.¹⁶

While most of the nonconformist gentlemen focused their Whig factional opposition to the war in America, either by speeches or in print, a few men were more overt. Perhaps the best individual example was David Hartley (1732–1814), whose principal residence was in Berkshire. Hartley was a landowner, a Member of Parliament, and a Rockingham Whig. Like William Hodgson, he had also become an intimate friend and a great admirer of Benjamin Franklin during the American agent's prewar residence in London. Franklin and Hartley shared a common interest in intellectual and scientific matters, and had been members of London social groups which sought to pursue and foster these scholarly topics. By the time Franklin had formally assumed his original diplomatic responsibilities in France (January 1777), Hartley had already indicated his disillusionment over his government's policies concerning America.¹⁷

The evidence of Hartley's disenchantment was soon shown through his offers of assistance to the infant American government – offers that Benjamin

¹⁵ Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 25–26, 126, 192–93.

¹⁶ Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977), 11–12, 116–28, 70–72; Charles Polhill, *The Chronicle of the Kingdom of the Cassiterides . . .* (London, 1783), vii–42.

¹⁷ George H. Gutteridge, *David Hartley, M.P., An Advocate of Conciliation* (Berkeley, CA, 1926), 1–223; Jerome Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution* (New York, 1998), 39–133; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 253.

Franklin, from Paris, gratefully accepted. Thereafter, the English gentleman labored diligently to benefit the cause of the colonial insurgents. He provided his services in various capacities during the conflict. He worked as a principal benefactor for the thousands of unfortunate Yankess incarcerated in British gaols; he worked with other “Real Whigs” in and outside of Parliament, engaged in protests against the North Ministry; and he participated with those in Britain who sought some form of conciliation with the rebels.¹⁸

In all these endeavors, however, David Hartley didn’t seek to undermine his own privileged class status. Others in Britain were considerably more radical in their political and social outlook. Instead, Hartley appeared most influenced by the liberal tenets of the Commonwealthmen who emerged during the latter part of the previous century. Consequently, this progressive country squire backed reforms – especially those that would reduce an existent corruption – both in Britain and its empire. Subsequently, Hartley’s negotiating abilities were recognized by the Shelburne Peace Ministry in 1782. That same year, Hartley was dispatched to France as a plenipotentiary representative to the ongoing peace negotiations. There he was reunited with Dr. Franklin, and together they labored to develop what became the draft of the 3 September 1783 treaty which formally recognized the independence of the United States.¹⁹

If we move from these upper-class Britons to the opposite end of the social scale in late eighteenth-century Great Britain, we would encounter the far less fortunate inhabitants who comprised over three-quarters of the populace. These less fortunate individuals were what could be cited generally as the often inarticulate and distinctly subordinate members of the lower classes. Admittedly, there are risks involved in assigning this categorization to particular individuals, but here people were found who could be arranged within this grouping: rural cottagers, husbandmen, transient laborers, paupers, beggars, orphans and many indigents, domestic servants, and the working poor. Others in this classification would include tenant farmers, retainers on large estates, apprentices, peddlars, common soldiers and sailors, impoverished aliens, and of course criminals of varying stripes. Life for this often ill-educated and disenfranchised segment of the population was ordinarily a struggle, marked by bleakness and few rays of opportunities for betterment. It was little wonder that throughout many parts of the realm, emigration to the American colonies, even placing oneself into a condition of temporary bondage, still attracted many members of this lower segment of the social structure.²⁰

¹⁸ Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 8–9, 78, 83, 103–06; Gutteridge, *David Hartley*, 88–125; Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution*; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 33; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols*, 90–94, 115–18, 120–23, 152–54.

¹⁹ Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 110; Gutteridge, *David Hartley*, 149–205; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 427, 431–37; Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 283–44, 291–92.

²⁰ Speck, *Stability and Strife*, 58–66; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 84–97; Mathias, “The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century,” 34–44.

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Not surprisingly, individuals on the bottom rung of Britain's social structure, who comprised the vast majority of its inhabitants, were affected differently by the far-off American war than were their upper-class opposites. Many of the males of this subordinate class became victims of predatory army recruiting personnel or of naval press gangs prowling the sea coast areas. In addition, for many of those unfortunate common soldiers or sailors in His Majesty's armed forces across the seas, their service often brought additional tragedies, as their loved ones at home received word of their deaths or serious injury.²¹

There were, however, indirect examples of wartime dissent from among Britain's lower orders. Instances of resentment involved the Gordon Riots in June 1780, and agrarian discontent or difficulties in Yorkshire and in parts of Ireland.²² Many personal journals were penned by common ranked soldiers and sailors in the American Theater that express some disillusionment about the conflict. Examples may be found in the first-hand accounts of Sergeant Roger Lamb of the Welsh Fusiliers, Corporal Thomas Sullivan of the 49th Regiment of Foot, and Daniel Woodhouse, a below-deck seaman aboard *H.M.S. America*. Other such manuscripts revealing discontent within the lower social strata may be found in the considerable number of appeals received by army and naval department offices or by petitions which poor relief administrators received from family members who had been left bereft by personal wartime dislocations.²³

Between the parameters of Britain's subordinate classes, and the privileged elite, were members of the growing and disparate middle classes. The increase in their numbers during the course of the eighteenth century paralleled the expansion of the British Empire itself. Members of this particular segment practiced a broad variety of vocations. In rural areas of Britain, the middle classes contained surveyors and small landowners or yeoman farmers, and skilled servants on large estates. And urban settings provided more occupations for workers such as civil servants, commercial ship captains and shipbuilders,

²¹ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, IL, 1984), 227–31, 415; Speck, *Stability and Strife*, 55–62; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 80, 120–22, 140; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 16–17, 22–23, 110–11, 134–50, 184–85; Watson, *The Reign of George III*, 33–38.

²² Robert B. McDowell, "Colonial Nationalism, 1760–1782," in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds, *The New History of Ireland, IV: 1692–1800* (Oxford, 1986), 212–30; David N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America, 1760–1820* (Dublin, 1981), 152–69; Ian R. Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform; The Parliamentary Reform Movement in British Politics, 1760–1785* (London, 1962), 69–124; Watson, *The Reign of George III*, 228–32.

²³ Roger Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences During the Late American War* (London, 1807); Sydney S. Bradford, "The Common Foot Soldier in America; Journal of Thomas Sullivan, 49th Regiment of Foot," *Historical Magazine* 52 (1967), 219–53; Journal, P. Daniel Woodhouse, below-deck seaman on board *H.M.S. America*, 1781–1783. Ms National Maritime Museum, Greenwich/London, JOD/40.

merchants, tradesmen, technicians, printers, bankers, brokers, skilled clerks, artisans, innkeepers, and printer-booksellers. Professionals within this societal category included clergymen, schoolmasters, lawyers, trained architects, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries. A varying number of individuals filled these and other distinct positions, but by the mid-1770s it might be estimated that between 15 and 20 percent of the British population comprised this “middling-level” or “middling-sort” status.²⁴

These middling-level Britons had retained a large and dissimilar number of interconnections with the American colonists during the years prior to 1775. One of the strongest links in this transatlantic connection had been through commerce. Under the government’s mercantilist “Imperial System,” the thirteen continental colonies were used as both a source of raw materials and a regulated market for the manufactures of Great Britain. This government-supervised interdependence helped provide strong ties – albeit principally for the benefit of the Mother Country – between many middle-class merchants and tradesmen on both sides of the Atlantic. Nonetheless, during the course of the eighteenth century – and particularly after 1763 – the increasingly ordered Imperial economy evoked dissident reactions from colonial America’s purchasing public. In this regard, Timothy H. Breen’s investigative study *The Marketplace of Revolution* has skillfully and insightfully portrayed how refractory protest actions initiated by the colonists played a significant role in the eventual conflict with the Mother Country.²⁵

Other Imperial interactions paralleled these middle-class commercial exchanges. Colonial shipbuilders launched vessels that by the mid-eighteenth century accounted for a significant percentage of Britain’s commercial fleet. The abundance of naval stores (tar, pitch, resin) and lumber in the colonies were important resources employed and needed by this industry on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁶

Crown civil servants in America and colonial agents (lobbyists) in London such as Benjamin Franklin were yet another example of this interrelationship. These British bureaucrats in America sought to uphold and promote the interests of the Crown. Conversely, the agents representing the American

²⁴ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 61–76; H.R. French, “The Search For the Middle Sort of People in England, 1600–1800.” *The Historical Journal*, 43: 1 (2000), 277–93; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 70–84; Mathias, “The Social Structure in the Eighteenth Century,” 34–45; Speck, *Stability and Strife*, 42–55.

²⁵ Richard Middleton, *Colonial America; A History, 1585–1776* (Oxford, 1992), 230–42; Max Savelle and Darold D. Wax, *A History of Colonial America* (Hinsdale, IL, 1973), 467–58, 517–31; Dora M. Clark, *British Opinion and the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 1930), 18–29; Timothy H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York, 2004), xviii–380.

²⁶ Middleton, *Colonial America*, 221–39; Savelle and Wax, *A History of Colonial America*, 229–31; Clark, *British Opinion*, 23–25, 350–51, 490–91; Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, 104–13.

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colonies sought to protect their particular interests. These divergent objectives often led to significant contentions.

In the area of religion, middling-level Episcopal missionaries were sent to America to maintain and expand the interests of the Church. Simultaneously, dissenter organizations in Britain often acted to protect and support the interests of American Baptists, Quakers, Independents (Congregationalists), and Presbyterians. These religious ties between Britain and America became quite evident as revivalist movements emerged on both sides of the Atlantic during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The close interconnection in religion was also reflected, prior to the American Revolution, in the distinct alarm which nonconformists in both locales expressed over the possible establishment of an Episcopal bishopric within the continental colonies.²⁷

Britain and her North American colonies had also developed new cultural ties. They could be observed, in part, through the significant sales and distribution of intellectual works, pamphlets, sermons, newspapers, almanacs, literary or scientific tracts, and other printed items which originated mainly in the Mother Country. From America, college administrators made noticeable and recurrent efforts to obtain funds from possible British benefactors. Probably, though, the most manifest sign of this transatlantic community during this period was demonstrated in the many written exchanges between families, friends, and associates in the New and Old World.²⁸

The outbreak of hostilities in America in April 1775 had immediate effects on Britain's middling-level merchants, jobbers, and others who had regular commercial dealings with continental North America. Some of them, those opportunists who acted quickly, had the right governmental contacts, and lived in the vicinity of garrison towns, naval centers, or other strategic locales, obtained contracts to outfit or supply royal troops or ships bound for America during the early stages of the conflict.²⁹

Not that many of Britain's businessmen with commercial ties with North America were so fortunate, however. The interruption of regular commercial exchanges with the British colonies had negative effects on their own business survival. This fact was reflected in a pamphlet of 1775 describing the proceedings of an assembly of "Merchants, Traders, and others of the City of London concerned in the American Commerce." And in October of that year,

²⁷ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Scepter: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Policies, 1689–1775* (New York, 1962), xiv–384; Clark, *British Opinion*, 183–84.

²⁸ Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783* (New York, 1970), 466–79; Savelle and Wax, *A History of Colonial America*, 584–88; Middleton, *Colonial America*, 284–309.

²⁹ Thomas J. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700–1800* (Oxford, 1959), 155–60; John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Montreal, 1987), 72–73, 177; Clark, *British Opinion*, 107.

the gathering of a recently founded pro-American London Association approved an anti-war petition to be presented to the North Administration, but their remonstrance was shelved.³⁰ Although merchants subsequently joined with London aldermen in protests, little was immediately accomplished. Britain's trade continued to decline; the conflict expanded; and one economic historian later wrote that by the beginning of 1779, "English exports were the lowest since 1745." Trade figures improved during the year, only to decline sharply in 1780. Such negative economic developments were obviously detrimental to businessmen engaged in commerce with America. Aside from having their regular American sources of naval stores for building ships interdicted, British shipbuilders were further injured when the League of Armed Neutrality (1780) reduced their Baltic sources of these vital commodities.³¹

From the religious standpoint, middling-level clergymen from differing Protestant sects reflected varying sentiments toward the insurrection in America. The majority of Episcopal vicars and rectors endorsed the cause of the Crown. They responded positively to the hierarchy's call for Fast Days and days of Prayer that were generated to serve as examples of this support. Pro-government sermons were also often delivered; two examples of such expressions were Alexander Carlyle's *The Justice and Necessity of the War with our American Colonies Examined . . .* (1777), and Robert Poole Finch's *A Sermon Preached at St. Michael, Cornhill on Wednesday February 10, 1779 . . .* (1779).³² Theological backing for the Crown was represented in earnest through the sermons of exiled Episcopalians from the North American colonies. Many of them were still vengeful over the harsh treatment they had undergone. One of them, the Reverend Samuel Peters from Connecticut, delighted in denouncing the rebels when occasionally invited to speak in London Episcopal pulpits.³³

Other Episcopal churchmen, however, were considerably more generous to the American insurgents. Thus Josiah Tucker, the prolific Dean of Gloucester, concluded both before and during the American Revolution that Britain would be better off separating herself from her continental colonies in North America.³⁴ Another noteworthy, unorthodox churchman was John Horne

³⁰ Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 87–102, 171–93.

³¹ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The First Salute; A View of the American Revolution* (New York, 1988), 87–92, 117; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 165–72, 175, 280; Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England*, 162–63.

³² Alexander Carlyle, *The Justice and Necessity of the War with our American Colonies Examined* (Edinburgh, 1777), 1–54; Robert Poole Finch, *A Sermon Preached at St. Michael, Cornhill on Wednesday, February 10, 1779 . . .* (London, 1779), 1–24.

³³ Sheldon S. Cohen, *Connecticut's Loyalist Gadfly: The Reverend Samuel Peters* (Hartford, CT, 1977), 24–34; Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans; The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774–1779* (Boston, MA, 1972), 50–82, 70.

³⁴ Josiah Tucker, *The True Interests of Great Britain set forth in regard to the Colonies* (London, 1774), 2–65; Mary Kinnear, "British Friends of America 'Without Doors' During the

Tooke, “the radical parson from Brentwood.” Tooke reportedly delivered sharp criticism of the government’s overseas policies. Attributed to him was an anonymous charge in a London newspaper that Americans had been “inhumanely murdered” by the King’s forces. The aftermath of this unsubstantiated charge was the parson’s conviction for slander and a year’s prison term. Christopher Wyvill, despite his often pro-American views, remained in the Church of England, but he became Chairman of the reformist Yorkshire Association. In 1782 he emphatically urged the immediate recognition of independence for the United States. Other churchmen who endorsed the American cause included Francis Blackburn and John Jebb, both of whom participated simultaneously in efforts to liberalize the polity of the Church of England.³⁵

Dissenting clergymen from within the middling classes also exhibited differing attitudes toward the American controversy. Perhaps most noteworthy were the growing number of Methodists – technically still within the Church of England. Their leader was the charismatic and energetic John Wesley. Wesley remained a strong advocate of Royal Supremacy, both before and during the American war. Probably the most noteworthy of his comments (although largely appropriated from Samuel Johnson) appeared in his 1775 essay, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies*. His subsequent endorsement for the North Administration’s actions in America after the conflict began was revealed in his pamphlet of 1777, *A Calm Address to the People of England*.³⁶

As for other nonconformists, many of Britain’s Baptist residents also gave their support to the government. This fact was illustrated in Bristol where, in 1775, Baptists led a petition drive to support the coercive policies of Lord North. Independent (Congregationalist) or Presbyterian dissenter clergymen who supported the government included John Martin and Henry Hunter of London and Job Orton of Kidderminster.³⁷ Quakers, whose pacifist beliefs

American Revolution,” *The Humanities Association Review*, 27: 2 (1976), 112–13; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 128, 161; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 77.

³⁵ John Disney, ed., *The Works Theological, Medical, Political and Miscellaneous of John Jebb* (London, 1787), 437–80; Christie, *Wilkes, Wyvill and Reform*, 74–77, 117–18, 124–36; Bonwick, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 5–6, 11, 65, 88, 134–35, 142, 173, 184–85, 110, 225; Francis Blackburn, ed., *A Collection of Letters and Essays in Favor of Public Liberty*, 3 vols (London, 1774); Kinnear, “British Friends of America,” 107–08; Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution*, 107–11.

³⁶ John Wesley, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (London, 1775), 1–23; *A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England* (London, 1779), 6–23; John Fothergill, *An English Freeholder’s Address to his Countrymen* (London, 1780), 1–18; Bonwick, *English Radicalism and the American Revolution*, 86–87; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 158, 216–17, 231–32.

³⁷ Job Orton, *The Political Works of Job Orton*, vol. II (London, 1842), 484; Henry Hunter, *The Duty and Usefulness of Commemorating National Deliverances* (London, 1777), 1–31; John Martin, *Familiar Dialogue between Americus and Britannicus . . .* (London, 1776), 1–51;

made them more difficult to categorize, were quite likely unhappy over British trade restrictions. This situation became very evident if they were involved in commerce, as many of them were with prosperous Friends, particularly in Pennsylvania. At the same time though, British Quakers also scorned belligerent actions on both sides. In the end, most British Quakers endorsed the conciliation efforts of other Friends in Britain such as merchant David Barclay and Dr. John Fothergill. Fothergill was the alleged author of a pamphlet printed in 1780 entitled *An English Freeholder's Address to his Countrymen*, in which the writer urged determined efforts to resolve the "American War" as the primary means for solving his nation's "misfortunes."³⁸

Dissenter clergymen in Britain, who were decidedly pro-American, have received considerable historical notoriety. The most celebrated of them was the Reverend Richard Price. Price (1723–1794) was well respected as a commentator on economics, politics, and theology. He became a member of the liberal "Real Whigs," and while declaring his loyalty to the British government, he nevertheless remonstrated against what he considered unwarranted commercial and civil restrictions imposed on the American colonists prior to 1775. After the outbreak of hostilities he retained his strong pro-American sentiments, and in early 1776 he staunchly endorsed his tenets in a partisan pamphlet, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, And the Justice And Policy of the War with America*. The work sold over 60,000 copies, including a second edition printed in 1777 which had the updated title, *Additional Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty and the War with America*.³⁹ Price's work approved American patriot concepts of government by consent of the governed, and the Lockean precepts of natural rights, and the compact theory of government. Price continued to support America's cause throughout the remainder of the war in sermons and in printed tracts. Many of the American Founding Fathers became quite familiar with his writings, and after the conflict he was visited in England and personally thanked for his advocacy by John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.⁴⁰

Another noteworthy Briton who gave written support to the American rebels, while ordained as a Presbyterian minister, was Joseph Priestley. Priestley

Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 114, 122–24, 189; Ippel, "British Sermons and the American Revolution," 193–94.

³⁸ Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 53–54, 56–58, 86, 189, 197–98; Kinnear, "British Friends of America," 108–10.

³⁹ Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty: The Principles of Government and the Justice and Policy of the War with America* (London, 1776), 1–128; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 6, 7, 57–58, 223–33, 248–57, 189–91; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 9–10, 16–18, 91–98, 165–68; Kinnear, "British Friends of America," 105–06.

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 57–58, 148–57, 189–90; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 97–110, 104–05, 126–27, 130, 166–68, 181, 201–05; Kinnear, "British Friends of America," 106.

(1733–1804) was best known in intellectual circles for his work as an experimental scientist, but he was also noted for his sympathy to the colonial cause. In this respect, he authored a short pamphlet during the pre-revolutionary period (1769), *The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and her Colonies* . . . in which he denounced what he considered as Parliament's use of arbitrary authority in the American colonies. Then, prior to the parliamentary elections of 1774, he warned that the North Administration's repressive measures against American rights could easily have repercussions for Britons themselves. Once the conflict began, Priestley joined other radicals and earnestly supported the colonial rebels. His decided admiration for what he felt were the progressive governmental foundations of the independent United States led him to emigrate to the new American republic where he spent his final years.⁴¹

There were other pro-American dissenter clergymen in Britain, less heralded than Richard Price or Joseph Priestley, but who, nevertheless, have received historical recognition. Perhaps the most interesting of these men was Theophilus Lindsey, a former Episcopal priest, who, in 1774, established the first church in London that overtly avowed Unitarian precepts. Many of the city's radicals met there to espouse their support for American independence, and Lindsey, who corresponded with John Adams, had idealistic visions of the United States serving as a haven for oppressed Europeans.⁴² Others on this list of nonconformist clergy in Britain who supported the American cause included Caleb Evans of Bristol, James Murray of Newcastle-on-Tyne, Joshua Toulmin of Taunton, William Hazlitt of Bandon, Ireland, Newcome Cappe of York, John Jebb of London, and James Walker of Nottingham. These and other nonconformist pastors deliberately expressed their affinity to the patriot cause in America to their congregants. Simultaneously, many of these same clerics also sought to solidify and promote the status of dissenter sects within the British Isles.⁴³

⁴¹ Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on the First Principals of Government* . . . (London, 1768), vii–191; Priestley, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters of All Denominations* (London, 1774), 1–16; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 9–10, 12, 30, 64–65, 79 and 78, 64–65, 107–08, 183–84, 211–13; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 6, 13, 156–57, 147–57, 189–90, 242, 376.

⁴² Theophilus Lindsey, *Vindiciae, Priestleiane* (London, 1788), 1–320; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 11, 91, 124–25, 159–60, 172–73, 184; Kinnear, “British Friends of America,” 107.

⁴³ Caleb Evans, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (Bristol, 1779), 1–13; Joshua Toulmin, *The American War Lamented* . . . (London, 1776), 2–20; James Murray, *An Impartial History of the Present War in America*, 2 vols (London, 1778); Newcome Cappe, *A Sermon Preached on Friday the Fourth of February 1780* (London, 1780), 1–24; Ernest J. Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt: A Friend of Liberty in Ireland During the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. ser., 21 (April 1964), 288–94; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 8–11, 80, 83, 123–24, 151–52.

Newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and other printed works offered yet another insight into the attitudes of ordinary Britons. Newspaper output and newspaper readership had increased significantly during the eighteenth century, and many county towns and other sizeable communities had established their own presses and publications. Those printed in London, however, had the largest readership and the most widespread distribution. In many cases, they were made available to wider audiences when they were placed in coffee houses and similar locales for public viewing.⁴⁴ One such publication, the *London Gazette*, was an official government publication, but as Solomon Lutnick's study of the British press during this period has shown, most of the others were managed by middle-class printers, publishers, and editors. As for magazines, which appeared less frequently, such as England's very prominent *The Gentleman's Magazine*; and *Historical Chronicle*, and *Town and Country Magazine*, their issues catered to the middling-level and, more noticeably, upper-class Britons.⁴⁵

British newspapers and magazines adopted disparate stances regarding the American Revolution. Thus, according to Lutnick, *The [London] Morning Chronicle*, the *London Advertiser*, the *[London] Courant and Westminster Chronicle* were anti-North Administration, while the *London Gazette*, the *[London] General Evening Post*, and *Lloyd's [London] Evening Post* were supporters of the government's policies, and quite critical of the American rebels. Similar political divisions were also evident in the provincial press. Thus, *Adams's Weekly Courant [Chester]*, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, the *Bath Journal*, and the *Newcastle Courant* generally favored the actions of the rulers, while those in opposition included the *Kentish Gazette*, the *Newcastle Chronicle*, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, and the *Leeds Mercury*.⁴⁶

For their part, magazines were noticeably sympathetic to the government – at least in the opening phases of the conflict. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, expressed its disdain toward the American dissidents when its September 1776 issue published a caustic critique of the Declaration of Independence authored by “an Englishman.” Among other disparaging and censorious comments, the author charged the “Signers” of the document with hypocrisy: “The next assigned cause and ground of their rebellion is that every man hath an inalienable right to liberty; and here the words, as it happens, are not nonsense, but now they are not true: slaves there are in America, and where there are slaves, there [sic] liberty is alienated!” *Town and Country* was also contemptuous of the American rebels, and was prominent for its disinformation concerning Royal military and naval alleged achievements in

⁴⁴ Solomon Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press* (Columbia, MO, 1967), 2–29.

⁴⁵ Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press*, 24–31, 44.

⁴⁶ Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press*, Appendix, 224–27; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, 325–26, 343, 378–79.

America. The *Scots Magazine*, during the early stages of the conflict, was similarly contemptuous of the insurgents in their commentaries. And the North Ministry itself worked to enlist its sympathizers to submit supportive articles or letters to pro-government publications.⁴⁷

Opposition presses were far less sympathetic to the government during the war years. *The Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*, and the [London] *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* were noted for their critical comments on governmental policies in America, and they repeatedly urged greater efforts for Crown conciliation, and even concessions in dealing with the American rebels.⁴⁸ The anti-war sentiment intensified as news of a deadlock or governmental reverses in America were received, and also as the hostilities expanded. Even before word of the disaster at Yorktown (October 1781) reached the nation, many of these publications urged the government to make the best settlement possible with the Americans, lest Britain surrender valuable overseas territories to its European rivals. William Hodgson was but one of those in Britain who expressed such growing disillusionment with the North Administration. And the American commissioners in Paris, who themselves received several of these printings from across the Channel, were probably heartened upon reading such positive information.⁴⁹

Aside from digesting such newspapers and magazines or printed sermons, Britons could also read the pamphlets penned by middle-class partisans on both sides of the controversy. The foremost critic of the American rebels in this social category was Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), the esteemed lexicographer, critic, and commentator. Johnson had little love for American protesters, their defiance of Parliamentary statutes or, in his own country, their British defenders. The most notable pronouncements of his views were *Taxation, No Tyranny: An Answer to the Resolution of the American Congress* (1775), and a shorter related work, *An Address to the American Congress* (1775, 1776).⁵⁰ (The Reverend John Wesley was so impressed by the first of these pamphlets that – as previously noted – he “borrowed” freely from it.) Johnson’s writings derided the assertions of the transatlantic dissidents and firmly endorsed the doctrine of Parliamentary Supremacy. He ridiculed those American slave owners who “so loudly demanded liberty for themselves,” yet denied the same to their slaves. He also asserted that Britain should arm these slaves and also the Indians, “and encourage them now and again to plunder a

⁴⁷ *The Scots Magazine* . . . vols 37–43; *Town and Country Magazine* . . . *Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction and Entertainment*, vols 5–13; Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press*, 94; *The Gentleman’s Magazine, and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 46, 403–04.

⁴⁸ Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press*, 12–16, 125–30.

⁴⁹ Cohen, “William Hodgson,” 73–76; Clark, *British Opinion*, 131–58; Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 253–55; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 68–69, 235; Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press*, 192–93, 221.

⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, *Taxation, No Tyranny: An Answer to the Revolution and Address of the American Congress* (London, 1775, 1776), 1–91.

plantation.” The eminent critic maintained his distaste for the Americans and the rebel leadership throughout the war, and he often repeated his views to other associates.⁵¹

Other recognized middling-level men in Britain who wrote pamphlets critical of the American dissidents included John Lind, Dr. James Anderson, James Stewart, John Macpherson, and John Shebbeare. Lind, who was a noted London barrister, wrote a particularly antagonistic work in 1776 entitled *An Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress*, in which he stridently denounced any right of the Americans to claim independence from Britain. Macpherson, Anderson, and Stewart were all Scots who published works that also scorned the rebel cause. Macpherson, in 1775, authored a pro-government pamphlet, *The Rights of Great Britain Asserted Against the Claims of America; Being an Answer to the Declaration of the General Congress*, which defended Parliamentary Supremacy and its right to tax and to legislate over the colonies.⁵² James Stewart wrote *The Total Refutation and Political Overthrow of Dr. Price; Great Britain Successfully Vindicated Against All American Rebels* (1777). Dr. Anderson, a noted economist, contributed *Free Thoughts on the American Contest . . .* (1776), which also defended the actions of the North Ministry and its policies in America. John Shebbeare was an Englishman who wrote under government sponsorship. In 1775 he published (anonymously) *An Answer to the Printed Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq; Spoken in the House of Commons, April 19, 1774*, which criticized Burke’s famous defense of American liberties.⁵³

Many middle-class Britons, apart from the clergy – often labeled radicals by the establishment – wrote of their sympathies for the American rebels. Among them was John Cartwright, a former army major. Two of his pamphlets, *American Independence; The Interest and Glory of Great Britain . . .* (1774), and *The Memorial of Common-Sense Upon the Present Crisis between Great Britain and America . . .* (1778), affirmed his loyalty to his country, but also concluded that it would be in Britain’s best interests to grant America its freedom.⁵⁴ Granville Sharp, a liberal-minded civil servant, and an advocate of freedom

⁵¹ Johnson, *Taxation, No Tyranny*, 1–91; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 87. Another of Johnson’s tracts denouncing the rebel cause was *Hypocrisy Unmasked* (London, 1776), 1–24.

⁵² James Macpherson, *The Rights of Great Britain Against the Claims of America . . .* (London, 1776), 1–92; John Lind, *An Answer to the Declaration of the American Congress . . .* (London, 1776), 1–137.

⁵³ James Stewart, *The Total Reputation and Political Overthrow of Dr. Price . . .* (London, 1776), 1–88; James Anderson, *Free Thoughts on the American Contest . . .* (Edinburgh, 1776), 1–59; John Shebbeare, *An Answer to the Printed Speech of Edmund Burke . . .* (London, 1775), 1–222.

⁵⁴ John Cartwright, *American Independence: The Independence and Glory of Great Britain . . .* (London, 1774), 1–72; *The Memorial of Common Sense Upon the Present Crisis between Great Britain and America . . .* (London, 1778), 7–29.

for African slaves held in bondage in England, urged the British government to grant the Americans their constitutional rights. John Jebb and members of the “Real Whigs” of Middlesex, and the emergent internal reform group known as “The Association,” also championed American rights. Much of Jebb’s anti-war sentiments were exhibited in his pamphlet, *An Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex . . .* (1779). Thomas Day, a writer of children’s books as well as poetry and political tracts, was a member of the radical, London-based Society for Constitutional Information. In this capacity, he criticized the continuing American war, a fact evident in his 1777 poem, *The Desolation of America*.⁵⁵

Other middle-class authors contributed much lengthier pieces that displayed scorn regarding the Royal government’s overseas actions. James Burgh was a schoolmaster, and another old friend and fellow London clubman of Benjamin Franklin and William Hodgson. Burgh expressed radical sentiments in his well-received three-volume compilation, *Political Disquisitions: or, An Enquiry into Public Errors Defects and Abuses*, which appeared in 1774, just prior to his death. This multi-volume work included several sharp criticisms of Britain’s colonial policies, as well as calls for significant internal reforms. John Almon, the anti-North newspaper publisher and bookseller, commenced a journal in 1776 entitled the *Remembrancer; An Impartial Repository of Public Events . . .*, which reported the American versions of events occurring during the hostilities, and this publication, which continued until 1784, was not remiss in its forthright criticisms of governmental policies in colonial America.⁵⁶

Catherine Macaulay, a friend of John Wilkes and the most recognized woman in this particular group of partisans, also displayed her attraction to the American rebel cause. Her short pamphlet in 1775, *An Address to the People of England, Scotland, and Ireland on the Present Important Crisis of Affairs*, was highly critical of the subordinate treatment the colonists had received from the British government. At the same time, however, she expressed her hope that the controversy could be amicably resolved. Mrs. Macaulay also condemned what she regarded as unresolved inequities in Britain itself that contributed greatly to Imperial problems. Some of her reformist sentiments had been revealed previously in her tract of 1770 entitled *Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents*. She endorsed the rebel cause during the conflict, and after the war she visited the United States, met George Washington at his Mount Vernon estate, and, with some

⁵⁵ Granville Sharp, *A Declaration of the People’s Natural Rights . . .* (London, 1774), 1–32; John Jebb, *An Address to the Freeholders of Middlesex . . .*; see John Disney, *The Works of John Jebb II* (London, 1787), 457–80; Thomas Day, *The Desolation of America: A Poem . . .* (London, 1777), 1–26.

⁵⁶ James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions . . .* (London, 1774), 1–496; John Almon, *The Remembrancer: An Important Repository of Public Events* (London, 1776–1784); Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, 40–42, 80.

reservations, she wrote optimistically about the future success of the new republic.⁵⁷

The preceding observations have sought to portray two interconnected features that were manifest among Britain's populace during a troublesome period in the late eighteenth century: the general social makeup of its social classes, and a sense of the overall and disparate attitudes adopted toward the conflict that erupted in the North American colonies. The small upper-class ruling elite of landed gentlemen initially supported the Crown, although there were dissidents whose voice increased as the conflict expanded and seemed to be deadlocked. The opinions of the vast majority of Britons comprising the lower classes were understandably more difficult to assess. Often separated directly from the hostilities, often faced with more immediate concerns about their daily existence, and often lacking in a basic comprehension of the issues, their reactions were in direct proportion to the effects on their own lives. The multifaceted, albeit much more influential middle classes were more often directly affected by the conflict – especially those who were involved in trade with the North American colonies. Middle-class or middling-level Britons exhibited differing outlooks toward the conflict. Certainly many of them took no real position regarding the American war, or they tried to stay aloof and prayed for conciliation. Many of them, however, did choose sides, as this chapter has indicated. Quite worthy of study are the paths chosen by those who did take a stance toward the conflict that began in America and later expanded to other parts of the world.⁵⁸

Mention has been made of many heretofore recognized middle-class Britons who did adopt overt positions regarding the American Revolution. Their names included personages such as Joseph Priestley, James Burgh, Richard Price, Josiah Tucker, John Horne Tooke, Theophilus Lindsey, John Cartwright, Samuel Johnson, James Macpherson, Alexander Carlyle, John Lind, and Catherine Macaulay. Many of their disparate sentiments have previously been cited in commendable studies such as Colin Bonwick's volume published in 1977, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*. Such treatises reveal much of the significant story of how the British populace reacted to a momentous transatlantic event. But there remain less well-known, obscure, middling-level residents whose actions and lives are also quite worthy of portrayal.⁵⁹

We will show the contributions of five ordinary, middling-level Britons, focusing on the period from 1775 through 1783. They represent the undistinguished, and, for the most part, rather ordinary individuals who sought

⁵⁷ Catherine Macaulay, *Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents* (London, 1775), 5–20; *An Address to the People of England, Scotland, and Ireland on the Present Important Crisis of Affairs . . .* (London, 1775), 1–29; Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, xi–xviii, 8, 22, 32, 78–79, 123, 182–83.

⁵⁸ Clark, *British Opinion*, 1–13, 255–80.

⁵⁹ Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, xi–353.

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actively to provide assistance to the American insurgents. All of them had some connections with Benjamin Franklin, but they also reflected individual disparities. Two of them, William Hodgson of London and Reuben Harvey of Cork City, Ireland, were merchants or tradesmen who were also involved in financial matters. Two others, Thomas Wren of Portsmouth and Robert Heath of Plymouth Dock and Rodborough, in Gloucestershire, were nonconformist clergymen – although Heath's original occupation was as a tradesman. The last of them, Griffith Williams, was a transplanted Welshman who worked as an apothecary in the run-down, disreputable Wapping district of London. The motives for their actions on behalf of Americans varied, but the significant contributions (even indirect) that they made on behalf of what became the United States of America will be individually described.

William Hodgson

Pro-American London merchant

On Wednesday morning, October 20, 1784, a tragedy was played out in London at 17 Coleman Street, the residence and business office of William Hodgson, a prominent warehouseman (wholesale merchant) who also dabbled in financial matters. Hodgson had lived at this address for several years and was a long-standing communicant at the restored St. Stephen's Church only a short distance down the street. According to printed accounts of the calamity, a business colleague had come to the home that morning for a breakfast appointment. Hodgson's wife Mary and some of their children were then at the family's country house at Chigwell, about thirteen miles outside London. A servant greeted the guest and requested he wait in the parlor; but as the visitor tarried in the receiving room, he heard a pistol blast from an adjoining room. Both the caller and the servant ran immediately to the chamber where they found the bloodied, lifeless body of Hodgson who had shot himself in the head.¹

Suicides were not uncommon in London that year, and several merchants were numbered among those who took their own lives.² But Hodgson's sudden and horrifying demise represented more than a disastrous statistic; it also terminated the career of a neglected and unrecognized Briton who had significantly assisted America in its struggle for independence. Hodgson had demonstrated a strong affinity for the patriot cause when he labored zealously with Benjamin Franklin and others for the relief of hundreds of Americans imprisoned in England. He had also endeavored to stimulate

¹ *Political Magazine and Parliamentary, Naval, Military, and Literary Journal* (October 1784), 244; *Whitehall Evening Post* (London) (October 21–23, 1784); *St. James Chronicle* (London) or *British Evening Post* (October 19–21, 1784); *Newcastle (England) Chronicle* (October 30, 1784). St. Stephen's Church had been destroyed during the great London Fire of 1666. It was rebuilt largely under the design of Christopher Wren. Henry B. Wheatley, *London Past and Present: A Dictionary of Its History, Associations, and Traditions*, 3 vols (London, 1891), vol. 3, 310.

² Michael MacDonald, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), 245–47, 268–74, 365–66.

Image not available

Plate 2.1 Undated portrait of the Family of William Hodgson, merchant of Coleman Street, London, painted by Johann Zoffany.

Source: Copyright, National Portrait Gallery, London

British trade with the new United States even before its independence was recognized. Yet for all of his noteworthy efforts, this London merchant failed to receive adequate and deserved recognition, and one can speculate that it was due in part to this rebuff from abroad that William Hodgson ended his life so impulsively.

Who then was this little-known and unsung merchant? He was not the William Hodgson (1745–1851) cited in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, though both men had family roots in the north of England.³ Their progenitors had arrived in Britain in the tenth century after crossing the North Sea from Scandinavia, and the name Hodgson emerged afterward in Cumberland, Durham, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire. Family historians have recorded individuals with this surname who were subsequently involved in such noteworthy events in English history as the Wars of the Roses and the (Anthony) Babington Plot to murder Queen Elizabeth.⁴

³ *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v., “Hodgson, William, M.D.”

⁴ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *The Hodgson Surname: Its New Origins and Cumbria Locations*

Hodgson's last will (September 9, 1784) offers some key clues about the date and place of this merchant's birth. It discloses that he left property in the West Yorkshire parish of Calverley (near Bradford) to his wife Mary. In turn, Calverley Parish records cite the marriage of one William Hodgson and Elizabeth Butler on February 9, 1713 at a ceremony performed in the twelfth-century John Calverley Church. The newlyweds were both listed as residing in the village of Idle, a chapelry in Calverley Parish situated beside the meandering River Aire, three miles north-north-east of the woollens manufacturing community of Bradford and about six miles northwest of the cloth-making town of Leeds. Because the imposing Calverley Hall was close to the church, it was also possible that someone from the squire's family attended the nuptials honoring the local young couple. Subsequent parish registers list a son, Thomas, born to the couple and baptized on October 17, 1714, but the register of births, which continues for several more years, does not include mention of other offspring.⁵

Other records indicate that William and Mary Hodgson had departed their West Yorkshire residence – most likely within a decade of their marriage. The *International Genealogical Index* shows that on July 6, 1725, a William Hodgson was born to Elizabeth and William Hodgson who were then communicants of St. Giles's Church, in London's Cripplegate Ward. This combined data would indicate that the Hodgsons were among the many families from England's northern counties who emigrated to London during the early eighteenth century seeking economic opportunities in the city's expanding markets.⁶

It was quite possible that William Hodgson, senior was involved in trade, as were many of the communicants of St. Giles who managed churchyard stalls and resided along the surrounding streets of Cripplegate. Many of the newly arrived inhabitants from outside London commenced their own competitive mercantile enterprises within this vibrant section of the capital. If so, it was also quite possible that the younger William Hodgson received his basic

(Standon, Herts, 1993), 59; Gordon Hodgson, *What Name Did You Get? The Thing About Hodgsons* (Calgary, Canada, 1995), chs 1–3; David Hodgson to author, May 29, 1997 (FAX).

⁵ Samuel Margerison, *The Registers of the Parish Church of Calverley in the West Riding of the County of York, With a Description of the Church, and Sketches of Its History* (Bradford, Yorks, 1880–1887), vol. I, 7–8, vol. II, 588, vol. III, 74, 118; Frank Smith, comp., *A Genealogical Gazetteer of England* (Baltimore, 1986), 284; *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales* . . . (London, 1843), vol. I, 345, vol. II, 458; Will of Mr. William Hodgson of Coleman Street, London (September 9, 1784), Probate Records, 11/1122, Family Records Centre, London; Mrs. C. Boddington, senior archivist, East Riding of Yorkshire Council to author, October 20, 1997.

⁶ *International Genealogical Index* (1992), Births, Children born to Hodgson, Surname, Father = William, Mother = Mary; Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1988), 105–06, 122–24, 274–75. St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate, unique in London for its Gothic structure, was the burial site of the poet John Milton. Wheatley, *London Past and Present*, vol. 2, 109–10.

Image not available

Plate 2.2 St. Stephen's Church on Coleman Street, where the Hodgson family were communicants

introduction to business from his father, or perhaps he served as an apprentice to an established entrepreneur. Whatever his vocational training, young William Hodgson was evidently on his own when he married Mary Hay on March 11, 1749 at the historic St. Stephen's Parish church on Coleman Street, not that far distant from Cripplegate. St. Stephen's, founded in the Middle Ages, had been largely destroyed during the Great Fire of 1666, but it had subsequently been restored and significantly beautified under the supervision of the famed architect Sir Christopher Wren. The bride's family were communicants of St. James's Church located in the nearby Clerkenwell district of London. Perhaps more than affection precipitated their vows, since six months after they were made, the couple's first child Hugh was born.⁷

⁷ William H. Challen, comp., *London Marriages, 1538–1754*, 11 vols (London, 1932), vol. 2, St. Stephen's Church, Coleman Street, City of London Register (p. 90), London, Middlesex, MX/REG/646, Guildhall Library London; Ralph Hyde, *The A to Z of Georgian London* (Lympne Castle, Kent, 1981), map 13 Aa, 26; *International Genealogical Index, Marriages*, surname = Hodgson, Forename William, Spouse, Mary. Children born to Hodgson, Surname, Father = William, Mother = Mary. During the early part of the seventeenth century, St. Stephen's achieved notoriety for the considerable number of Puritan

During the first twenty-five years of his marriage, William's commercial ventures prospered while his family increased in size. At the time of his nuptials, he was listed in *Kent's London Directory* as the operator of a business stall at St. Mary le Bow Churchyard, not far from London Bridge. Commercial directories reveal him to have subsequently conducted various mercantile enterprises within the City of London. Although his personal business records for these years are not extant, his involvement with diverse trades – especially wholesale marketing – leads one to speculate that Hodgson participated, at least indirectly, in American commerce. He was listed first as a wholesale merchant with an address of Bush Lane, but the same register also cites him as a wine merchant at this address until 1775. Taken together, the directory entries were indicative of an ambitious, up-and-coming entrepreneur pursuing available business enterprises that would solidify and potentially advance his middle-class status. Such characteristics were common within the city's increasingly multifaceted social and economic environment.⁸

Around this time, then, this ambitious tradesman probably moved to his final London residence and established William Hodgson & Co. on historic Coleman Street. (During the previous century, the thoroughfare had boasted the residence of Sir Francis Bacon and had once served as a hiding place for Oliver Cromwell.) The fact that Hodgson could afford to reside on this prominent commercial roadway was an indication of his success in business. Such mercantile successes were accompanied by the birth of several offspring to William and Mary. Birth registries at St. Stephen's Church show that after the birth of their first child in 1749, the Hodgsons had eight more children, the last of whom was a son, Philip, born on July 15, 1774.⁹ The Hodgsons' country home at Chigwell, acquired around this time, reflected not only prosperity, but perhaps a need for parental relaxation.

dissenters among its communicants. Many of them subsequently participated in the "Great Migration" to New England. Most notable among them was the Reverend John Davenport, vicar from 1622 to 1631, who became one of the founders of New Haven Colony.

⁸ *Kent's London Directory* for the years 1749 to 1775. Listed in these directories for this period as proprietors of various commercial enterprises were two other individuals named William Hodgson. Hodgson was first listed as a warehouseman at the Bush Lane address in 1768 (*Kent's London Directory*, 1768, p. 128). He was listed as a warehouseman and proprietor of William Hodgson & Co. in the *Directory* for 1778 (p. 88). Bush Lane and St. Mary le Bow Churchyard are shown in maps in Hyde, *The A to Z of Georgian London*, map 13 Aa, 26. For evidence indicating the likelihood of Hodgson's involvement in trade with America, see Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise Merchants and Economic Development in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1986), 55–56, 71–72, 86–87.

⁹ Ms. St. Stephen's (Parish) Church, City of London, Registry of Births, MX/R 324, Guildhall Library, London, microfilm, Wheatley, *London Past and Present*, vol. 3, 310; *International Genealogical Index*, children born to Surname, Hodgson, Father = William, Mother = Mary. Coleman Street was described about the time the Hodgsons moved there as "a faire and large street, on both sides builded with divers [diverse] faire houses."

One extant feature, likely dating from the latter part of the 1770s or early in the following decade, reflects the evident prosperity of William Hodgson. The item itself is a painting of “William Hodgson, merchant of Coleman Street and his family,” by the German-born British artist, Johann Zoffany (1733–1810). The National Gallery of Art (National Portrait Gallery), which once held this painting, has erroneously listed Hodgson’s death as 1783. It does note correctly, however, that the recognized portrait artist spent much of his life abroad, but that he was in England from 1779 to 1783 – the period when the Hodgsons were definitely residing on Coleman Street. Zoffany’s paintings included prominent Britons such as John Wilkes, David Garrick, and members of the Royal Family, but his clients also included many upper-middle-class merchants, bankers, and financiers. Aside from the fact that Hodgson was financially able to commission Zoffany for this work, the portrait itself is revealing. In it, the London merchant appears as the head of a respectful family who was intent on displaying the successful plateau to which his years of commercial endeavors had ostensibly brought him. An expensive-looking china tea service, which stands out in the painting, offers a significant indication that this was a time of affluence for the businessman and his enterprises. Subsequent events, however, were to prove otherwise.¹⁰

Hodgson’s mercantile activities also appear to have sparked his association with luminaries involved in intellectual concerns. One such individual was Dr. Benjamin Franklin, who since the early 1760s had been living in London. There, Franklin acted as a colonial agent and sought to defend the economic and political interests of the colonies from a Royal government attempting to assert greater control over its North American empire. Like the Coleman Street merchant, Franklin frequented London coffee houses where economic, political, and quite often intellectual topics were debated and discussed. It was out of such spirited gatherings that the noted American agent from Pennsylvania and David Williams, a dissenting minister, educator, and author of controversial theological works, founded a new organization in the early 1770s.¹¹ It was called the Wednesday Society or, more commonly, the Club of

¹⁰ The information concerning John Zoffany was sent to the author on January 15, 2002 by Ms. Deborah H. Stock, visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for United States Studies, University of London. Biographical information and bibliographical references concerning Johann Zoffany were furnished to her by the National Portrait Gallery. The portrait of the Hodgson family was sold by Christie’s at auction on April 17, 1964, but the Gallery still holds a photograph copy of it, and Mrs. Emma Butterfield, Librarian of the Picture Library, has kindly supplied the author with a reproduction for use in his research.

¹¹ David T. Morgan, *The Devious Dr. Franklin, Colonial Agent: Benjamin Franklin’s Years in London* (Macon, GA, 1996), 16, 94; Cecil B. Currey, *Road to Revolution: Benjamin Franklin in England, 1765–1775* (New York, 1968), iv–422; Verner W. Crane, *Benjamin Franklin and a Rising People* (Boston, MA, 1954), 102–56; David Hawke, *Franklin* (New York, 1976), 222–348; Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), chs 14–19; J. Dybikowski,

Thirteen, since the group set limits on its membership. Hodgson was an original member of this liberal-minded gathering which usually met at Old Slaughter's Coffee House on St. Martin's Lane or at the Swan at Westminster Bridge. The members, who also included the illustrious pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood, discoursed upon religious, social, scientific, and political matters, including the growing tensions between the American colonies and Britain. Most of the members endorsed the American cause, and perhaps it was there that Hodgson acquired his strong affinity for the American colonists. It was clearly through these gatherings that the Coleman Street merchant formed an admiration for Franklin that was evident by the time the Pennsylvania agent sailed home in March 1775. The fact that his American associate had been recently denounced by the Privy Council for revealing private correspondence of Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson failed to dampen Hodgson's veneration for his departing friend.¹²

News of the outbreak of conflict in America during the spring of 1775 had considerable effect on Londoners – particularly merchants like Hodgson. Many of these men sympathized with their colonial brethren, and realized also that the hostilities would interrupt commerce with one of their prime markets. After the Boston Tea Party in 1773, several London merchants held out the vain hope that some form of reconciliation could be reached with the North American colonists. Even when reports of the fighting in Massachusetts reached Britain, Hodgson continued to share their hope, as did his colleagues in the Club of Thirteen, anti-ministerial supporters of the erratic John Wilkes, Franklin's friend and Member of Parliament David Hartley, several London aldermen, civic groups, and a number of expatriate Americans living in the capital. This last contingent included merchants such as Matthew Ridley, Ralph Izard, William Carmichael, Arthur and William Lee, and George and Thomas Digges. These pro-American advocates, both colonial and British-born, made such vehement protests against the hostilities in the colonies that the Crown issued a proclamation on August 23, 1775, threatening legal action "against all persons in any manner or degree aiding or abetting the American

On Burning Ground: An Examination of the Ideas, Projects and Life of David Williams (Oxford, 1993), xix–351; Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Willcox, Barbara Oberg, *et al.*, eds, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT, 1959–), vol. 11, 28n; DNB, s.v., "Williams, David." Prior to his membership in the Club of Thirteen, Benjamin Franklin had been associated with other London intellectual groups, most notably the Club of Honest Whigs. See Verner W. Crane, "The Club of Honest Whigs: Friends of Science and Liberty," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter *W&MQ*), 23 (1966), 210–33.

¹² David Williams, "More Light on Franklin's Religious Ideas," *American Historical Review*, 43 (1938), 803–10; Bryant Lillywhite, ed., *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1963), 91, 421–24, 529–36, 561; *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 21, 119–20; vol. 22, 22, 173–74; Hawke, *Franklin*, 346–49; Crane, *Rising People*, 154–57; Currey, *Road to Revolution*, 384–85; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 49–60, 245–47, 268–75.

rebellion.” Despite the Crown’s admonition, criticism of the Ministry’s American policies persisted among members of these groups and some elements of the London press during the ensuing years of conflict.¹³

Many other individuals, principally in London, also disregarded this Crown proclamation against open dissent concerning the North Ministry’s pursuit of the war in America. And the challenges that these people proffered to their administration’s controversial overseas policies were not brief or superficial. Anti-government opposition persisted throughout the lengthy conflict, much of it reflected in vocal or printed remonstrances. Other protesters, however, adopted a more energetic stance. These individuals, for the most part, were undistinguished Britons who engaged voluntarily in overt or concealed activities that demonstrated an empathy toward the colonial insurgents. The Coleman Street entrepreneur became a part of this latter group when he subsequently offered his services to assist the cause of the American rebels.

Hodgson’s exact role among Britain’s anti-war factions during the early stages of the American Revolution is unclear. His Club of Thirteen discussions seem to have been critical of the Royal government and the imperial resolve to crush the rebellion in America through military and naval action. (Colin Bonwick’s excellent study, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (1977), has connected the sympathies of specific club members to the rebel cause.) Most of Hodgson’s American associates in London demonstrated their support for their insurgent colonial brethren, and many of his colleagues in commerce favored a peaceful resolution of the dispute.¹⁴ Perhaps some of his north England family heritage of anti-monarchical activity during the Tudor era also influenced him. Whatever his motivations, the expanding nature of the war in North America led the Coleman Street merchant to his first overt act of assistance for the rebel cause.

One of Hodgson’s reasons for supporting the rebellious colonists emerged during the spring of 1777. By that time the marauding armed American naval vessels against British shipping on the high seas had caused Lord North’s Ministry considerable concern. In addition, the Royal Navy’s seizure of many of the hostile vessels had given the government the vexing problem of how to treat the seamen on these armed vessels, especially those captured well away from American shores. In March 1777, Parliament addressed the issue by

¹³ Dora M. Clark, *British Opinion and the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 1930), 10–12, 79–81; John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Montreal, 1987), 69–93, 94–95; Solomon Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press, 1775–1783* (Columbia, MO, 1967), 58–73.

¹⁴ Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977), 28–31; Don Cook, *The Long Fuse: How England Lost the American Colonies, 1760–1785* (New York, 1995), 219–20, 224–39; Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The American Revolution through British Eyes* (New York, 1990), 33–41, 76–78, 86–87, 93–95; Piers Mackesy, *The War for America* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 38–39, 55–56; Clark, *British Opinion*, 92–97, 181–82; Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 78–82.

adopting a strongly worded measure which authorized, “under charges of High Treason or Piracy,” the imprisonment within Britain of mariners captured from armed vessels.¹⁵ Because prison ships, called hulks, proved inadequate for accommodating the substantial number of arriving detainees, the government decided to reactivate some larger land-based internment centers that had been used during previous eighteenth-century wars. Two sites held most of the rebel seamen captured during the remainder of the conflict – Forton Gaol near Gosport in Hampshire, and Mill (Old Mill, Millbay) Gaol situated between Plymouth and Plymouth Dock in Devon.¹⁶

The unfortunate rebel captives who were remanded to Mill Gaol commencing in May 1777, and to Forton the following month, encountered decidedly unpleasant conditions, and their forlorn circumstances soon became known in other parts of Britain. Provisions provided at the two detention facilities were substandard both in quality and quantity. One of the first inmates at Mill wrote that the rations were so inferior that the prisoners “were strongly tempted to pick up the grass and eat it,” while at Forton a prisoner declared that they had been served “nothing but boiled cabbage” for days after their arrival.¹⁷ Lack of clothing constituted another serious shortcoming, since many of the first inmates had their possessions confiscated during their shipboard confinement. The prisoners were also subjected to further personal indignities, both at sea and on land, prior to entering these gaols. Thus, by November 1777, the supervisors of British naval prisons, known as the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners, were obliged to petition the Admiralty to alleviate “the great want of Clothing and Shoes and Stockings among many of the prisoners.”¹⁸ The initial difficulties that the rebel detainees experienced in matters of victualing, personal attire, and adequate confinement billeting were problems that were not to be adequately resolved during the wartime operation of these gaols.

Discipline for these initial American detainees, charged in effect with high treason, was covered by a set of rigid regulations implemented by an arbitrary,

¹⁵ William Cobbett, comp., *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1814), 193–95; Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols, Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 24–28; Catherine M. Prelinger, “Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England During the American Revolution,” *W&MQ*, 32 (1975), 264.

¹⁶ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 30–37.

¹⁷ Richard Livesey, ed., *The Prisoners of 1776: A Relic of the Revolution* (Boston, MA, 1854), 49, 59; William R. Cutter, “A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England 1777–1779,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (hereafter *NEHGR*), 30 (1876), 343–44; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 59–61.

¹⁸ Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen to Admiralty, November 25, 1777, Adm/M/404/NMM, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England; Reverend Samuel Cutler, ed., “Samuel Cutler’s Diary,” *NEHGR*, 22 (1878), 187; Cutter, “A Yankee Privateersman,” 343–44; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 61–62.

authoritarian, petty, and often corrupt administrative staff. At both prisons the supervisors or agents – John Newsham at Forton and William Cowdry at Mill – seemed to delight in deceiving, demeaning, threatening, and allegedly robbing their rebel charges.¹⁹ Nevertheless, these first American arrivals did find local champions who could, and did, spread word of their increasingly distressful situation to other prospective advocates in Britain. At Forton, the Reverend Thomas Wren worked to aid the prisoners, and at Mill, a similar role was played by Robert Heath, a local merchant and a deacon in the Calvinist Methodist church. Both of these men communicated details of the prisoners' hardships to other locales. Their descriptions in large part inspired the pro-Americans of London, including Hodgson, to mobilize in an attempt to offer relief to the prisoners.²⁰

An ambitious expatriate, Thomas Attwood Digges, a descendant of a prominent early Maryland family,²¹ was one of the Londoners who became apprised of the privations of the American captives in England. Digges frequented many of the capital's popular coffee houses and gathering locales; he was acquainted with several knowledgeable government officials; and, as such, he was in a favorable position to obtain considerable information regarding the deplorable situation. In November 1777, he described the captives' plight in a letter to a friend and former associate, Arthur Lee, who – along with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane – was an American commissioner in Paris. The commissioners replied to the letter by authorizing Deane to send £50 to assist the detainees. This meager amount – plus a larger sum that Franklin arranged for his friend David Hartley to distribute – was inadequate, but by this time word of the internees' situation had also caused an outcry from the British opposition. On December 11, Lord Abingdon pleaded their case in Parliament and announced that he intended to promote a subscription on their behalf.²²

¹⁹ Cutter, "Yankee Privateersman," 345; Cutler, "Samuel Cutler's Diary," 186, 309, 396; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 65–67.

²⁰ Sheldon S. Cohen, "The Preachers and the Prisoners," *Essex Institute Historical Collection*, 126 (1990), 1–26; Sheldon S. Cohen, "Thomas Wren: Ministering Angel of Forton Prison," *PMHB*, 102 (1979), 279–301; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 78–82.

²¹ Robert J. Elias and Eugene D. Finch, eds, *The Letters of Thomas Attwood Digges* (Columbia, SC, 1982), xxiii–xl; William B. Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter *PMHB*), 77 (1953), 385–89; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 50, 53, 57.

²² Richard H. Lee, *Life of Arthur Lee* (Boston, MA, 1829), vol. 1, 354–56; *The Parliamentary Register, or History of Proceedings and Debates of the House of Lords* (London, 1778), 10, 105–06; *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, 47 (1777), 107; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 389–90; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 83; Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 14–December 11, 1777, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 35, 67. The amount to be expended was between five and six hundred pounds.

Abingdon's declaration sparked anti-ministerial activists to organize and publicize a meeting "for the purpose of relieving the DISTRESS of the American PRISONERS." The gathering was held at the King's Arms Tavern in Cornhill on December 24, 1777, when pledges of £1300 were obtained for a subscription that grew to about £3700 by January 9, 1778. Besides Digges and Matthew Ridley, the principal organizers of the event, Hodgson was one of the most prominent of the several merchants in attendance. At this gathering his distinction within the City's business community was acknowledged by his appointment to a committee of twenty, including Ridley and Digges, that served to manage the subscription, distribute funds, and coordinate future appeals.²³

Digges was selected as the first director of this committee of concerned Londoners who subsequently engaged in diverse efforts to benefit the American prisoners in Britain. The mission to improve prison conditions received additional incentives after the American commissioners in Paris received a report from their emissary, John Thornton, who had been permitted to make a brief, supervised visit to Forton at the end of 1777. Thornton wrote that the 119 Americans imprisoned there were clearly enduring a strenuous captivity and were forbidden to speak to visitors without a prison official present.²⁴ Part of their misery, he claimed, stemmed from the strict prison regulations and the corruption and petty cruelties of the prison staff. He added that one reason for the inmates' discomfort was the inadequate supply of food and clothing, a situation aggravated by the prisoners' inability to pay for these items. Thornton did not visit the more distant Mill Gaol, but his account implied that many of the same unpleasant conditions prevailed for the 289 Americans detained there.²⁵

During the months following the Cornhill meeting and John Thornton's visit, conditions improved considerably for the captive Americans in England. The improved prison conditions resulted in part from the more conciliatory attitude taken by the British government following General John Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in October 1777. Thus, one Forton internee noted in his diary on December 25, 1777, "Since the defeat of Burgoyne, things wear

²³ John A. Sainsbury, "The Pro-Americans of London, 1769–1782," *W&MQ*, 35 (1978), 443–44; *London Evening Post*, December 23–25, 1777; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 47 (1777), 607; *Public Advertiser* (London), January 2, 1778; Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 142–43; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 390–91; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 83–84.

²⁴ Clark, "Thomas Digges," 390–91; American commissioners, Instructions to John Thornton, December 11, 1777; John Thornton to Benjamin Franklin, October 4, 1777; Benjamin Franklin to Sir Guy Cooper, December 11, 1777; Prelinger, "American Prisoners," 265–66; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 86–87. For limited information concerning Major John Thornton, see *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25, 26–28.

²⁵ John Thornton to American commissioners, December [17], 1777, and John Thornton, Memorandum for the American commissioners, January 5–8, 1778; *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25, 299, 350, 415–18; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 86–88.

another face . . . They begin to treat us better.”²⁶ Still another and equally important factor behind the amelioration of the detention environments at Forton and Mill stemmed from the active exertions of sympathizers in Britain. Through arrangements with the Reverend Thomas Wren who served as Portsmouth’s connection with the London relief committee, Thornton had been able to improve food rations at Forton. Funds for this purpose as well as for personal prisoner needs were supplied primarily by the London committee, though, on occasion, Wren had to depend on the beneficence of his parishioners and on his own pockets.²⁷

Similar improvements occurred at Mill, where relief funds from London were distributed by the committee’s representative, Deacon Robert Heath. One captive wrote in April 1778 to a friend in New Hampshire: “Since the beginning of the year, we have lived very well and want nothing but Liberty.”²⁸

But in addition to his legitimate activities aimed at improving the prisoners’ living conditions, Digges was providing unsanctioned assistance to escapees from Forton and Mill, possibly with the knowledge of fellow relief committeemen, including Hodgson. Rebel captives had attempted such escapes almost as soon as both prisons opened. Certainly there were numerous obstacles confronting those fugitives who were successful in breaking free of Mill or the less secure Forton Gaol.²⁹ Yet a year after both prisons commenced operations, a route to freedom was available to the many escapees who managed to reach London. Assisted by funds and sanctuary from sympathizers in Devon and Hampshire, the fugitives were often directed to the best “safe-house” in the capital, 23 Villars Street, Strand – Digges’s residence. The expatriate Marylander later claimed (in June 1782) that he had hidden over 160 of these runaways. At his home or at other hideouts in the city, the escapees were given concealment, false papers, cash, and were then smuggled on board ships departing London for the Continent. This illicit activity was conducted with the knowledge and promotion of the American commissioners in Paris.³⁰ Such often-repeated, illegal, and hazardous operations required more than the participation of Digges himself, but whether Hodgson was directly or indirectly

²⁶ Cutter, *Yankee Privateersman*, 347; Cook, *Long Fuse*, 279–80, 310–11; Mackesy, *War for America*, 149–60; Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels*, 195–97.

²⁷ Cohen, “Thomas Wren,” 288–89; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 391, 400–02; Prelinger, “Franklin and the American Prisoners,” 270–71; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 97, 115–16, 151–53, 192–95.

²⁸ *New Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth), September 3, 1778; Cohen, “Preachers and Prisoners,” 7–9; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 88, 115–18, 152–54, 186, 193.

²⁹ Olive Anderson, “American Escapes from British Naval Prisons during the War of Independence,” *Mariners’ Mirror*, 41 (1955), 238–40; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 291–92; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 108–09.

³⁰ Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 293–94, 405–06, 428; Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, September 18, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 27, 420; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 109–13.

involved, or – as was more likely – preferred not to know, has not been established.

It was, however, in the realm of prisoner exchanges, also known as cartels, that tradesman Hodgson came to play his most prominent role in assisting the American captives. The initial efforts of the commissioners in Paris to effect such exchanges had been summarily rebuffed. Lord Stormont, the British Minister in Paris, reflected this royal rigidity in April 1777 when he replied to a plea by Benjamin Franklin for prisoner leniency: “The King’s Minister receives no application from Rebels, unless they come to implore his Majesty’s mercy.”

But a year later events had transpired that undermined this obdurate stance. The Franco–American treaties brought France into the conflict on the rebel side, and John Paul Jones’s forays into the Irish Sea resulted in this continental navy officer depositing almost two hundred British prisoners in France in May 1778.³¹ That same month Franklin renewed his overtures for a cartel through his influential London friend, David Hartley. Subsequent negotiations dragged on until an exchange agreement was finally reached in December 1778. At the end of the following March the first of the cartels was finally carried out, when almost one hundred American captives at Mill embarked for France – an event that was repeated at Forton on July 2, 1779, when another one hundred rebel detainees set sail on a second exchange.³²

Hodgson, who had already worked closely with Hartley on prisoner assistance, now became the chief intermediary between Franklin and the Royal government’s Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners. Hartley’s personal affairs often obliged him to be away from London, but Hodgson’s prestigious mercantile and financial successes apparently gave him an opening to the Commission’s members. Also to his advantage was the fact that Hodgson, unlike Digges or Ridley, was not an expatriate American. (Digges himself admitted to Franklin, on January 10, 1780, “that as an American,” he could not act as an advocate before the Royal Commissioners).³³ In any event, Hodgson noted his go-between status in a letter to Franklin on November 23, 1779, when he mentioned going to the office of the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen seeking “the redress of some grievances under which the Prisoners at Forton labor,” and where he had “much Conversation with them relative to the future proposed exchange.”³⁴

³¹ Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth, April 2, 1777, William B. Clark and William J. Morgan, eds, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 8, 735–36; American commissioners to Lord Stormont, April 2, 1777, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23, 548–49; Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 263–64.

³² Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 122–24, 128–30; Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 275–76.

³³ Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, January 10, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 31, 364–69; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 273; Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 280; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 410.

³⁴ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, November 23, 1779, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 31, 142–44; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 156.

The proposed exchange Hodgson cited in his letter to Franklin noted that the British commissioners were demanding that the Americans agree to future prisoner exchanges on a one-for-one basis, with the exact number of British captives for exchange to be stipulated beforehand. On January 20, 1780, Franklin declared his willingness to comply with Hodgson's declaration that the British commissioners had rejected further cartels until complete details were received from the Americans in Paris.³⁵

Meanwhile, Franklin's position was being undercut by the Duc de Vauguyon, France's ambassador to Holland. Vauguyon had exchanged the British prisoners (left by Captain John Paul Jones) in Holland for French captives in Britain – without the approval of either Franklin or Jones. Although the Americans were consequently unable to employ the Jones prisoners for exchange purposes, Digges noted on January 10, 1780 that he was still pressing his efforts for more cartel agreements. Ten days later, in a letter to the London merchant, Franklin acknowledged Hodgson's attempts to find a solution to the cartel difficulties. Franklin regretfully admitted that of the American-held prisoners in French ports, only about eighty Britons were available for exchange. Hodgson then wrote to Franklin on January 28 that the American internees were "suffering exceedingly" in the harsh winter weather and that the captives' subscription was nearly "exhausted." He added that the commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen claimed that there were then approximately four hundred prisoners in Britain, and that they were willing to exchange any number of them, under supervision, with Franklin's clear assurances that they would be traded for an equal number of British internees held in France.³⁶

Five days later, Franklin wrote David Hartley that the Americans then held more than one hundred captives, and said he hoped the French government would grant him many of the British prisoners they held in lieu of the prisoners whom their ambassador in Holland had previously traced. On February 14, 1780, the American commissioner wrote to Hodgson enclosing a note for £100 for prisoner relief and added that he was prepared immediately to exchange "49 English prisoners" who had been brought to the port of L'orient.³⁷

By the end of February 1780, Franklin felt confident enough to write Hodgson that the cartel was ready to proceed. The ensuing events, however, were a fiasco that proved embarrassing for the American commissioners and

³⁵ Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 8–10, 1779; Franklin to John Paul Jones, December 6, 1779; Franklin to Antoine Sartine, December 20, 1779, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 30, 488–89, vol. 31, 203, 265–66.

³⁶ Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, January 10, 1780; Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, January 30, 1780; Hodgson to Franklin, January 28, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 31, 364–69, 396–98, 420–22; Prelinger, "American Prisoners," 279–81; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 156–57.

³⁷ Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, February 2, 1780; Franklin to William Hodgson, February 14, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 31, 436–38, 483–84.

left Hodgson with considerable explaining to do to British officialdom. Franklin had written to his London merchant friend on February 16 that if a cartel vessel would sail from Plymouth for Morlaix “with 100 prisoners” he was quite prepared to send back “an equal number of English Prisoners here, whether taken by the Americans or the French.”³⁸ Franklin had expected that Antoine de Sartine, France’s Naval Minister, would permit him to fill the necessary complement of British detainees with more than eighty sailors recently taken by the American chartered privateer *Black Prince*. The French Minister, however, intended to use these captured mariners for his own exchange purposes. Consequently, the British cartel vessel *Milford* arrived at Morlaix in early March with 119 rebel inmates from Mill who were freed. The cartel ship returned to England empty, however, except for a receipt for the prisoners brought to Morlaix.³⁹

The Morlaix fiasco marked the effective end of the Anglo–American cartel agreements to exchange prisoners by groups. Hartley wrote to Franklin on March 27, 1780, expressing his hope that the recently bungled episode would not delay further exchanges, but Hodgson was more realistic in his appraisal. In a letter to the American commissioner in Paris the day after Hartley’s communication, Hodgson declared, “The Board [Commissioners] of Sick and Hurt Seamen is disgusted at such an outcome of this business.” On May 12, he added in a message to Franklin that the commissioners had decided not to accept any British prisoners held by France in exchange for Americans. That same month, Digges endorsed the sentiments of the London merchant: “Nothing is expected nor even is another talked of here.” And in August 1780, both Digges and Hodgson seemed to put a final damper on the matter of exchanges when they reported that the Admiralty had refused to exchange any more Americans except “on a man to man basis,” and that in the future they would accept only those captives taken by American ships in Europe.⁴⁰

The Admiralty also rejected Hodgson’s compromise suggestion made in July 1780 that Britain dispatch American captives to France on a credit basis or else send them to New York to be exchanged there. During the following months, groups of British prisoners of war were in fact returned to England. Then, in December 1780, Hodgson wrote Franklin that the commissioners in London – who had apparently credited several American-held prisoners returned to Britain – were asserting that there were still “forty-one prisoners

³⁸ Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, February 26, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 31, 550–52; Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 280.

³⁹ Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 281; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 410–11; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 157–59.

⁴⁰ David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, March 27, 1780; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 28, May 12, August 11, 1780; Thomas Digges to Franklin, May 24, August 18, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 32, 159, 167–68, 327–80, 421–23; vol. 33, 207–11; Prelinger, “American Prisoners,” 281–82; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 159.

due,” and that there could be no further exchanges, “until that debt [from the abortive Morlaix transfer] is paid.”⁴¹

Hodgson continued calling at the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen despite the unfulfilled cartel. His stature among London’s mercantile classes evidently helped facilitate his entry to this governmental body. In Parliament, his labors on behalf of the prisoners had earned him personal contact with the prominent Whig leader Lord Shelburne, a fact that no doubt added to any feelings of self-importance.

Simultaneously, at the request of Franklin, the Coleman Street merchant interceded with London officials on behalf of individual Americans or French friends of Franklin who were having difficulties in the city. Thus, in May 1781, Hodgson notified the American commissioners in Paris that he had advanced “Ten Guineas” to John Trumbull, the son of Connecticut’s wartime governor. Young Trumbull had been in England studying art under the famed artist Benjamin West, but had been unjustly arrested the previous autumn on charges of treason. Similarly, after receiving another petition from Franklin, Hodgson had interceded with the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen during the summer of 1781 seeking the release of other detained men. One of them was Louis-Guillaume Le Veillard, the son and namesake of a friend and neighbor of Franklin in Passy. Young Le Veillard had been a passenger on board the cargo vessel *Lafayette*, which had sailed for America from L’orient at the end of March 1781, and had been captured by Royal Navy warships the following May 4. He was taken to London but was later released and returned to France the following September.⁴²

Three Americans who were also the subjects of Franklin’s petition were Samuel Curson (Courson), Isaac Gouverneur, and John Witherspoon, Jr. Curson and Gouverneur were agents of the Continental Congress. Witherspoon, a surgeon on board a privateer, was the son of the Reverend John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton). These men had been taken when the British captured the Dutch West Indian island of St. Eustatius in February 1781 and had later been brought to London. Hodgson replied to Franklin that these men had been released, and that, despite his encountering some initial

⁴¹ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, December 4, 1780, Papers of Benjamin Franklin (hereafter PBF), Yale University Library; William Hodgson to Franklin, August 4, 1780; Thomas Digges to Franklin, July 12, 1780, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 33, 60–62, 149–50; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 416–19.

⁴² Lewis Einstein, *Divided Loyalties: Americans in England During the War of Independence* (New York, 1948), 361–65; 374–75; Claude A. Lopez, “Benjamin Franklin, Lafayette, and the *Lafayette*,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 102 (1964), 219–22. Veillard’s ship had sailed from L’orient on March 29, 1781. See also Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, July 20, 1781, PBF; Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 421–22; Hodgson to Franklin, May 8, July 8, 1781, PBF. John Trumbull was released from captivity in August 1781. Hodgson to Franklin, September 4, 1781, PBF.

bureaucratic difficulties, he had been able to deliver funds to Gouverneur and Witherspoon.⁴³

Even before William Hodgson dispensed the funds to Witherspoon and Gouverneur, the London merchant became in effect the principal supervisor of the prisoner relief funds, due primarily to his laborious work on behalf of the rebel detainees, and also because of his strong prewar friendships with several Americans living in London. Digges too had shown an early concern for the captives, and had taken risks in hiding many of the men who had escaped and made their way to London. However, Digges was often away from London on secretive matters, while Hodgson was much more tied to the City by his work.⁴⁴ In 1781 a series of discomfiting events and unauthorized actions led to Digges's disgrace, which in turn made Hodgson even more indispensable to the welfare of the prisoners.

Digges, who had ordinarily kept up his regular correspondence with Benjamin Franklin using several different aliases, had been slow in replying to a letter sent by the American commissioner on December 5, 1780, which contained £48 for Digges to add to the prisoners' allowance. The communication had also requested that Digges submit an accounting to the American commissioners in Paris listing the monies he had already expended on the captives.⁴⁵ Digges did not reply to this letter until December 29 when he wrote Franklin only that he had complied with the request to add the £48 to the prisoners' allowance. On the matter of his accounting for monies already dispensed to the captives, he replied with equivocation: "My private accts. [accounts] cannot be got for some days without great inconvenience, I being generally distant from all papers, books, &c." The next month Digges drew £230 from Ferdinand Grand, the commissioners' French banker, who in turn stated on February 23, 1781 that he had not received any accounting from Digges either. Thirteen days later, Franklin, by now extremely concerned about the matter, wrote Digges demanding an immediate accounting. Then, on March 20, 1781, Hodgson confirmed Franklin's growing doubts when he wrote the American commissioner that he had been "deceived most egregiously," and that no monies had been paid out to the distributing agents at either Forton or Mill.⁴⁶

⁴³ Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians, 1769–1775: A Biographical Dictionary*, 3 vols (Princeton, NJ, 1987), vol. 2, 355–56; Ronald Hurst, *The Golden Rock, An Episode of the War of Independence* (Annapolis, MD, 1996), viii, 56, 65, 75, 110–28, 133, 167, 172, 220–22; Barbara Tuchman, *The First Salute: A View of the American Revolution* (New York, 1988), 93–107; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, August 8, September 8, 1781, PBF.

⁴⁴ Elias and Finch, *Letters of Thomas Attwood Digges*, xliii–xliv, i–liv; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 424–25; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 273.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Digges, December 5, 1780, PBF; Elias and Finch, *Letters of Thomas Attwood Digges*, 1–11; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 424.

⁴⁶ Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, December 29, 1780, PBF; Elias and Finch, *Letters*

Upon receipt of Hodgson's letter exposing the peculations of Digges, Franklin reacted with immediate indignation, replying to Hodgson on April 1, 1781, "What is he who can break his Trust by robbing a poor man and a Prisoner of eighteen Pence given charitably for his Relief, and repeat that Crime as often as there are Weeks in a Winter. . . . If such a Fellow is not damn'd, it is not worth while to keep a Devil." But even before this letter was written, Digges had gone into hiding and would not resurface until the beginning of the following year. Three weeks later, Franklin sent Hodgson a power of attorney to recover any missing funds, and formally made the Coleman Street merchant his principal representative on all matters involving the American prisoners.⁴⁷ Hodgson showed similar antipathy toward Digges when he wrote to Franklin on April 12 condemning the "villany [sic]" and malfeasance of the Marylander. The following June 29, Hodgson wrote Franklin that he had received a message from Digges who said he intended to go to Passy "to justify himself" to the American commissioner. Franklin replied skeptically, "I have not as much Faith in Digges coming here as I have in his going to Hell!" The next month Hodgson gave further indications of Digges's untrustworthiness when he made note of a report of the Marylander being arrested in Bath on charges of fraud.⁴⁸

Hodgson, who had aided Franklin in exposing Digges, now endeavored to make good on creditors' bills totaling over £330 for assistance to the prisoners. Franklin also entrusted his London relief supervisor with new allotments to the prisoner agents at Forton and Mill. In November 1781, he sent Hodgson £400 to assist the growing numbers of detainees who were facing the oncoming winter.⁴⁹ The Coleman Street merchant worked diligently and responsibly in distributing these funds, which included an extra allowance for officers who required special assistance. Hodgson even made a special journey to Forton about the beginning of June 1782, where he reassured the restive American captives, and, subsequently, reported to Benjamin Franklin about prison conditions. At the request of the American commissioner, he also lobbied that same year for the release of Henry Laurens of South Carolina. Laurens, a former president of the Continental Congress, had been captured on a voyage to Europe, and, beginning in October 1780, incarcerated in the Tower of

of Thomas Attwood Digges, 343–45; Franklin to Francis Bowens, January 12, 1781, Franklin to Ferdinand Grand, February 23, 1781, Franklin to Thomas Digges, March 8, 1781, Franklin to William Hodgson, March 8, 1781, Hodgson to Franklin, March 28, 1781, PBF; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 425–26.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, April 25, 1781, PBF; Prelinger, "American Prisoners," 288–90; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 426–27.

⁴⁸ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, April 12, June 29, July 20, 1781, Franklin to Hodgson, July 8, 1781, PBF; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 429–30.

⁴⁹ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, July 20, September 4, 1781, Franklin to Hodgson, July 17, August 8, November 19, 1781, PBF; Prelinger, "Franklin and the Prisoners of War," 289; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 431.

London until he was released late the following year. Personal notations and communications written by the South Carolinian during his confinement cite the energetic efforts of William Hodgson and other Britons in providing for his needs and helping to effect his discharge. (Laurens's secretary, Moses Young, was sent to Forton Gaol, from which he subsequently escaped and reached safety in France.) Then, in March 1782, the Royal government finally officially recognized the American internees as prisoners of war, and a year later the last of them were released from captivity.⁵⁰ By that time, Hodgson had shown himself deserving of proper recognition from the United States.

Aside from his exertions on behalf of the American prisoners, Hodgson offered several interesting comments to Benjamin Franklin about events occurring in Britain during the last years of the American Revolution. Some of his remarks included innocuous titbits about fellow members of the Club of Thirteen, to which Franklin occasionally sent small sums. More revealing, however, were the personal observations that the London merchant made about the conflict. These remarks clearly reflect the strong attachments he had formed for the American cause. Thus, on March 10, 1780, after noting the progress of prisoner relief efforts, he declared to Franklin, "I feel as much as any American in this struggle, for it has long been a settled principle in my Breast that English and American Liberty must stand or fall together." Later that year he reaffirmed his support for American "Liberty, Justice, and Humanity," despite what he termed "severe Obloquy and Reproach" made against him.⁵¹ The "severe" reproofs that Hodgson received should not have been unexpected – especially if they emanated from entrenched bureaucrats of the North Ministry with whom he had any dealings. Expounding Whig political sentiments while vigorously pursuing efforts to assist imprisoned colonial insurgents quite likely made him appear to Tory ideologues as a disloyal subject of the Crown.

Throughout 1781, as Hodgson assumed full responsibility for supervising prisoner assistance in England, he also informed Franklin of the increasing dissatisfaction in Britain over the course of the war. This anti-government sentiment was encouraged by the arrival of news in December of General Cornwallis's disastrous defeat at Yorktown. This decisive British calamity evidently galvanized William Hodgson to seek a new capacity when he tried unsuccessfully to obtain an appointment as one of his nation's commissioners in any upcoming peace negotiations. In early 1782, the London merchant joyfully noted the dramatic governmental changes in Britain and the

⁵⁰ David R. Chestnut, C. James Taylor, *et al.*, eds, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, (Columbia, SC, 2000), vol. 15, 318–19, 385, 415n, 416–17; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, June 17, 1782, PBF.

⁵¹ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, 10 March, 20 September, 18 December, 1780, Franklin to Hodgson, June 19, October 9, 1780, PBF; Prelinger, "American Prisoners," 289; Clark, "Thomas Digges," 431.

anticipated moves toward peace. On March 22, he wrote excitedly to his friend in France, “I shall now communicate to you the great Revolution that has happened in the Administration of the Country, there is a total Change, the whole of the Old Ministry, so hostile and inimical to America are to retire, and the Government is to be lodged in the hands of those who have ever reprobated the American War and the principles upon which it was carried on.” Peace negotiations commenced in Paris the following month, but it was not until September 3, 1783 that a treaty was formally signed.⁵²

While the lengthy negotiations in Paris dragged on, the correspondence between Hodgson and Franklin included several matters related to the work of the peacemakers. The communications reveal that during this period Hodgson was continuing his role as an intermediary. He helped oversee the release of the last groups of interned rebel captives in Britain and helped arrange their repatriation to either the United States or the Continent. British officials, aware of Hodgson’s earlier efforts in helping effect Henry Laurens’s release from the Tower of London (December 1781) at Franklin’s behest, now engaged the London merchant as a go-between. In this regard he contacted the American negotiators in Paris about speeding the release of captured British officers in America, including Brigadier General Charles O’Hara, Colonels Banastre Tarleton, and John Simcoe.⁵³

More germane to the discussions in Paris was Hodgson’s confidence about a successful outcome of the diplomatic negotiations. Thus, on May 10, 1782, he wrote Franklin not to doubt that “the peace party is the strongest [in Parliament],” and that “every reasonable concession will be made by them.” On July 13, he noted the death of the conciliatory leader, Lord Rockingham, but added that he did not feel it would have a negative effect on the negotiations. Six days later he wrote that Lord Shelburne, new head of the Peace Ministry, had told him unreservedly that “American independence must be admitted in the most unequivocal Manner.”⁵⁴ Afterward, following a brief visit to Paris in August, Hodgson reasserted Shelburne’s resolve, and the following October urged Franklin to capitalize on the negotiations, “untill [sic] you have compleated [sic] the great and glorious work which is to teach future

⁵² Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 435–37; Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 160–74; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 22, 1783, PBF. For accountings of expenses by William Hodgson for prisoners during this period, see Hodgson to Franklin, January 15, May 10, June 15, 1782. William Hodgson accounts with Benjamin Franklin, July 26, 1782; Benjamin Franklin accounts with William Hodgson, October 24, 1783, PBF.

⁵³ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 22, April 9, 11, May 10, June 7, 13, July 19; October 14, November 14, December 12, 1782, January 8, 1783, Franklin to Hodgson, December 26, 1781, March 31, April 13, April 26, May 27, 1782, PBF; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 200–06; Wallace, *Henry Laurens*, 387–89.

⁵⁴ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, May 10, 13, 19, July 19, 1782, PBF.

Kings and ministers that the Liberties and Property of Mankind are not to be trifled with for their sport and amusement.” In November 1782, the British government at last recognized American independence, and the following January 26, Hodgson, while admitting that there were still obstacles ahead, nonetheless congratulated his American friend on “the happy Issue to the horrors of War, which in my opinion has concluded in such a measure as to be a Blessing to the human Race, and to yourself, nothing could be more glorious and honorable.”⁵⁵

In the Paris bargaining, Hodgson proved too optimistic on one issue: the recovery of postwar commercial relations between Great Britain and the United States and his own mercantile opportunities within such a revival. No evidence supports the idea that during the war he personally sheltered escaped prisoners or engaged in illegal trade with the rebelling states. (This fact does not obviate the possibility that he may have participated covertly in such activities.) On March 20, 1781, he had in fact written to Franklin that his commercial enterprises “had Suffered much by the War.” But on January 26, 1783, he stated to his friend that “War being over, Commercial Ideas occupy my Mind.” Noting his anticipation that Anglo–American trading relations would soon be normalized, and adding that those who first got to the newly opened markets would profit considerably, Hodgson mentioned that he desired a safe pass for a ship he owned that was ready to sail for America.⁵⁶

On this matter, however, Franklin was obliged to dispel his friend’s economic aspirations. The American commissioner bluntly replied to Hodgson during February 1783 that Parliament would not “do away with every Hostile Act and permit American Vessels to come in [to Britain] without any Treaty.” He also pointed out to Hodgson, “you know you have acts of Parliament forbidding you to trade with us, and our people have Acts of Congress forbidding all commerce with you.” Hodgson continued to write Franklin during that year, expecting that Britain would agree to a complete restoration of commercial relations with the United States, but his hopes proved ephemeral.⁵⁷

Hodgson’s beneficent activities were made known to officials within the American government in addition to the American commissioners in Paris. One such individual was the influential Henry Laurens who, on his return trip to America following his release from internment in Britain, dispatched a letter from Amsterdam on May 30–31, 1782 to John Hancock, former President of the Continental Congress. In it, Laurens praised Hodgson, along

⁵⁵ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, August 26, October 14, 1782, January 26, 1783, PBF; Morris, *Peacemakers*, 337, 381–82; Dull, *Diplomatic History*, 150–51.

⁵⁶ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 20, 1781, January 26, 1783, PBF.

⁵⁷ Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, February 2, March 9, 1783, Hodgson to Franklin, February 25, March 6, 25, April 18, October 30, 1783, PBF. For commercial aspects of the Treaty of Paris, September 1783, see Morris, *Peacemakers*, 350, 429–33; Dull, *Diplomatic History*, 160–63.

with Edmund Burke, and Benjamin Vaughan, a close friend of Benjamin Franklin, for showing special concern for him during his incarceration.⁵⁸ Franklin also wrote on separate occasions to Robert R. Livingston, head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and to Thomas Mifflin, then President of the Continental Congress, lauding the indefatigable work of his British friend in aiding the American captives. For his part, Hodgson wrote with satisfaction to Charles Thomson, Secretary of the Congress, that he was “very happy that [he] had at least been instrumental in bringing the matter [prisoner exchanges] to a conclusion.” In this letter, the London merchant also enclosed proposed terms for the final prisoner exchanges. Congress, for its part, showed its intention to proffer fair reimbursement to Hodgson when Joseph Nourse, Registrar of the Treasury, approved the payment (May 31, 1783) of 40,493.9 livres to him as reimbursement for his many expenses in handling prisoner affairs.⁵⁹

The beginning of peace negotiations in Paris, along with the move to accomplish the release of the remaining American prisoners in Britain, served only to continue and heighten the admiration Hodgson felt for Franklin. While, as previously noted, both men had been members of the London Club of Thirteen prior to the war, it was the American commissioner’s prominent role in the ensuing conflict and the two men’s mutual co-operation in aiding the American prisoners that seem to have expanded the London merchant’s veneration of Franklin. Hodgson possibly envisaged greater commercial opportunities in the postwar years through his connection with Franklin.⁶⁰ But in 1782, the merchant was still doing well in his own commercial enterprises and evidently could continue to do so without relying solely on trading transactions with the United States. Hence the request that he made to his American friend in July 1782, after his brief trip to Paris, seems a genuine reflection of the lofty respect he held for Franklin:

The immediate business of our Correspondence having now in a great measure subsided, I may not be so happy in the frequent reception of your letters, but I shall presume so far upon your Friendship, as to rest in your Memory on every occasion that offers, reassuring you that it will give me the utmost Satisfaction on all

⁵⁸ Henry Laurens to John Hancock, May 30–31, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M 247, r 96, i 142), National Archives and Records Center, Chicago; Wallace, *Henry Laurens*, 388–93.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Franklin to Robert R. Livingston, June 29, 1782, Franklin to Thomas Mifflin, December 26, 1783, PBF; William Hodgson to Charles Thompson, June 6, 1782, William Hodgson Account for 1780–82, Ferdinand Grand Account for 1781, November 18, 1782, Grand Account for 1782–83, May 31, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress (m 247, r 96, i 78, r 155, i 142, r 155, i 142, r 156, i 144), pp. 162–70. Ferdinand Grand was Benjamin Franklin’s banker in Paris and Amsterdam; see *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23, 210n.

⁶⁰ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, April 9, 13, July 18, October 26, December 12, 1782, PBF; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 49–60, 245–47, 268–78.

Occasions if I can be the least use to your Friendship; and your Countrymen. There is one wish My Mind has long entertained which if you wou'd be kind enough to indulge me in, I should be very happy, it is this – that you wou'd be pleased to sit for your Picture to one of the best Painters in France, on my Account [at my expense], that I may with rapture tell my Children, I had the Honour, in some degree to enjoy the Friendship of a Man of whom the World thought and think so highly, if you can spare leisure, I hope you will not refuse me. I am with the most sincere regard, Dear Sir Yours most Respectfully,

William Hodgson⁶¹

The signing of the Paris Peace Accords in September 1783 added to Hodgson's expectations that he might benefit personally in postwar Anglo–American dealings. True, earlier that year, Franklin had undercut as being too premature his English friend's plans to send a trading vessel to America. But with the hostilities officially concluded, Hodgson continued to anticipate an imminent relaxation of British restrictions on American trade. His financial circumstances had appeared bright during the years of the conflict itself, so it was perhaps natural to assume that gaining an early entry into any reopened transatlantic trade could enhance his existing fortune. He also seemed to conclude that his decade-old friendship with Franklin and his numerous pro-American actions would earn him some form of recompense from the emergent United States government. Even after the final discharge of the captives in early 1782, Hodgson had acted upon requests from various American officials to try to obtain the release of their nation's commercial ships that had been impounded in British or Irish seaports.⁶² Appreciation for all his labors must have seemed imminent when Franklin wrote to him December 1783, declaring, "I shall not fail to recommend my Friend [Hodgson] for the [London] Consulship, being with unalterable Esteem and Affection." Franklin followed up this pledge two weeks later with a letter to his friend Thomas Mifflin, President of Congress. The communication offered a hearty endorsement for the London merchant:

If the Congress should think it fit to have a Consul for the United States in London, and do not appoint one of our Country to that office, I beg leave to mention the Merits of Mr. William Hodgson, a Merchant of that City, who has been a zealous Friend of America, [and] was a principal Promoter of the Subscription for the Relief of American Prisoners, and Chairman of the Committee for Dispensing the Money raised by that Subscription. He also took the Trouble of applying the Monies I furnished him with, when the Subscription was exhausted; and [he] consistently

⁶¹ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, July 13, 1782, PBF.

⁶² William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 6, 29, April 18, October 30, 1783, January 23, March 17, 1784; Samuel Curson and Isaac Gouverneur to Benjamin Franklin, December 20, 1783; Thomas Barclay to William Temple Franklin, December 16, 1783; Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Mifflin, December 26, 1783, PBF.

assisted with all the Negotiations I had with British Ministers in their [the prisoners'] Favour, wherein he generally succeeded, being a Man of Weight and Credit, very active, and much esteemed for his Probity and Integrity. These Services continued steadily during the Whole War, and seem to entitle him to the favourable notice of Congress, when any Occasion offers of doing him Service or Pleasure.⁶³

Franklin's letter, which in effect recommended Hodgson for the consulship, was probably a welcome Christmas present to the London merchant. An appointment as the American consul in the British capital – even if it paid nothing – could open innumerable future commercial enterprises for him. It might also bring with it the attention and admiration of many Britons, in particular those London tradesmen who had very sizable claims for pre-Revolutionary war debts and would quite likely seek his favor. Unfortunately, even Franklin's strong recommendation and the laudatory endorsements added by Thomas Barclay, an American agent in France, did not persuade the United States government. On March 16, 1784, the Confederation Congress asked the American representatives in France to convey their gratitude to Hodgson for his "benevolent attention to the Citizens of these United States who were Prisoners in Great Britain during the late War," but their resolution stated explicitly "That it is inconsistent with the interest of the United States to appoint any person not a Citizen to the Office of Minister, *chargé des affaires*, Consul, Vice Consul, or to any other Civil Department of a foreign Country."⁶⁴

The Congressional resolution was dispatched to the American representatives in Paris who apparently passed it on to appropriate individuals in Great Britain. Hodgson probably received word of it during the late spring of 1784. There is no extant record of his response to the disheartening rejection. The thanks of the United States Congress presumably meant little to Hodgson who had such great expectations for an appointment as United States consul in London. The suspicion also exists that the Coleman Street merchant may have prematurely bragged to his fellow businessmen in the City that this prestigious position was assured, only to suffer considerable and continuing humiliation when it was denied to him. For a self-made man with his hard-won accomplishments, this must also have made the disapproval an even more bitter pill to swallow. In addition, while his tragic suicide did not occur until the following October, the irrevocable path toward his lamentable end quite possibly commenced with this unpalatable rejection.

⁶³ Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, December 10, 1783; Franklin to Thomas Mifflin, December 26, 1783, PBF.

⁶⁴ Gallard Hunt, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*. Vol. 26: January 1–May 10, 1784 (Washington, DC, 1928), 144; The United States in Congress Assembled to Benjamin Franklin, March 16, 1784, PBF (where Hodgson's name is mistakenly spelled Hodgden); Katherine A. Kellock, "London Merchants and the Pre-1776 American Debts," *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 1 (1974), 109–49.

There were, of course, other motivations that combined to impel Hodgson to take his own life, and quite likely a full clarification will never be made. In reporting the calamitous event, the *Political Magazine* claimed that Hodgson was beset by other serious concerns and had failed to receive debt payments from America, a misfortune followed by very significant losses from stock market speculations. Michael MacDonald's recent study, *Sleepless Souls, Suicide in Early Modern England* (1990), points out that business failures in the volatile mercantile environment of Britain during this period became a prime motivation for individuals to take their own lives.⁶⁵ Hodgson, who had become so prosperous in his earlier commercial career – so much so that he could purchase a country home and offer to pay the expenses for a formal portrait of Benjamin Franklin – was psychologically unprepared to accept not only the loss of the London consulship, but also a very considerable portion of his fortune. Tragic parallels to this situation could be noted among those American stock market speculators who self-destructed during the autumn of 1929. Similarly, American literature contains numerous examples of men – seemingly content, prosperous, and successful – who suddenly and unexpectedly took their own lives. Edwin Arlington Robinson's classic poem, "Richard Cory," offers but one of many examples of such flawed individuals.

No documentation in the Benjamin Franklin papers offers clues to Hodgson's suicidal intentions. The London merchant's last extant letter to the American commissioner in Paris (March 17, 1784) contains no indication of any personal problems or stress. A brief message, written sometime in September or early October 1784, was sent by Edward Bancroft, who had once acted briefly as an unofficial secretary to the Paris commissioners, to William Temple Franklin, grandson of Benjamin Franklin. Both men then lived in London, and the communication simply instructed Franklin that "any commands you have for me in London may be addressed to the care of Mr. William Hodgson."⁶⁶ Another dispatch from Bancroft to William Temple Franklin (with the notation of only "Friday morning"), also apparently sent in September or October 1784, is slightly longer in content. Bancroft asked Franklin to read a letter he had received from Mary Hodgson and suggested that the two men travel together to the Hodgson "country house (at Chigwell Row Essex) about 12 miles from town on Saturday afternoon as she proposes, or not." Perhaps Mary Hodgson was becoming increasingly desperate about her husband's mental state; the wording does not disclose this possibility or even if her husband was still alive. In any event, Dr. Richard Price, a dissenting clergyman and prominent pro-American Englishman, made no mention of the London merchant's mental state in a letter to William Temple Franklin

⁶⁵ MacDonald, *Sleepless Souls*, 268–74, 327–28.

⁶⁶ Edward Bancroft to William Temple Franklin, September/October 1784, PBF; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 17, 1784, PBF; Dybikowski, *On Burning Ground*, 274.

in early October, and, two days after Hodgson's suicide, Franklin offered no mention of the shocking event in a letter to his grandfather in France.⁶⁷

But Hodgson's suicide was given coverage in British publications. Newspapers in England noted the event, although they offered no editorial comment. This was not the case for the *Political Magazine*, which appeared to take pleasure in any story that made the United States, its inhabitants, and its supporters look unappealing. The publication declared that Hodgson's death should serve as a warning to Britons "who possess any share of common sense and prudence, that there are many bad customers on the other side of the Atlantic." It added that British merchants such as Hodgson "Must have had great faith in miracles to suppose that those who were so lately fraudulent debtors and cruel and perjured rebels, would immediately be converted into honest men and fair and opulent dealers." The same issue of this publication added other negative reports and comments that dealt with the United States. Such acrimonious anti-American pronouncements were not uncommon at this time, and it was not until the Jay Treaty of 1794 that several of the divisive issues between the two nations were resolved.⁶⁸

There were no replies printed in the *Political Magazine* that took issue with its coverage of Hodgson's demise. There are also few extant references to the London merchant following his suicide. One such example, however, is a short, provocative message sent to William Temple Franklin from Edward Bancroft with a date showing only 1784, though it was probably penned after Hodgson's death. Written as Bancroft was returning from France, the note states that he "will take care to deliver the Packet for Mrs. H[odgson] immediately upon my arrival" in London. In April 1785, Benjamin Franklin instructed Jonathan Williams, an American agent (and his grand nephew) staying in England, "to apply to the executors of Mr. Hodgson for the Ballance [*sic*] that appears due to me on his Books. Dr. Bancroft can inform you where they are." Williams replied to Franklin on May 14, informing him, "I find you must come in for your dividend with Mr. Hodgson's Creditors. I believe it will be necessary to send a Power of Attorney to somebody here to receive these Dividends and give a discharge as they are paid." (It is possible that Hodgson had not reimbursed Franklin for small sums that were still remaining from the prisoner relief fund.)⁶⁹

The last extant mention of the Hodgson family in Benjamin Franklin's correspondence occurred on July 21, 1785. Prior to his departure for America, the elderly American commissioner had written to John Paul Jones, the United States naval hero who was then staying in Le Havre, that he had dispatched

⁶⁷ Edward Bancroft to William Temple Franklin, September/October 1784, PBF; Richard Price to William Temple Franklin, October 11, 1784, PBF.

⁶⁸ *Political Magazine* (October 1784), 244.

⁶⁹ Edward Bancroft to William Temple Franklin [1784]; Benjamin Franklin to Jonathan Williams, April 25, 1785, PBF.

a letter to a “Mr. Hodgson” seeking “information about coverage costs for [American] ships sailing to Canada.” Most likely, this “Mr. Hodgson” was related to William Hodgson – perhaps a son.⁷⁰

For all of his extensive and arduous labors on behalf of the United States, Hodgson received little in return compared to other British contemporaries. The pro-American Dr. Richard Price received an honorary doctorate from Yale College for his work. The Reverend Thomas Wren, who distributed relief funds to Americans incarcerated at Forton Gaol, received an honorary doctorate from the College of New Jersey. Reuben Harvey, a Quaker merchant from Cork City, Ireland, who aided American sailors detained in nearby Kinsale, received special recognition from Congress and obtained from George Washington a miniature of the General.⁷¹ Even the roguish Thomas Digges benefitted during the postwar years. During the 1790s, he was employed by influential Americans to perform legal tasks in Britain. Later in the decade he returned to Maryland upon inheriting a substantial family homestead along the Potomac River. There he received the honor of invitations to several receptions at the nearby Mount Vernon Estate of President Washington. And several Britons who helped the American cause also received personal welcomes in the United States after the war.⁷²

There were additional negative aftermaths that affected the career and renown of Hodgson. The United States government never provided any financial assistance to his family or his descendants. It was undeniable that, mixed in with the British merchant’s altruistic motivations and apparent political empathy, were his own materialistic ambitions. But, in the same vein, history has disclosed many colonial Americans, honored and rewarded for their patriot services, who had been similarly impelled by self-consideration. His key role serving as the intermediary in Britain for imprisoned Americans in that country and his other supportive actions have never been thoroughly detailed. And adding insult to such slights, some later American historians have even confused him with an English centenarian who bore the same name, though evidently was not closely related to him. The original and impressive portrait of Benjamin Franklin that Hodgson had commissioned in Paris during 1782 now hangs in the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and a copy may be viewed at the Papers of Benjamin Franklin at Yale University’s Sterling Memorial Library; yet it was only recently that the staffs at both locales were informed of the significant connection of this particular work to Johann

⁷⁰ Franklin to John Paul Jones, July 21, 1785; Jonathan Williams to Franklin, May 14, 1785, PBF.

⁷¹ Sheldon S. Cohen, “Reuben Harvey, Irish Friend of the American Revolution,” *Quaker History*, 88 (1999), 22–39; *General Catalogue of Princeton University, 1746–1906* (Princeton, NJ, 1908), 399–400; *Catalogue of the Officers and Graduates of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, 1701–1924* (New Haven, 1924), 574.

⁷² Clark, “Thomas Digges,” 436–38; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 211.

Zoffany's painting depicting the Coleman Street merchant and his family.⁷³ For all of this, William Hodgson's noteworthy deeds in support of a largely unappreciative nation – a nation that ironically had played a role in his tragic and sudden death – do call for some form of posthumous credit and elaboration. This account will provide some of the recognition he deserves.

⁷³ Clark, "Thomas Digges," 390n; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 211.

Image not available

Plate 3.1 The Reverend Thomas Wren, c. 1725–1787, Minister of the High Street Chapel, Portsmouth

Thomas Wren

Portsmouth's patron of American liberty

The German bombers flew in a series of massed wave attacks against Portsmouth, England, on Friday evening, January 10, 1941, and again the following morning. According to one report specially cabled to the *New York Times*, the Nazi raiders dropped “many hundreds of explosive and incendiary bombs that killed or injured many civilians, damaged or destroyed six churches, several movie theaters, stores and houses, and rendered many persons homeless.”¹ One of Portsmouth's destroyed churches was High Street's venerable John Pounds Memorial Chapel, founded by Presbyterians, but since the early nineteenth century a Unitarian house of worship. Among the chapel ruins was a monument which had displayed this 150-year-old epitaph:

Thomas Wren DD
 Born in Keswick
 In the County of Cumberland
 Died October the 30th, 1787: aged 63 years
 Distinguished for sound judgement
 Useful learning, and unaffected piety:
 He was no less eminent
 For the peculiar virtues of the Christian profession
 Meekness of spirit, gentleness of manner,
 And an active and universal benevolence,
 The congregation of Protestant dissenters
 Assembling in this place,
 Where he preached for more than thirty years,
 And was a most faithful and affectionate pastor,
 In testimony of his services and their own
 gratitudes,
 Have erected this monument to his memory.²

¹ *New York Times*, January 12, 1941, p. 9.

² William G. Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth* (Portsmouth, 1900), 291–99; William G. Hutchinson, *The History of the County of Cumberland*, reprint edn (London, 1974), 225.

Thomas Wren may have been illustrious to his communicants who erected the monument, but his name has not been in the forefront of either the histories of Portsmouth or of his native Cumberland. Similarly, American histories have been singularly neglectful of his mention despite the fact that this mild, unpretentious Presbyterian minister rendered very noteworthy services during the United States' long struggle for independence. Today his monument, unlike his High Street Chapel, remains unrestored, which reflects the undeserved obscurity of the man and his work. So perhaps it is time that the character and career of the little publicized Thomas Wren deserves elaboration for Britons and Americans alike.

Thomas Wren (no relation to Sir Christopher Wren) was born, reportedly in the autumn of 1725, in the tiny hamlet of Grange, four miles south of the old market town of Keswick in England's Lake District, famed for its rustic beauty and breathtaking scenery of mountains, waterfalls, lakes, and lush valleys. Thomas Gray's lucid and poetic *Journal of the Lakes* (1769) had first popularized the loveliness of Cumberland's scenic vistas. This excerpt from his writing offers a fine portrayal of the immediate vicinity of Wren's youth:

1. "Round Derwent Water"

Met a civil young farmer overseeing his reapers (for it is oat-harvest here) who conducted us to a neat white house in the village of Grange, which is built on a rising ground in the midst of a valley. Round it the mountains form an awful amphitheatre, and through it obliquely runs the Derwent clear as glass, and showing under its bridge every trout that passes. Beside the village rises a round eminence of rock, covered entirely with old trees, and over that more proudly towers Castle-crag, invested also with wood on its sides, and bearing on its naked top some traces of a fort said to be Roman. By the side of this hill, which almost blocks up the way, the valley turns to the left and contracts its dimensions, till there is hardly any road but the rocky bed of the river. The woods of the mountains increases and their summits grow loftier to the eye, and of more fantastic forms; among them appears Eagle's Cliff, Dove's Nest, Whitedale Pike, etc., celebrated names in the annals of Keswick. The dale opens about four miles higher till you come to Seathwaite (where lies the way mounting the hills to the right, that leads to the Waddmines); all farther access is here barred to prying mortals, only there is a little path winding over the Fells, and for some weeks in the year passable to the dalesmen; but the mountains know well, that these innocent people will not reveal the mysteries of their ancient kingdom, the reign of Chaos and old Night.³

Later British authors, including William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Robert Southey, and Beatrix Potter, were similarly inspired by its majestic landscapes. Grange, said to have been founded about 1396 as a religious site,

³ Thomas Gray, "Round Derwent Water," in Walter and Clare Jerrold, *Cumberland in Prose and Verse* (London, 1930), 36–37.

is located in Borrowdale, called by many the loveliest valley in Britain.⁴ The village consisted of about a dozen small stone homes and farmhouses, near the Keswick road and just beyond a double-humped stone bridge that spans the narrow River Derwent Water. Sheep raising was the predominant agrarian pursuit in the region at the time of Wren's birth, and even today, Grange bears many of its eighteenth-century features despite the influx of campers, climbers and other modern characteristics.⁵

The name "Wren" was quite common in Cumberland by the eighteenth century. Although two branches of the family are mentioned in the Crosthwaite Parish registers, Thomas Wren's exact ancestry has not been ascertained. It is recorded, however, that his father Timothy was from Pietnest in Borrowdale and probably descended from the Wrens of Castlerigg, a family of standing during the Commonwealth period. It is also recorded that this Timothy Wren was married to one Judith Banck (Banks) of Rigsby in Borrowdale on December 22, 1716. The married couple settled in Grange where Thomas (1725) and his elder brother Timothy (c. 1720) were born.⁶

Thomas Wren's formal schooling commenced in the Crosthwaite Parish school in Keswick. The school (still in operation) stood close by the twelfth-century Crosthwaite Parish Church of St. Kentigern. The parish school, described as comprising one large classroom with an attached teacher residence, was under the control of the local Church of England vicar, then the Reverend Thomas Christian. (Christian had kinship ties to the famed Fletcher Christian who later in the eighteenth century served on *H.M.S. Bounty*.) Nevertheless, such institutions offered their primary-level instruction not only to Anglican sons and daughters, but also to children of dissenters like the Wrens.⁷

In September 1734 Judith Wren died and was buried in St. Kentigern's graveyard, also near the parish school. After his mother's death, young Thomas

⁴ Thomas Gray, *Journal of the Lakes* (London, 1769); Roy Millward and Adrian Robinson, *The Lake District* (London, 1963), 226, 294–95; W.G. Collingwood, "The Home of the Derwentwater Family," *Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Transactions*, new ser., IV (1904), 282–84; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224.

⁵ William Parson and William White, *A Directory and Gazetteer of Cumberland and Westmorland* (London, 1829), 329; H.A. Rice, *Where Rise The Mountains: A Cumberland Miscellany* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1969), 294; C.M.L. Bough and O.P. Jones, *A Short Economic and Social History of the Lake Counties, 1500–1830* (Manchester, 1961), 8.

⁶ Henry Brierly and Francis Haswell, *The Registers of Crosthwaite, III, Births and Marriages, 1670–1812* (Penrith, 1930), 251; *Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Transactions*, old. ser. (1876), vol. II, 237, 240, 241, 257; Collingwood, *Transactions*, new ser. (1904), vol. IV, 282–84; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224.

⁷ Tom Wilson, *The History and Chronicles of Crosthwaite Old School* (Keswick, 1949), 1–35; Joseph Nicholson and Richard Barnes, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Cumberland* (London, 1777), vol. II, 42. In 1721 one Grace Wren had willed money in trust to aid poor children attending the school. William Whelan, *The History and Topography of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmorland* (London, 1860), 338–43.

was evidently sent for his secondary school education to St. Bee's, a grammar school established during Queen Elizabeth I's reign in Whitehaven on the rugged Cumberland coast. During or shortly following Wren's classical studies at St Bee's, his father remarried, and the familial responsibilities for Thomas and a younger sister Sarah evidently devolved upon his elder brother Timothy.⁸

Apparently, Thomas Wren completed his secondary schooling at St. Bee's during the early 1740s, and with his brother Timothy's financial assistance, he then journeyed to London where he entered a dissenting academy directed by the Reverend David Jennings and Dr. Morton Savage. These dissenting academies had been founded principally to offer higher education for students planning to enter the dissenting Protestant ministry, and during much of the eighteenth century they reportedly provided "far better teaching" and had a "broader curriculum" than the two existing English universities. The Jennings and Savage academy was particularly prominent for its advanced curriculum, so that after successfully completing the school's program and being examined, Thomas Wren was ordained to the regular Presbyterian ministry in 1753.⁹

Like many newly ordained dissenter ministers of the period, the Reverend Thomas Wren preached at several locales in England before obtaining a permanent settlement. His first position came as an assistant to the Reverend Joseph Evans at Brentwood in Essex. Afterwards, in December 1753, he moved on to the market town of Colchester, also in Essex, where he preached for almost a year. He also occupied pulpits in Hampstead and London's Old Jury (Jewry) Chapel, and in 1754 he was a Presbyterian cleric for several months in the small market town of Diss. Within this Norfolk community, noted for its textile industry, Wren reportedly was offered a permanent settlement. He declined the entreaties of his congregation and went to Portsmouth in June 1756. As for Portsmouth itself when Wren arrived, almost all of the inhabitants, numbering more than ten thousand, lived within a fortified portion of the marsh-bordered Portsea Island. Although a "Guide" to the town published later in the mid-1770s boasted that the recently paved main streets added to its lustre as "one of the most placid, neat, and healthy towns in the kingdom," historians have noted that the Portsmouth's residents led a

⁸ William Jackson, *Papers or Pedigrees Mainly Relating to Cumberland and Westmorland* (London, 1892), 186–243; Whelan, *History and Topography*, 430–32; Brierly and Haswell, *Registers of Crosthwaite Deaths*, vol. IV, 67. The Register also notes the deaths of two children of Timothy Wren in February and March 1728, 56–7. Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224. Apparently, Wren studied at St. Bee's during the headmastership (1738–55) of Alan Fisher. Letter to author from M.T. Thyne, Headmaster, St. Bee's School, October 23, 1987. My thanks are due to Mr. L.C. Jarman of Braithwaits, Keswick, for providing me with a copy of the Will of Abraham Wren (1768) in the Cumbria Record office, Carlisle.

⁹ H. McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Act* (Manchester, 1931), 206; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education, The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783* (New York, 1970), 323–24; M.D. Stephens and G.W. Roderick, "Education and the Dissenting Academies," *History Today*, XXVII (1977), 47–54; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224.

“somewhat cramped existence” amidst the many rowdy servicemen who frequented the numerous community taverns. Problems were also evident in the town’s government, where contentions between the Admiralty’s interests and those of the Corporation and aldermen clashed.¹⁰

The aforementioned snippets provide a brief overview of Portsmouth in about the mid-eighteenth century. And it was from within this descriptive backdrop of town life that the Reverend John Norman was directed by his parishioners during the spring of 1756 to pay the Reverend Thomas Wren £15 5s. for a “tryal [sic] period” as his assistant.¹¹ Soon the position in Hampshire was to become permanent.

The fact that Wren had failed to receive more attractive offers for a permanent position following his ordination perhaps stemmed both from his alleged lack of inspiration and his sometimes questionable orthodoxy from the pulpit. Such criticisms were indicated by a fellow cleric’s description during his services in Colchester.

He preached on 1st Jan. (1754) on a public occasion in which both congregations are concerned and the poor creature, that his prayer might be exact, as well as his preaching, he had it wrote down and read to us, though with not the best of graces either. I stood at a distance and wondered at the close of every sentence (if) his eyes were turned down to his cushion, but was informed afterwards by those that saw it that his prayer was wrote down. His sermon was not suitable to the occasion, nor yet to the criterion of the divine word. It was rank Arminianism. I apprehend both by it and the conclusion of his prayer, he is cast in the Arian mode.¹²

Notwithstanding such aspersions, Wren was to remain secure in his Portsmouth position. Soon after his confirmation as assistant pastor, the ailing and aged Mr. Norman died, and Thomas Wren succeeded him as minister of the Presbyterian Chapel.¹³

The dissenter chapel was founded in 1662. In 1718, during the lengthy stewardship of the Reverend Mr. Norman, an impressive new brick chapel,

¹⁰ *Protestant Dissenters’ Magazine*, vol. IV, 365, vol. V, 245 (London, 1797–8); Eric Pursehouse, *Waveney Valley Studies; Gleanings From Local History* (Diss, Norfolk, 1966), 10–11; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224; Letter to author from Jean Kennedy, County Archivist, Norfolk (England) Record Office, September 23, 1987; J.H. Thomas and N.W. Surrey, eds, *Portsmouth Record Series: Book of Original Entries, 1731–1751* (Portsmouth, Hants, 1976), xvii–xx, liii–lvii; *The Portsmouth Guide, or A Description of the Ancient and Present State of the Place* (Portsmouth, England, 1775), 1–42.

¹¹ P(ortsmouth) C(ity) R(ecords) O(ffice), CHU 82/9, Records of John Pounds Memorial Church, High Street, Portsmouth; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026.

¹² Alfred Goodall, “Early Independence in Essex,” *The Congregational Historical Society, Transactions*, VI (1913–15), 156.

¹³ PCRO, CHU 82/9–10; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224.

built in the Dutch style of architecture, was completed. It replaced a smaller structure in Penny Street, evidently to meet the needs of a growing congregation, for reportedly it could accommodate 700 communicants.¹⁴ It included an elliptical roof, deep circular windows, an upstairs gallery, sturdy oak pews, and it was set back from the street and bordered by an iron fence.¹⁵

During the years following his installation in this picturesque structure, Thomas Wren remained rather uninspiring from the pulpit. Several of his contemporaries noted the uncertainty that he had displayed preaching in other locales. They also cited a lack of enthusiasm, and dull and rambling sermons. Most of his communicants, though, overlooked such peculiarities, which were attributed in part to his northern background, and they remained satisfied with his theological conformity. However, throughout the term of his ministry, a conservative and evangelical minority of parishioners maintained suspicions that Mr. Wren's scriptural lessons skirted dangerously close to unorthodox, Arian or Arminian doctrines.¹⁶

The general lack of acclaim for Thomas Wren's pulpit performance was quite distinct from the enthusiasm, praise, and popular following that his personal life earned within the seaport. One Portsmouth historian reported later that while living in the community, Wren, a lifelong bachelor, "led an exemplary life of charming simplicity and piety." He was also liberal in developing close friendships with other local clergymen including the Anglican Reverend Henry Taylor, vicar of the Parish Church of St. Thomas, situated a short distance down the High Street.¹⁷ Concurrently, the Presbyterian cleric extended his liberality, friendliness, and engaging personality to common British seamen and the town's raucous taverns that they frequented. It was even said that he loved to imitate these sailors, and often retold their stories "with great humour," though he took care "that they were never interlarded with those vulgar and irreverend (*sic*) expressions so common among that brave and useful set of men." Such personal conduct became Mr. Wren's most noteworthy trait, for as one friend later wrote of him, "Few can be mentioned who have been more distinguished by piety and virtue, by purity of mind and able behaviour."¹⁸

Records of the High Street Presbyterian Chapel during Wren's pastorate also attest to the altruistic and warm-hearted character of the cleric. These

¹⁴ John Webb, "An Early Victorian Street; The High Street, Old Portsmouth," *The Portsmouth Papers*, 26 (March 1977), 13; Henry and Julian Slight, *Chronicles of Portsmouth* (London, 1828), 91–92; Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 291–2; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224.

¹⁵ Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 281–99; Slight, *Chronicles of Portsmouth*, 91–93.

¹⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026; Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 298; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224; *Protestant Dissenters' Magazine*, V, 246.

¹⁷ Henry T. Lilley and Alfred T. Everitt, *Portsmouth's Parish Church* (Portsmouth, 1921), 132–37; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 225; Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 297.

¹⁸ Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 224; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026.

church papers reveal that the minister oversaw the regular distribution of poor money sums to many indigent or otherwise needy residents of the community. Often, he delivered these beneficences personally and offered individual encouragement or solace that earned him considerable respect from magistrates and citizens alike. His assistance also extended beyond Portsmouth as Wren approved church grants of monies to distressed individuals and institutions in other parts of England.¹⁹ Even the fledgling and distant College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) became a grantee; on June 14, 1763 the minister approved a “Brief for the college in America with the sum of 4 pounds six shillings and one penny.”²⁰ Quite possibly these efforts on behalf of American dissenters and England’s underprivileged may have influenced his subsequent decision to help the cause of American independence.

Minister Wren’s liberal theological tenets and beneficent social consciousness may also have carried over into the realm of English politics. Wren was known for his Whig tenets, including a strong support for freedom of elections. Although a Portsmouth resident, he remained a Cumberland freeholder, and as such he became involved in the county’s celebrated electoral contests between Sir James Lowther and his rival in the northern counties, the Duke of Portland. Wren supported the cause of the Duke, as is revealed in a letter to him dated February 22, 1768. Later, during Lord North’s administration (1770–1782), the Duke often opposed ministerial actions against the rebellious American colonists.²¹

The approach of revolution in the North American colonies diverted considerable concern in England from domestic political and social issues to Imperial affairs. Such disquiet was especially evident in London, where during the year prior to the outbreak of hostilities, and during the subsequent war years, various groups within and outside Parliament gave varying sympathy and help to the American cause. The pro-American groups outside Parliament were generally followers of the fiery politician John Wilkes, and the contention they sparked was frequently reported in the metropolitan press.²²

Although seventy-three miles distant from the capital’s conspicuous polemics, Portsmouth was not oblivious to the crucial developments in the North American settlements. The town regularly received London newspapers and other publications featuring stories about American unrest. In addition,

¹⁹ PCRO, CHU 82/9–11.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brian Bonsall, *Sir James Lowther and Cumberland and Westmorland Elections, 1754–1775* (Manchester, 1961), 1–161; *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. II, 302–04, vol. XXII, 217–19; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026. The David Hartley Papers (hereafter D/Ehy), at the Berkshire Record Office, Reading, have papers relating to this controversy for the period 1765 to 1771. See also the Portland Papers, University of Nottingham Library.

²² John A. Sainsbury, “The Pro-American Movement in London, 1769–1782; Extra-parliamentary Opposition to the Government’s American Policy,” Ph.D. diss. (McGill University, 1975), 1–174; Owen Sherrard, *A Life of John Wilkes* (New York, 1930), 220–71.

since it was a seaport, Portsmouth's merchants were well aware of colonial boycotts of British goods and of the destruction of East India tea in Boston Harbor in 1773.²³ English seamen or Crown officials, relieved at being done with their onerous royal duties in America, also conveyed further details of increasing American hostility.

Consequently, the people of Portsmouth were probably not surprised to learn in June 1775 of the April skirmishes at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. The subsequent experiences of the conflict, and the colonists' defiant Declaration of Independence (July 1776), were undoubtedly discussed and debated by townspeople and must have received at least passing references in sermons of the local clergy. Certainly, intensified naval activities in Portsmouth's dockyard throughout 1776 reflected the distant and deadly American war.²⁴

Events in the following year brought the war even closer to the city. On March 3, 1777, Parliament adopted the controversial "[Lord] North's Act." This legislation temporarily suspended habeas corpus for persons "charged with or suspected of the crime of High Treasons committed in any of his Majesty's colonies or on the High Seas, or with the crime of Piracy." The latter portion of this Act was applied to captured rebels, many of whom were then packed on board guardships anchored in scattered English seaports.²⁵ But the increasing number of detainees in such makeshift, overcrowded gaols required new provisions by the government. Accordingly, on May 8, 1777, the Admiralty, with warrants prepared by His Majesty the previous month, ordered that two sites were to be established as "Places of confinement for such Rebel Prisoners as may be brought to England from North America." Also, on May 8, the Admiralty ordered that Americans confined on British naval vessels be delivered to the solicitor of the Admiralty or its designated representatives. Two prisons were to be prepared in England for accepting these captured Yankee rebels. One was Mill Prison situated in Devon between the town of Plymouth and Plymouth Dock. The other, Forton Prison, was located across Portsmouth Harbour, approximately a mile northwest of Gosport Harbour, in the Parish of Alverstoke, Hampshire.²⁶

²³ Solomon Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press, 1775–1783* (Columbia, MO, 1967), 1–11; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972), chs 2–8.

²⁴ G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen, eds, *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771–1782* (London, 1932), vol. I, 67–76; Lutnick, *The American Revolution*, 1–45.

²⁵ Olive Anderson, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain During the American Revolution," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 28 (1955), 66; Thomas C. Hansard, ed., *The Parliamentary History of England From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1814), vol. XIX, 51–2.

²⁶ P(ublic) R(ecord) O(office), Out-Letters Medical and POW Department, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779; Larry G. Bowman, *Captive Americans: Prisoners During the American Revolution* (Athens, OH, 1976), 52; Anderson, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain," 66.

Administrative responsibility for both prisons was also established during 1777. As in earlier eighteenth-century conflicts, the secretaries of state and the Lords of the Admiralty were the highest government agencies charged with primary authority over enemy naval captives. However, a subordinate body, the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners of War, acted as the principal intermediary between these two agencies. Although primarily responsible to the Admiralty, the commissioners dispatched orders from their superiors to the directors of each gaol, normally with their own instructions for implementation.²⁷ The commissioners in turn received reports from officials directly connected with each prison, and passed on the reports to their superiors. Each prison was to have a formal staffing that included an agent or keeper, a clerk, three turnkeys, two deputies, a steward, cooks, laborers (handymen), and a part-time surgeon. In addition, available military personnel or local militia were to serve as prison guards, usually ten sentinels at a time. Rewards for captured escapees, initially 10s., were raised to £5 in July 1777.²⁸

Forton, which had served as a prison during the Seven Years War, contained rather ample facilities. It was built originally as a hospital during the reign of Queen Anne, though by the time of the colonial rebellion, Haslar Hospital, immediately south of Gosport, handled major matters. The prison itself consisted of two rather spacious buildings that could hold up to 2000 inmates. During the American Revolution one building was used for “under” (junior) officers and sailors, and one for higher officers. There was one airing ground between the buildings and another nearby “on three quarters of an acre of level ground.” In December 1777 the Admiralty approved the construction of a shed on the airing ground which was open on all sides, and under which seats were placed for the prisoners to sit during hot or sultry weather.²⁹

Surrounding the prison area were eight-foot-high pickets driven into the ground about two inches apart. In November 1777 the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen wrote to the Admiralty requesting that *cheveux de frise* (iron spikes) be placed on the walls of both buildings, but there is no indication that this was ever done. A map of the period indicates a small lake just east of Forton, farms, meadows, and woodlands on the other sides, and a single road leading southeast to the fortifications surrounding Gosport. Another road twisted northward through the small hamlet of Brockhurst before proceeding

²⁷ Francis Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain, 1750–1815* (London, 1914), 214–34; Anderson, “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain,” 64–66; Bowman, *Captive Americans*, 57–58.

²⁸ N(ational) M(aritime) M(useum), Sick and Hurt Board, In-Letters and Orders, ADM/M, 1702–1806; PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779.

²⁹ John K. Alexander, “Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of the British Prisoner of War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 103 (1967), 369–71; Leonard F.W. White, *The Story of Gosport* (Southsea, Hnats, n.d.), 81–82; Eunice H. Turner, “American Prisoners of War in Britain, 1777–1783,” *Mariner’s Mirror*, 45 (1959), 201–02; John Howard, *The State of Prisons in England and Wales*, 4th edn (London, 1792), 185–87.

to Fareham. Gosport itself was a far smaller community than Portsmouth, though a printed guide of 1775 colorfully described it as “a very neat town with a decent trade in it, the buildings are mostly good, and the inhabitants genteel.”³⁰

The overall features of the Forton prison and the fact that it was available must have made it an ideal facility for housing many of the increasing number of rebel maritime captives. In May 1777 the prison was ready for use, but its formal opening was briefly delayed by legal technicalities. These matters were soon resolved with assistance from Admiral Thomas Pye, Portsmouth’s naval director, so that on June 13, 1777 the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen wrote to the Admiralty that Forton was ready to accept prisoners. That same day, the first American seamen were confined there, and by November 1782 a total of more than 1200 captured rebels had been listed on Forton’s rosters.³¹

The American prisoners usually passed through Portsmouth on their way to Forton. While in the seaport, they were examined under guard by civil or crown magistrates and sometimes by Admiralty officials. The standard procedure of the examination was first to determine that the captives were detained Americans who had served on board armed vessels as stated by the Act of March 1777; next to issue warrants charging them with treason against His Majesty; and, finally, to commit them to Forton Prison “as Rebels and Pirates.”³² Despite the ominous tone of such warrants, most of the prisoners were not mistreated during their commitment, and some even expressed relief at being sent to confinement on land. Jonathan Carpenter, a Massachusetts sailor and one of Forton’s earliest inmates, wrote that he “rejoiced at the opportunity to go to prison” and “get clear from cruel masters” who commanded his guardship in the harbor. Caleb Foot, a later detainee also from New England, declared that leaving his prison ship for Forton “was like coming out of Hell and going into Paradise.” Forton, however, was not intended to be a paradise, and following their examination and commitment, captured mariners were usually taken under heavy guard, ferried across Portsmouth Harbour to Gosport, and from there marched again to confinement in the prison.³³

³⁰ *The Portsmouth Guide: or A Description of the Ancient and Present State of the Place* (Portsmouth, 1775), 46; PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 370.

³¹ PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 371.

³² Marion and Jack Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution* (Baltimore, MD, 1967), i–xii; Timothy Connor Journal, William R. Cutter, ed., “A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England, 1777–1779,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXX (1876), 343; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 369.

³³ Caleb Foot, “Prison Letters and Sea Journal of Caleb Foot,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, XXVI (1889), 109–10; “Diary of Jonathan Carpenter,” *Vermont Historical Society, Proceedings*, No. 46 (1872), viii; John S. Barnes, ed., *Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning, An American Naval Officer* (New York, 1912), 9; “Connor Journal,” vol. XXX, 343; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 369.

Prison conditions were far from ideal for the first American inmates in 1777. Timothy Connor, among Forton's earliest captives, noted that for a day after he and his shipmates arrived on June 13, they "had nothing to eat but boiled cabbage, which was part of the officers' allowance." The supply of provisions eventually improved, but the quality and quantity of food continued to be the subject of intermittent prisoner complaints. Clothing was another shortcoming; many of the early arrivals had had their possessions taken during their shipboard captivity, and some inmates arrived at Forton half-naked. Nevertheless, it was not until November 1777 that the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen dispatched a petition to the Admiralty asking them to alleviate "the great want of clothing and of Shoes and Stockings amongst the prisoners."³⁴

Forton's administrative regulations, like those at Mill Prison, were formulated by the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen, and they were expected to be strictly observed. Twelve rules were initially implemented. The first stated explicitly that "the Directions of Keeper and Agent are to be obeyed without murmuring or endeavoring to raise any Discontent or mutiny among the Prisoners; much less is any Prisoner to dare to offer any Menace or Insult by their action to the Keeper and Agent, or any action under him upon Pain of being put into closer Confinement and upon half Allowance provision or such other Punishment as the Case may deserve." Subsequent regulations covered related disciplinary matters such as prison musters, damage to prison property, escape attempts, fighting, theft, personal health and cleanliness, and regular sweeping of the prison yard.

These ordinances also made provisions for the prisoners' mess that included a weekly "Table of Victualing." Such regulations were not excessively abusive and the Keeper even permitted a daily market at Forton's main gate where the captives could barter with farmers or tradesmen. Nevertheless, these restraints naturally sparked resentment among free-spirited sailors; refractory behavior and resentment increased as internment lengthened.³⁵

Forton's staff, who were to enforce these regulations, were frequently guilty of acts of corruption, petty or vindictive restrictions, and unwarranted harassments. In August 1777 one rebel inmate alleged that John Newsham, the prison agent and keeper, forced three newly arrived naval officers to "deliver up their money by the point of the bayonet." Another prisoner referred to him as an "old crab." And indications of Newsham's general unpopularity among the detainees was contained in a letter dated September

³⁴ "Connor Journal," vol. XXX, 343–44; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; Alexander, "Forton Prison," 375–77; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 17–18.

³⁵ "Regulations Which are to be Observed by the Prisoners," David Hartley Papers, D/EHy 040, Berkshire Record Office, Reading. Since this paper was written, the David Hartley Papers have been withdrawn from the Berkshire Record Office (Editors); Alexander, "Forton Prison," 373.

17, 1777 from several American prisoners to the Admiralty, charging Newsham with “arbitrary and unwarrantable conduct.”³⁶

Prisoners suffered from boredom, isolation, tedium, and frustration. Their diaries expressed such sentiments, and part of a song written by Timothy Connor, one of the American prisoners, also reflects these moods:

O now the cold winter comes on
And Forton runs hard by my side
For work at my trade I have none
And the best of my friends I have tried
Oh he that's a friend to himself
Will provide for a cold winter's day
That will serve him in time of his need
When the best of his friends are all flown.

My breeches all ragged [ragged] and tore
My stockings hang down to my toes
My pockets no money will hold
In good faith I've nothing to put in them
My shirt is as black as the Devils
For want of an industrious Wife
And if you will help me good fellow
I'd love you all the days of my life.

By this experience I've learnt
And Forton runs hard by my side
For want of an Industrious Wife
That something for me will provide
O then I will tumble and toss
Till dinner time lie in my bed
I would not care how soon I was wed.
Forton Prison, August 17, 1778³⁷

Residents of Portsmouth were well aware of these incoming prisoners. The Yankee captives were frequently observed disembarking at the dockyards and marching to their arraignment. After their brief examinations and commitments, citizens could again see the prisoners being led to the Gosport ferry and from there to Forton confinement. For many Portsmouth inhabitants

³⁶ “Connor Journal,” vol. XXX, 345; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 9; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806. John Newsham evidently had ties to Hampshire. After the end of the American Revolution he was listed in the *Hampshire Directory* for 1784 as an “agent offering financial backing services” with an address cited as Haslar Royal Hospital, Gosport.

³⁷ George G. Carey, ed., *A Sailor's Songbag: An American Rebel in an English Prison, 1777–1779* (Amherst, MA, 1976), 90.

with royalist sympathies these colonial rebels were the objects of derision and scorn. For many other townspeople they were a matter of curiosity. Several of those residents who had such feelings visited the prison site occasionally merely to scrutinize these New World captives. One such English onlooker was even heard to gasp in amazement, “Why, Lord neighbours,” the Americans “be white people; they talk just as us do, by my troth!”³⁸ However, for a few of Portsmouth’s inhabitants, such as Thomas Wren, these prisoners soon became the object of personal concern.

It is quite likely that the Reverend Mr. Wren had already made some references to the American war in his sermons and he was not oblivious to the presence of these captured colonial rebels in his midst. Consequently, after this initial confinement of Americans, the Portsmouth minister began making regular visits to the prison, usually accompanied by a Gosport man named Mr. Duckett [Duckitt]. On one of these early calls, Wren became acquainted with officers from the prize ship *Rising States*, and he gave them English currency in exchange for their unusable continental notes. *The Hampshire Chronicle* had previously recorded the arrival of the impounded vessel, with an ominous warning for her captured crew: “Came into harbor, the *Rising States* privateer, taken by the *Terrible*. . . . The men (41 in number) are sent to Fortune, about a mile from Gosport, to be confined as pirates.”³⁹ Exchanging currency was apparently the first form of financial assistance that agent Newsham permitted imprisoned rebels.

The Reverend Mr. Wren also appeared at confinement hearings for captured American sailors during the latter part of 1777. In September of that year his efforts helped to transmit to the Admiralty the prisoners’ letter that alleged “arbitrary and unlawful conduct” against Keeper Newsham. In addition, following entreaties to royal officials, Wren was finally allowed to distribute small sums of his own money to detainees in special confinement. Concurrently, he solicited financial contributions through local friends and organizations, and sought donations of clothing and other personal necessities.⁴⁰

By the close of 1777, sympathetic Englishmen from outside Portsmouth and Gosport, chiefly those associated with the pro-Americans of London, had bolstered Wren’s efforts for prisoner relief. One such person was Thomas Digges, the son of a prominent Maryland landowner, who had been working in the London mercantile trade for several years past. Digges knew a number of Britons who supported the American cause, including the Reverend Richard

³⁸ Jesse Lemisch, “Listening to the Inarticulate: William Wigder’s Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons,” *Journal of Social History*, 3 (1969), 11; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 369.

³⁹ John Thornton to American commissioners at Paris, January 5–8, 1778, AM 811.3, Harvard University Library; *The Hampshire Chronicle*, May 12, 1777.

⁴⁰ Thornton Letter, January 5–8, 1778; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806.

Price, a nonconformist acquaintance of Thomas Wren. Through these sources, Digges had learned of the privations facing the growing number of Americans at both Mill and Forton prisons, for in November 1777 he described their plight in a letter to Arthur Lee, one of the American Commissioners in Paris. Early the following month, Digges received an authorization from Lee to spend £50 for the prisoners' needs.⁴¹

Several peers, including Lord Abingdon, shared Thomas Digges's concern over the alleged maltreatment of American detainees. This prominent aristocrat had called for an investigation into prison conditions during a parliamentary speech on December 1, 1777. Abingdon then announced his intention to seek a subscription for prisoner relief from fellow members of the House of Lords. The pronouncement of this influential peer may have provided the needed impetus for such a campaign, for, on the day before Christmas 1777, more than a hundred people met at the *King's Crown* tavern in Cornhill "for the Purpose of relieving the Distresses of the American Prisoners." The gathering, which was well publicized (but did not include Thomas Wren), resulted in pledges of almost £1500 to a subscription for prisoner aid, and in the selection of a twenty-man committee to administer this fund. Fifteen days later the committee, which included Thomas Digges, four Members of Parliament, and four London aldermen, announced that the pledges had increased to £3700.⁴²

Implementation of this subscription drive gave additional notoriety to Thomas Wren's endeavors, while simultaneously word of his activities at Forton was being sent to the American commissioners in Paris. This information was conveyed in a letter dated January 5–8, 1778 from Major John Thornton, who previously had been dispatched by the commissioners to investigate conditions at both Mill and Forton. Thornton's letter reported that Wren's activities were about the only heartening aspects of an otherwise dismal situation. According to Major Thornton, Wren had been "of the greatest service and behaved with great Humanity to the American prisoners." He noted in particular that "this worthy clergyman" had visited the Americans at Forton every other day, supplied them "from time to time with trifling [*sic*]

⁴¹ William B. Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 77 (1953), 385–89; Richard Henry Lee, *Life of Arthur Lee* (Boston, MA, 1829), vol. I, 354–56; Wren and Price (1723–1791) had both preached at the Old Jewry Chapel in London.

⁴² *The Parliamentary Register or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Lords* . . . (London, 1778), vol. X, 105–06; John Sainsbury, "The Pro-Americans of London, 1769–1782," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXXV (1978), 443; *The Annual Register* . . . for the Year 1778, 3rd edn (London, 1778), 79; *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLVII (1777), 607, XLVIII (1778), 43; *The Public Advertiser* (London), January 2, 1778; *London Evening Post*, December 23–5, 1777, January 8–10, 1778; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 390.

sums,” and had even got provisions delivered to inmates confined in the special punishment compound known as “the black hole.”⁴³ Thornton’s letter also declared that he had asked Wren to check an arrangement with Mrs. Elizabeth Harrison, Forton’s chief cook, to provide officers “with a joint of meat” every other day. The major concluded by stating that the public announcement of the subscription of the American prisoners had already produced several sympathetic inquiries and pledges, and he indicated that many more donations would soon follow. In fact, a few days after this letter was completed, it was announced that the subscription was closing after reaching the impressive sum of £3815 17s. 10d.⁴⁴

The success of the subscription drive provided Wren and his assistant Mr. Duckett with the additional tasks of receiving and distributing the monies raised. At Forton, where administrative rule was now becoming more benevolent, Thomas Wren began a regular distribution of his portion of the bounties that had been collected. Individual allotments for the period from February 1778 until June 1779 apparently averaged about 1s. 2d. per week for common sailors and double this sum for officers.⁴⁵ From June 1779 until early 1781 all of the prisoners received continually decreasing assistance from a second, less bountiful, subscription fund. Food rations, especially meat, generally improved in both quantity and quality. Although there were sporadic complaints about meals at Forton, food rations were never as bad as those at Mill Prison, where a report in August 1777 stated that the inmates alleged they were served “Necks of Beef with maggots.” Wren and Duckett also distributed warm clothing to alleviate the effects of the damp, chilly Hampshire winter, and they dispensed personal items such as tobacco, medicines, books, tea, and writing supplies to inmates who often lacked funds for purchasing them at the prison market.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, working from France, the American Commissioners were becoming more involved in the relief activities of sympathetic Britons. In October 1777, Benjamin Franklin had written to David Hartley, an old friend and fellow club-mate, and an anti-war Member of Parliament for Kingston upon Hull, requesting that he distribute two or three hundred pounds to needy

⁴³ American commissioners to Major (John) Thornton, December 11, 1777, in Albert H. Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1906), vol. VII, 75–76; Thornton to American commissioners, January 5–6, 1778.

⁴⁴ *The Public Advertiser*, January 10, 1778; Thornton to American commissioners, January 5–8, 1778; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, XLVIII (1778), 43; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 390.

⁴⁵ Catherine M. Prelinger, “Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England during the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., XXXII (1975), 270–71; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 375, 378–79.

⁴⁶ Anderson, “The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain,” 72–73; Prelinger, “Benjamin Franklin,” 268, 270–71; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 378–79; “Connor Journal,” vol. XXX, 347–48; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026.

Image not available

Plate 3.2 High Street Unitarian (formerly Presbyterian) Chapel, Portsmouth, circa 1840.

Source: Courtesy of the Portsmouth Records Office

American captives. On February 3, 1778, Hartley informed Dr. Franklin of the work accomplished by the prisoner relief committee and noted that, according to the doctor's wishes, he had recently advanced Mr. Wren, "a very worthy man," £50 in order to provide special dinners for the officers at Forton. Furthermore, he declared that if Franklin would send him an additional £100 this supplementary meal program could be extended for another eight to ten weeks.⁴⁷ Nine days later Dr. Franklin replied to Hartley thanking him for so "readily engaging in the means of relieving our poor captives, and the pains you have taken and the advances you have made for that purpose." He enclosed the £100 that Hartley had requested and added,

I much approve of Mr. Wren's prudent as well as benevolent conduct in the Disposition of the Money; and wish him to continue doing what shall appear to

⁴⁷ Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, October 14, 1777, in William B. Willcox, Douglas Arnold, Dorothy Bridgewater, *et al.*, eds, *The papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT, 1986), vol. 25, 64–68; David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, February 3, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25, 578; David Hartley, s.v., *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. IX, 68–69.

him and you to be right, which I am persuaded will appear the same to me and my colleagues here. I beg you will present him, when you write him my respectful acknowledgements.⁴⁸

Franklin's compliments, and more importantly his remittance, were gratefully received by Wren, who was then hard pressed to maintain the supplementary officers' messes. On February 7, 1778, he had written to David Hartley that "Mrs. Harrison's patience and credit are near exhausted," and that her husband had advised her to stop making these supplementary food purchases. Wren had promised to pay the cook her £10 10s. the following Monday which should provide Hartley with more time to obtain funds. Seventeen days later Franklin's payment arrived at last and Wren modestly replied to commendations from the American Commissioners: "The regards and acknowledgements of such persons form the most ample recompense that my imagination can reach."⁴⁹

Later, it became necessary to modify this special food program. On March 25, 1778, Wren wrote directly to Franklin asking permission to draw from the remainder of the £100 remittance in order to reimburse Mrs. Harrison. He also noted that he had advised American officers of the limited funds available for continuing their supplementary messes, and the consequent need for frugality. In response to this assessment, the officers had decided that instead of paying the higher costs of food preparation they would rather receive weekly cash allotments, "and so to manage *the sum* granted as to make it go as far as possible." Thus by the beginning of April Wren was dispensing an additional 3s. a week to the officers at Forton, and reporting his expenditures to Hartley.⁵⁰

Monetary payments to the prisoners, however, remained a chronic problem. On May 13, 1778, Wren wrote to Hartley that "he was sorely in want of more cash," and had been obliged to use £21 10s. of his own money. The clergyman added that he might be able to obtain further funds from Sir John Carter, his close friend and most prominent parishioner. Sir John, a wealthy brewer, magistrate, and recent Mayor of Portsmouth, held strong pro-American, anti-ministerial sentiments which he did not hesitate to voice. Already in December 1777, he had written to David Hartley concerning "the sorry state of these American prisoners" and he offered his utmost assistance. But Sir John's cash donations, along with those of other Portsmouth sympathizers, proved insufficient so that Wren ultimately had to rely on sources in London and in France. His appeals were eventually answered, and most of the food

⁴⁸ Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley, February 12, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25, 650–53.

⁴⁹ Thomas Wren to David Hartley, February 7, 1778, March 5, 1778; Statement of Thomas and Elizabeth Harrison, March 17, 1778; Benjamin Franklin Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁰ Thomas Wren to Benjamin Franklin, March 25, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 26, 165–67.

and regular monetary grants continued with occasional interruptions and in lesser amounts throughout the remainder of the war.⁵¹

Providing financial assistance was the primary but not the only way in which the Reverend Mr. Wren helped the Americans at Forton. He strove consistently to provide needed items such as medicine and clothing, often using his own limited income. One prisoner wrote that when subscriptions were temporarily depleted, Wren “used to go round the neighborhoods to beg clothing and money for us.” Within Forton’s confines Wren endeavored to alleviate the monotony and frustrations of prison life. He offered spiritual comfort to prisoners; he encouraged the organization of regular schooling in reading, writing, navigation, and arithmetic; and most importantly, he became a source of reports, messages, and news from the outside world. Usually, Wren had no difficulty in bringing such information to the eager prisoners, although in November 1778 he complained that Keeper Newsham, citing Admiralty orders, had forbidden him to deliver a letter to the American officers from the commissioners in Paris. After some discussion, however, Wren was allowed to transmit verbally the contents of this letter, regarding a possible prisoner exchange, to the anxious inmates.⁵²

Several prisoners at Forton kept accounts of their captivity in which they noted the charitable work of their Portsmouth benefactor. The narratives of inmates Charles Bulkeley and Elisha Hinman of Connecticut and Luke Matthewman of New York mention Wren’s assistance.⁵³ More detailed descriptions of Wren’s work appeared in the lengthier journals of Nathaniel Fanning, Jonathan Carpenter, George Thompson, and Timothy Connor. Fanning recalled with particular gratitude Wren’s regular visits to dispense money, supplies, and wartime information. He also stated that whenever any disgruntled prisoners would berate the minister for not meeting all their demands, Wren would answer soothingly, “have a little patience my children, and I will endeavour to bring you the next time I come whatever you are in need of.”

⁵¹ Alastair Geddes, “Portsmouth During the Great French Wars, 1770–1800,” *The Portsmouth Papers*, No. 9 (March 1970), 11–14; Sir John Carter to David Hartley, December 29, 1777, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers; Thomas Wren to William Hodgson, February 13, February 27, 1781, Benjamin Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society; Thomas Wren to David Hartley, May 13, 1778, November 18, 1778, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers; *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXXVIII, pt. 2 (1808), 559–60, 848–49; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 378–79.

⁵² Thomas Wren to David Hartley, November 19, 1778, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 15; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 373–75, 378–79; PRO, ADM/M 98/11, 1775–1779; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026; Prelinger, “Benjamin Franklin,” 268.

⁵³ Captain Charles Bulkeley’s Narrative . . . “in Ernest Rogers, ed., *Connecticut’s Naval Office at New London During the War of the American Revolution* (New London, 1933), 126–28; R.R. Hinman, *Catalogue of the First Puritan Settlers of Connecticut* . . . (Hartford, 1856), 816–19; “Narrative of Lieut Luke Matthewman of the Revolutionary Navy,” *The Magazine of American History*, II, pt. 1 (1878), 175–84.

Timothy Connor, who was confined in Forton from June 1777 until his exchange two years later, kept the most extensive prison diary. Connor not only cited the clergyman's welcome distribution of supplies and subscription monies, but he also emphasized the optimistic manner in which Wren kept alive the inmates' hopes of being freed from Forton. In one entry, for example, Connor wrote that on March 7, 1778, "Mr. Duckett [the Gosport almoner] and Mr. Wrenn came and paid the officers eight shillings, and the men two; likewise told us that Mr. Hartley [David Hartley] had waited upon Lord North to know a set time for our [exchange] embarkation [sic]."⁵⁴

One of the means by which these rebel mariners could leave their prisons was by abandoning the patriotic cause and voluntarily joining the service of King George III. The English army, and more especially the Royal Navy, were usually agreeable, often eager, to accept imprisoned seamen who were willing to apply for an official pardon and switch their allegiance. Consequently recruiters, especially those from the naval service, frequently sought to entice the prisoners into applying for pardons. The pardons were issued by the Admiralty under the monarch's seal. The pardons also specifically stated that the paroled prisoners were being released for the purpose of entering His Majesty's service, and that prison officials were to see that these men were "delivered over to such person or persons as shall be duly authorized to receive them for the Purpose aforesaid." As the war dragged on, perhaps endlessly for many of the prisoners, the records of the Admiralty and the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen reveal that many inmates of Mill and Forton chose this route from captivity.⁵⁵

However, the percentage of prisoners who chose defection was relatively low. Historians have estimated that the overall rate of defection was less than 10 percent at both Mill and Forton. Furthermore, it was evident that many of these turncoat prisoners were actually "Old Countrymen" who were born in Britain or Ireland, while others had simply opted for this course as an easy means of escape. Resolute patriot sentiments as well as the fact that the volunteers had to wait for their pardon before leaving Forton also had an effect. Thus Admiral Sir Thomas Pye suggested in a letter to Sick and Hurt Seamen (June 5, 1781) that the delays in volunteers receiving their pardons "exposed them to the Resentment of other Prisoners who threatened the lives of those who offer to serve in the Navy and prevent many from entering."⁵⁶ It is also

⁵⁴ "Diary of George Thompson of Newburyport, Kept at Forton Prison, England, 1777–1781," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, LXXVI (1940), 221–42; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 19, Jonathan Carpenter Journal (Ms.); "Connor Journal," vol. XXX, 32.

⁵⁵ For examples of such paroles see NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806.

⁵⁶ Alexander, "Forton Prison," 384, cites a defection rate of 5.7 percent at Forton during the period June 14, 1777 to July 2, 1779. A higher defection rate of 11 percent is given for Mill Prison; see Howard L. Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777–1782," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, XCVII (October 1961), 319; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; Anderson, "Treatment of Prisoners of War," 72.

likely that the cheerful and optimistic reports concerning repatriations brought during Thomas Wren's visits helped to reduce the number of changelings.

Prisoners' exchange agreements were another way in which Yankee captives might leave their British gaols. These exchange agreements, or cartels, were a common practice during eighteenth-century European wars, but the fact that the American prisoners in effect were considered traitors by Parliamentary legislation, and not regular combatants, altered their status. Thus, Benjamin Franklin, representing the American commissioners in Paris, had no success in his initial efforts to obtain any exchange agreement. Lord Stormont, Britain's Minister in Paris, reflected his government's intransigence in April 1777 when he returned a message from Dr. Franklin and disdainfully declared, "The King's Minister receives no applications from rebels unless they come to implore his Majesty's mercy."⁵⁷

However, by early 1778 significant new developments made the British government more receptive to the question of prisoner exchanges. Publication in *The London Chronicle* of Lord Stormont's obstinacy on this issue had caused vigorous protests from the anti-war opposition. In addition, Lord North's efforts at colonial reconciliation and France's formal entry into the war further weakened the government's intransigent position.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, negotiations between Franklin and British officials dragged on slowly with both sides blaming each other for delays. Franklin now had to reconcile his actions with his French allies and their own prisoner considerations. Finally, in December 1778, England agreed to an exchange procedure and, in the following March, a hundred Americans were sent to France from Mill Prison. In June 1779, 119 Americans followed from Forton, reportedly "receiving the joy and gifts of the people as they passed through Gosport." England had insisted that these captives were to be exchanged only for British prisoners in France in units of one hundred and, since Franklin lacked prisoners to exchange, the next transfer of Americans waited until March 1780. Problems resulted anew from this exchange so that the significant release of Americans was halted until March 1782 when Parliament finally acknowledged that captured Americans were in fact prisoners of war. The following month, the Admiralty ordered all these captives to be sent to North America for exchange, and by July 1782 more than 1000 American prisoners had left England for home. Forton Prison itself was not officially closed until the summer of 1783.⁵⁹

Thomas Wren had become particularly involved in the delicate maneuvering that preceded the first prisoner exchange. In early 1778, the spokesmen for the Americans at Forton, with the clergyman's help, had drawn

⁵⁷ Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin," 263.

⁵⁸ *London Chronicle*, November 4–6, 1777; Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin," 264.

⁵⁹ Alexander, "Forton Prison," 386–87; Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin," 276–91; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 398, 403–11, 413–8.

up petitions to the Admiralty requesting an exchange. A copy was sent through Wren to David Hartley in London with the expectation that he would use his political influence on their behalf. In a letter to Hartley (March 18, 1778) that accompanied the petitions, Wren endorsed the prisoners' aspirations, stating, "I trust sir that you will give these petitions such direction and weight that these poor men may soon see their native country." Two months later, as the captives' hopes increased, he wrote to Hartley again, asking if he had any "intelligence respecting their exchange." He added that while the prisoners lately "had been tolerably patient and quiet . . . it is not without the most laborious and repeated efforts that Mr. Duckett and myself keep them up to their degree of confinement."⁶⁰

By the autumn of 1778, Wren and Mr. Duckett had to exert even more efforts to sustain the Americans' patience and hopes for exchange. That October, Wren was somehow able to get a letter read to the Forton prisoners from Benjamin Franklin and the American Commissioners which stated that a cartel exchange was settled, and a "Passport vessel would soon take them to Nantes or L'Orient." Wren followed this encouraging letter from France by pressing David Hartley for further information that would bolster the captives' morale. On November 4, 1778, Hartley replied to the Commissioners that the transfer agreement was imminent. Two weeks later, Wren informed Hartley that he had passed on the good news to the prisoners, and that he now expected that "the exchange of Prisoners will speedily take place."⁶¹ In fact, the final resolution remained protracted and the Admiralty reprimanded Keeper Newsham for allowing Franklin's letter to be read to the prisoners. Evidence of prisoners' reactions to these ongoing postponements was an increase in escape attempts and a defiance of prison regulations. Newsham reflected the latter situation when he wrote to the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen in January 1779 of the "refractory behavior of the prisoners," and the "need to restrain many of them from committing acts of violence." Consequently, the autumn and winter of 1778 to 1779 was a critical period in Wren's continuous and laborious work at Forton. Yet somehow he was able to mollify much of the captives' bitterness and restiveness until the promulgation of the initial prisoner cartel in 1779.⁶²

Thomas Wren continued to work closely with his friend David Hartley on the problem of prisoner exchange just as he had done for prisoner relief. He dispatched lists of the Forton inmates who were selected for exchange; he

⁶⁰ Wren to Hartley, March 19, 1778, Franklin Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Wren to Hartley, May 13, 1778, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers.

⁶¹ PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779; Wren to Hartley, November 19, 1778, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers; Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin," 274–6; "Connor Journal," vol. XXXII, 280–84; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 19.

⁶² NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; "Connor Journal," vol. XXXII, 280–84; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 19.

passed on news about further cartel negotiations; and he reported through Hartley to the American commissioners on the general health and mood of the remaining captives. During the autumn of 1779, Wren regretfully informed Hartley that the valuable assistance of his Gosport companion, Mr. Duckett, would no longer be available. On October 4, 1779, he wrote that his "very useful and worthy Colleague at Forton for nearly two years is about to move to Esher to live after the entreaties of his uncles who are wealthy and intelligent farmers there." Wren accordingly settled Duckett's accounts, and thereafter acted alone as the prisoners' benefactor, advisor, and spokesman until the last prisoner exchange in 1783.⁶³

Supporting cartel agreements was only one way in which Thomas Wren assisted American prisoners in attaining their freedom. Although it was little known in England during the American Revolution, the Portsmouth parson, supported by sympathetic Englishmen, had a hand in abetting several successful escapes from the prison.

Attempted escapes from Forton began almost simultaneously with the initial confinement of Americans. Timothy Connor reported in his journal on June 19, 1777, "our people made a large hole through the wall of the prison and eleven men made their escape." Six days later, Keeper Newsham reported that the fugitives had all been returned, but the fact that the prisoners had been able to flee despite a sentinel being on duty prompted an Admiralty order that security be inspected and tightened.⁶⁴ This mandate, however, proved of little avail. During Connor's two years of captivity (1777 to 1779), he estimated that 112 of 413 prisoners had broken out of Forton, and British records from June 1777 up to and including April 1782 listed 536 attempted escapes, considerably more than those at Mill Prison. These endeavors included individual flights, as well as mass breakouts. Administrative actions, such as replacing guards and turnkeys, extending the prison fencing and, in July 1777, raising the reward for captured fugitives to £5, proved to have little deterrence. At the beginning of 1782, the Marquis de Lafayette, apparently aware of Forton's continuing security shortcomings, devised a plan for a French-assisted mass breakout from the Hampshire goal, but Dr. Franklin in Paris prudently dismissed it as unworkable.⁶⁵

⁶³ Wren to Hartley, October 4, 1779, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers; Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin," 267–878; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 428–36; Alexander, "Forton Prison," 386–87.

⁶⁴ PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779, NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; "Connor Journal," vol. XXX, 343–44.

⁶⁵ John Alexander, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777–1782; An Evaluation," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 102 (October 1966), 318–40; Olive Anderson, "American Escapes from British Naval Prisons During the War of Independence," *Mariner's Mirror*, 41: 3 (1955), 238–39; PRO, ADM 98/11, 1775–1779; NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; *The Annual Register for the Year 1778*, 200; "Connor Journal,"

The enterprising American prisoners dug tunnels (including one from the prison privy); they jumped the eight-foot prison pickets and dug under the fences; they bribed or tricked corrupt, ill-trained, or incompetent guards; and in a few cases they feigned serious illness in order to obtain transfer to the less protected Haslar Hospital. Punishment for recaptured fugitives, forty days in the Black Hole at half-rations, plus relegation to the bottom of the exchange list, was apparently not too serious a deterrent. Furthermore, Forton itself was less secure than Mill Prison and the area immediately outside the Gosport prison was more conducive to hiding than the Plymouth gaol. Moreover, guards at both Forton and Mill had no standing orders to fire at fleeing inmates. Therefore, escape must have seemed more feasible and attractive than a frustrating and tedious wait for exchange.⁶⁶

Despite these inviting circumstances, plus the fact that many local residents were corruptible, escape from Forton and from England was not without danger and difficulty. Although guards had no orders to shoot fleeing inmates, they had live ammunition and some did fire at escapees. Informers inside the prison also warned the keeper of inmate plans. Thus, in August 1781, John Newsham notified his superiors that he had used such informants to learn “that the Prisoners at Forton have a hole nearly finished whereby a number mean to sign on some vessel and make for the coast of France.” And the improvement of physical security, beginning in early 1778, while far from foolproof, at least made escape from the prison more difficult than before.⁶⁷

Other obstacles remained for prisoners who somehow effected their escape from Forton’s immediate confines. Descriptions of fugitive prisoners were distributed to local magistrates, military commanders, and the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen. These descriptions not only benefitted English sheriffs and justices but also local civilians called “five pounders” who were awarded that generous sum for returning any of the escapees. Some prisoners actually worked in collusion with these civilians for a free evening outside Forton plus a little extra money for themselves. The practice became so prevalent that in 1782 the Admiralty ordered that rewards for escapees be reduced to their original 10s. sum. Still, most of the Yankee captives who were attempting to flee England had to be concerned about bounty hunters and their tracking dogs.⁶⁸ Added to all this was the fact that most of the fugitives

vol. XXXIII, 36–39; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 381–83; Benjamin Franklin to the Marquis of Lafayette, March 28, 1782, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 37, 60.

⁶⁶ *The Annual Register . . . for the Year 1778* (London, 1779), 9; Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols; Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 74–76, 106–14, 177–79, 185–88; Anderson, “American Escapes,” 238–40; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 382–84; Lemisch, “Listening to the Inarticulate,” 18.

⁶⁷ NMM, ADM/M 1702–1806; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 382–4; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 10.

⁶⁸ NMM, ADM/M, 1702–1806; Lemisch, “Listening to the Inarticulate,” 19; “Diary of George Thompson,” p. 225.

were hampered by a lack of knowledge of secure travel routes and needed suitable clothing, money, and personal identification.

Assistance for overcoming these obstacles became available through sources outside the prison. (Mr. Duckett, Thomas Wren's associate in Gosport, may have been one such source in the early phases of attempted break-outs since he could covertly provide the means to guide the escapees across the narrow Portsmouth Harbour to the seaport itself.) The difficulty in recapturing many of the prisoners and the news that several American fugitives had actually reached safety in France soon convinced English officials that the fugitives had received some illicit support. Reports to the Admiralty and the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen confirmed the existence of such unlawful assistance. On July 20, 1778 a letter to the Admiralty noted that prisoners "who can get money will not long remain prisoners" and that "there are friends who aren't far from Portsmouth who can assist their endeavours." On September 29 of the following year, six justices wrote to the Admiralty from Fareham that "the fugitives are known to have many friends in the neighbourhood who take every occasion of giving them protection and assistance."⁶⁹ More oblique references concerning illegal help were contained in communications by loyal subjects in Hampshire, but Crown officials were unable to identify the specific sources of such help.

If magistrates had investigated this matter carefully, they might have uncovered a link between the successful escapes and the Reverend Thomas Wren and his Portsmouth associates. Indeed, it was Wren's chapel at the top of the High Street that often served as the first stop in a freedom trip for those who were able to slip out of Forton and evade the avaricious "five pounders" or the military patrols. In his chapel Wren, along with supportive townsmen, offered sanctuary to the fugitives who had crossed Portsmouth Harbour. There these Americans were provided with the necessary means, and sometimes personal escorts, for the crucial journey to London.

Once in London, the escapees almost invariably went to Wren's friend Thomas Digges, who lived at No. 23 Villiers Street, Strand. At Digges's home, and sometimes at the residence of "Dr." Griffith Williams, another pro-American advocate, the escapees from both Forton and Mill were concealed until they received money and means of transportation to the Continent. By June 1782, Digges claimed to have aided more than 160 fugitives. However, this assertion, as well as Digges's earlier claim that the burden of helping these Americans had put him under "extreme financial difficulties," was somewhat exaggerated. In addition, while both Digges and Wren had clearly broken the law by assisting rebel fugitives, such activities were far less crucial than the blatant treason of James Aitken ("Jack the Painter"), executed in March 1777 for abortive attempts to burn Portsmouth's dockyards. In fact, by this time, Digges's own claims concerning financial matters had rung quite hollow.

⁶⁹ NMM, ADMM, 1702–1806.

This Maryland expatriate had recently been exposed for pocketing some of the funds destined for prisoner relief, and an annoyed Benjamin Franklin had referred to him contemptuously as “a Devil.”⁷⁰

Portsmouth residents assisting the secretive and illicit activities of Thomas Wren were evidently led by Sir John Carter, whose home in the High Street was almost opposite the Presbyterian chapel, behind which, in St. Thomas's Street, according to one prisoner, Wren's own residence was said to be. Carter was well known for his vigorous opposition to the American war, and, along with fellow merchants and congregants Thomas and William White and Timothy Pike, he waged political battles with the faction then controlling Portsmouth's municipal government. Such Whiggishness naturally produced a strong affinity for and eagerness to assist the Forton prisoners. Some of Carter's help, as noted previously, came through his financial donations to Thomas Wren. However, it is likely that Carter, and perhaps his political associates, were accessories to the sanctuary and support Wren provided to American escapees. The proximity of his home to the Presbyterian chapel, where he was a congregant, would have made it difficult to avoid having knowledge of any secret activities there, and he and his associates were the logical source of funds that Wren provided for travel expenses to London safe-houses.⁷¹

No written acknowledgment can be found concerning the roles of Sir John Carter or Thomas Wren in aiding these escapes, but Wren's actions alone were noted by others. John Thornton, in his letter to the American commissioners in January 1778, wrote that in addition to his benevolences for the American prisoners, Mr. Wren had been “providing some with the means of making their escapes.” Later, in November 1780, Thomas Digges wrote to Franklin that “numbers have reduced lately owing to the exertions of a very worthy little agent; numbers having found their way to a certain house in Amster(da)m” (a reference to the High Street chapel's Dutch architecture).⁷²

Successful escapees wrote of Wren's assistance. Captain Elisha Hinman mentioned Wren's help after he had bribed his way out of prison. Prizemaster George Thompson noted that after he and another inmate had made their

⁷⁰ Dr. Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 20, 1778, Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society; Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, November 10, 1779, Franklin Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 405–06, 418; Alexander, “Forton Prison,” 383; Neil L. York, “Burning the Dockyard: John the Painter and the American Revolution,” *The Portsmouth Papers*, 71 (March 2001), 1–23.

⁷¹ Geddes, “Portsmouth During the Great French Wars,” 11–15; Thomas Greenleaf to John Adams, July 16, 1778, in Robert J. Taylor, Greg L. Lint and Celeste Walker, eds, *Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), vol. 6, 293–94.

⁷² Thornton to American Commissioners, January 5–8, 1778; Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, November 13, 1780, Franklin Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 421.

escapes from Forton, Wren had provided them with a safe hideaway and additional clothing until a way out of England was arranged. Captain of Marines Alexander Dick and several companions broke out of confinement in September 1778, and Wren gave them temporary refuge before clandestinely directing them to Thomas Digges and their subsequent liberation. Lieutenant Luke Matthewman reported that after he and Captain John Smith had tunneled their way to freedom in late 1780, they “went to Portsmouth where we received instructions from our good friend Dr. Wren how to proceed.” Lieutenant Nathaniel Fanning was not an escapee, but in 1783 he too described the “extra-legal” assistance offered by Wren. Fanning commented appropriately that all the clergyman’s services to the captives “ought to be universally known in the United States.”⁷³

The Portsmouth cleric’s assistance also extended to one notable American who endured his captivity at a site distinctly different than Forton or Mill. This individual was Henry Laurens, a prosperous South Carolina merchant planter, and a President of the Continental Congress. Laurens had been captured on the High Seas while on a diplomatic mission to Europe, and soon afterward, in October 1780, he was remanded to the infamous Tower of London. He received petty harassment from the onset of his confinement, but simultaneously he also obtained relief from several pro-American sympathizers in Britain. In London, his benefactors included politicians such as Edmund Burke, and then successful merchants including Edward Bridgen and Benjamin Vaughan, who provided money, clothing, and other necessities. Thomas Wren became one such benefactor outside the capital when he actively worked for the American’s discharge. Laurens ultimately obtained his release by early 1782, and in May he expressed his strong personal appreciation and desire for recognition of the clergyman, who had bestowed benefactions both on himself and the rebel prisoners in Britain:

If it please God to conduct me again to America, Americans shall be told of yr [your] goodness, & I trust Ama [America] will make grateful acknowledgments, but shd [should] we fail, God will reward you. I pray God to bless & keep you under his holy protection.⁷⁴

With the close of the American Revolution, action was taken recognizing Wren’s various endeavors. In February 1780 a letter from Benjamin Franklin to the Portsmouth clergyman offered an early indication of American gratitude:

⁷³ Robert A. Stewart, *The History of Virginia’s Navy of the Revolution* (Richmond, VA, 1933), 180; Thomas C. Parramore, “The Great Escape from Forton Gaol,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, XLV (1968), 355–56; Hinman, *Catalogue*, 819n; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 392; Luke Matthewman, “Narrative,” 182; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 18.

⁷⁴ Henry Laurens to Thomas Wren, May 6, 1782, David R. Chestnut and C. James Taylor, eds, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, vol. 15 (Columbia, SC, 2000), 496–97, 530; Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Willcox, Dorothy Bridgewater, et al., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 12 (New Haven, CT, 1968), 422.

Reverend Sir:

Your great attention to the wants of our poor captive countrymen and your kind and charitable care of them in their sicknesses and other distresses I have often heard spoke of by such as have escaped and passed through this place, in the strongest terms of grateful acknowledgement. I beg you accept among the rest, my sincere and hearty thanks, and my best wishes for your health and prosperity.⁷⁵

Later, on July 22, 1783, Franklin cited Wren's contributions in a letter to Robert R. Livingston, head of the Confederation Congress's Department of Foreign Affairs, and added: "I wish the Congress would enable me to make a present and that some of our universities would confer upon him the degree of Doctor." The following September 25, three weeks after the signing of the Peace of Paris, a congressional resolution was initiated to thank Wren and award him a gift of £500. Apparently Congress had second thoughts about the financial gift, for the approved resolution of September 29 merely voted that "the thanks of Congress be given to the Reverend Doctor Wren for his humane and benevolent attention to the citizens of these United States who were prisoners at Portsmouth in Great Britain during the war."⁷⁶

A few weeks after this laudatory congressional resolve, Thomas Wren was sent word of the second honor that Franklin had suggested to Livingston. Contact had been made with Elias Boudinot, President of the Confederation Congress, and a trustee of the College of New Jersey. Boudinot evidently had little difficulty persuading this Presbyterian College to award a Presbyterian minister a degree, especially with the added endorsements of Franklin and Livingston. Thus, on November 1, 1783, Boudinot wrote to Franklin informing him of the college's award to Wren of an honorary doctorate. Boudinot also included a copy of the diploma and a letter written to the "Rev'd Dr. Wren" mentioning his acts of "Benevolence and Humanity" to the American prisoners, and concluding;

It adds Sir to my happiness on this Occasion to enclose a Diploma from the University in this Place of which I have the honor of being a trustee conferring on you the Degree of Doctor of Divinity which I hope you will favor us with the acceptance of as an additional Evidence of the respect of this grateful country.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Wren, February 26, 1780, in Francis Wharton, ed., *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1888), vol. 3, 523–24.

⁷⁶ Worthington C. Ford., ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, vol. 25 (Washington, DC, 1922), 619, 632; "Report of the Committee on Dispatches from Foreign Ministers," in Edmund C. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC, 1934), 306.

⁷⁷ Elias Boudinot to Benjamin Franklin, November 1, 1783, Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society; Boudinot to Wren, November 1, 1783, in Burnett, *Letters*, vol. 7, 362–63.

The honorary degree citation that followed the name of the Reverend Thomas Wren was simply worded: "Voted the Thanks of the Continental Congress in 1783 for services to American Prisoners at Portsmouth Eng." Although the Princeton award failed to amplify what services had been performed, it did provide the Portsmouth parson with a unique niche in the annals of American history. Wren had become the first Englishman to receive an honorary degree from an American college since the outbreak of the American Revolution. The award was granted at Princeton's September 1783 commencement ceremonies – the same month that the Treaty of Paris acknowledged the independence of the United States.⁷⁸ Perhaps the two events even held an unseen connection, since the Reverend Mr. Wren's degree might also symbolize those common and kindred ties that would continue to bind these two separate nations.

On December 10, 1783, Franklin sent Congress's resolution of thanks, the College of New Jersey's diploma, and Boudinot's letter to Thomas Wren by way of a mutual friend, William Hodgson of London. Hodgson had served on the prisoner relief committee and had assisted Franklin in arranging exchanges of wartime captives. Two months later, Dr. Wren replied to Boudinot in a modest and gracious manner:

Portsmouth, 12 February 1784

Honorable Sir,

I have had the honour to receive your very obliging letter of the 1st November last, which enclosed a Vote of thanks of the Honourable the Congress of the United States of America, and a Diploma of Doctor in Divinity from the College of New Jersey.

The sentiments which you are pleased to express on this occasion assure me Sir, that I may take the liberty to request, that you will present to the Honourable Congress, in a better manner than I am able to do my most grateful acknowledgements for the distinguished honour they have done me. I receive this testimony of their approbation with the highest sense of their condescending and generous regards. It is the pure result of their own goodness; For tho' I was determined to do everything in my power for the relief of their captives, yet were not my efforts equal to my wishes. All possible assistance to men suffering so deeply, and in such a cause, appeared to me, to be in the strictest sense, my duty. And as the impulse of that humanity which I feel, the attachment to that liberty which I adore and the desire of succoring oppressed innocence, never obtained full gratification. I am the more affected with the acknowledgement of that honourable body over which you preside. Their Vote of thanks to me, also acquires additional value, as it is the Act of men who had spirit equal to the defense of their rights, and perseverance sufficient for the emancipation of their country. Such honours no other men can confer. Such honours no other men possess.

I pray the favour of you Sir to convey the enclosed to the President of the

⁷⁸ *General Catalogue of Princeton University, 1746–1906* (Princeton, NJ, 1908), 399–400.

College of Princeton. And permit me Sir to add that I esteem myself greatly obliged by the polite and friendly manner in which you have communicated to me these high and undeserved regards of your country.

May your country, Sir, be the Seat of freedom, the region of virtue and prosperity, and the asylum of the oppressed for ever.

With Sincere respect and esteem
I have the honour to be
Honourable Sir
Your very obliged and humble Servant
Thomas Wren.⁷⁹

Thomas Wren never saw the small New Jersey college that awarded him this honorary doctorate. Following the end of the American Revolution, he continued to preach at the High Street Chapel. He maintained a correspondence with some of those individuals in England who had helped him with the prisoner relief, and with some former American captives.⁸⁰

Apparently, Wren was also in touch with Henry Laurens, then an American peace commissioner, and possibly may have met John Adams, the first United States Minister [Ambassador] to Great Britain. In the former instance, Laurens wrote to Robert R. Livingston in Philadelphia on July 17, 1783, noting that “Doctor (Richard) Price and the Reverend Mr. Wren of Portsmouth” had strongly recommended four Englishmen “as Settlers and Citizens in the United States.” At the time Laurens was in Bath seeking relief from a chronic illness, and perhaps became acquainted with one of these Britons during his convalescence in England.⁸¹

John Adams had known about Thomas Wren’s pro-American activities and sympathies for several years, and in the spring of 1787 this illustrious American, then serving as Minister (Ambassador) of the United States to Britain, sensed an existent need to make use of the cleric’s support. In April, Wren had sent Adams a possibly portentous message concerning the imprisonment of a suspicious individual named Robert Muir. Muir, who was also called Moore, and a Scotsman, had arrived in London the previous January on a ship from Charleston, South Carolina. Following an undivulged stay in London, Muir, who also claimed to come from North Carolina, traveled to Portsmouth Common, residing there at a “Mr. Darts.” Later, Muir, “dressed as a common sailor,” had approached Walter Mowbray, a prominent Portsmouth printer, and there he had allegedly attempted to obtain Mowbray’s collusion in “printing off a thousand Carolina notes.” The printer’s concerns were immediately

⁷⁹ Wren to Elias Boudinot, February 12, 1783, Princeton University Archives.

⁸⁰ Charles W. Parsons, “Zabdiel and John Boylston,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXXV (1881), 150–52; Wren to Franklin, December 5, 1782, Franklin Papers, American Philosophical Society.

⁸¹ Henry Laurens to Robert Livingston, July 17, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress (M 247, r 117, i 89, p. 311), National Archives Microfilm.

aroused, and Mowbray and Wren wrote to Adams; Portsmouth's Mayor, Sir John Carter, was alerted; and Muir was quickly arrested and remanded to the town gaol. Mowbray also informed Adams of his belief that Muir had associates, and that it was discovered that the detainee possessed a large amount of printers' type and a considerable number of currency notes from the various United States.⁸²

John Adams's suspicions were aroused by the letters from Thomas Wren and Walter Mowbray. Shortly after their receipt, the American diplomat journeyed to Portsmouth where he consulted with Mayor Carter and both men. With their help, he was then able to obtain a prison interview with Robert Muir, but the session proved fruitless. Afterward, Adams, in a letter to John Jay in America, colorfully described Muir as a "Shrewed Fellow, but with a mean, hungry, desperate expression, Suitable to any kind of atrocious villany." Although Adams was unable to report any counterfeiting ring in England, he was undoubtedly grateful for the Portsmouth parson's continued friendly assistance to America. Both men shared a similar belief that through cooperation in incidents such as this, an eventual and warranted Anglo-American amicability could result. (This intent had already been revealed by the American emissary in an audience with George III, when he told the monarch that Britain and the United States, "though separated by an ocean and under different governments, have the same language, a similar religion, and kindred blood.") On June 25, 1787, Adams wrote to Wren that for lack of further evidence, he concurred with "Sir John Carter that it will be most prudent to release Muir on his own recognizance." The final mention of this puzzling incident came seventeen days later when Wren wrote to Adams suggesting that a better course of action might be to allow Muir to be held for trial until the quarter sessions (July 23) and then be speedily acquitted, not as innocent, but for want of proper evidence.⁸³

Meanwhile, the closing of Forton as a wartime prison in 1783 had ended Wren's humanitarian efforts there, but, as indicated in his church's records, he

⁸² Wren to John Adams, April 22, 1787, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r 113, i 84, v 6), 451–44; Wren to John Adams, April 20, 1787 (recipient's copy), John Adams to Wren, April 21, 1787 (letterbook copy), *The Adams Papers*, Letters Received and other Loose Papers, Mass. Historical Society, Boston, 1958; a searcher, used by the author, was unable to find any mention of a Robert Muir or Robert Moore for this period in the archives of the North Carolina State Library in Raleigh, North Carolina.

⁸³ Walter Mowbray to John Adams (M247, r 113, i 84, V6), 456–57, National Archives Microfilm; John Adams to John Jay, April 30, 1787; Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r 113, i 84, V 6), 477–80; John Adams to Wren, June 25, 1787 (letterbook copy), Wren to John Adams, July 12, 1787 (recipient's copy), *The Adams Papers*; David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York, 2001), 336. Thomas Jefferson, not John Adams, was the first future American President to visit Portsmouth. The Virginian stopped at the seaport in July 1784 on a voyage from Boston to France. See James A. Bear Jr. and Lucia C. Stanton, eds, *Jefferson's Memorandum Book: Accounts with Local Records and Miscellany, 1767–1820, I, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Second Series* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 555–56.

continued to work for charitable causes in England. As a result of these altruistic acts, he became known as “the John Howard of his neighborhood.” He also continued to go northward on his vacations to the captivating Lake District of his youth, and quite likely to behold once again “The beauteous brook of Borrowdale.” There he was also respected for his amiability and knowledge, and he was even invited to settle as a minister to Keswick’s non-conformists. Wren declined the offer, however, and returned to his Portsmouth chapel where he continued to preach until his death, “after an illness of a few days,” on October 30, 1787, when he was said to have been “carried off suddenly by an inflammation in his bowels.” Eleven days later, Richard Price, the liberal, pro-American dissenting clergyman, offered this touching and appropriate farewell: “Dr. Wren’s death has given me great concern; He was one of the best of men, and will be happy in a better world.”⁸⁴

Among the individuals in England who openly supported the Patriot cause during the American Revolution, the Reverend Dr. Wren was unique. Men such as Charles Fox, William Pitt, Lord Abingdon, and Edmund Burke openly orated against the war, but these men did not take their opposition to the hostilities to the point of treason as the Portsmouth minister had done. In addition, while several individuals in England such as Thomas Digges, David Hartley, and William Hodgson had joined Wren in gathering subscriptions for American captives, Thomas Wren, unlike Digges, was not accused of pocketing prisoner relief funds. In fact, the records reveal that Wren was never reimbursed for some of the monies that he had provided from his own limited resources.⁸⁵

Wren’s motives for his altruistic acts appear to have been both political and ethical, according to his letter to Elias Boudinot. In it, he indicated a strong sympathy for the ideals of the American Revolution as well as a magnanimous concern for the prisoners at Forton. He may also have been impelled into his obviously courageous involvement with enemy prisoners by a strong sectarian empathy for the captives, most of whom were fellow dissenters from the Anglican faith. And it was commonly known by non-conformist ministers in England that their counterparts in America had far greater religious liberty than themselves, even in colonies with an Episcopal establishment.

⁸⁴ Richard Price to the Marquis of Lansdowne, November 10, 1783; Ms. Bowood, National Library of Wales; PCRO, CHU 82/9–10; Gates, *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 298; Hutchinson, *History of Cumberland*, 225; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LVII, pt. 2, 1026–7. The stanza regarding Borrowdale was taken from the poem, “Sweet Keswick’s Vale,” by John Dalton (1709–1763).

⁸⁵ Sheldon S. Cohen, “William Hodgson: An English Merchant and Unsung Friend to American Revolutionary Captives,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 122: 1/2 (January/April 1999), 57–85; Franklin to William Hodgson, December 10, 1783, in Smyth, *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. IX, 124; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 381–85; Wharton, *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence*, vol. IV, 623–24, 643–47, vol. V, 149, 293–94, 512.

Humanitarian adages from the Scriptures or from the altruistic evangelism then affecting much of England may also have influenced the change from his rather dull, unimposing posture. Perhaps it should be noted, however, that Wren's benevolent actions may have been somewhat selective. There is no evidence that he gave French prisoners the same attention and concern that he bestowed on Americans, and his letters to David Hartley (1778–1780) are laced with nationalistic sentiments against England's Gallic foe.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, his effective, firm, and supportive actions on behalf of the downtrodden Americans who were regarded as traitors was certainly exemplary. Moreover, he performed these actions in addition to the time-consuming demands of his ministry. Perhaps, then, the lines on his devastated memorial should offer the final insight into and measure of the man: "He was no less eminent For the peculiar Virtues of the Christian profession. Meekness of spirit, gentleness of manner, and an active and universal benevolence."

⁸⁶ See Wren to David Hartley, August 26, 1779, September 12, 1779, October 28, 1779, D/EHy/39, October 4, 1779, D/EHy 040, David Hartley Papers.

Reuben Harvey

Irish “friend” of American freedom

In its “Notes and Documents” section for April 1964 *The William and Mary Quarterly* printed an article by Ernest J. Moyne entitled “The Reverend William Hazlitt: A Friend of Liberty in Ireland during the American Revolution.” The subject of the article, Hazlitt (1737–1820), whose sons William and John became respectively a noted essayist and an artist, was a nonconformist English cleric. He had moved to the Irish town of Bandon in 1780 from his pastorate in Maidstone, Kent. In Bandon, Hazlitt presided over a dissenter congregation until his temporary departure for America in April 1783.¹ Professor Moyne’s article notes that during his career in western Ireland, the Reverend Mr. Hazlitt had displayed special sympathy for the rebel cause in America, and most particularly for several hundred American captives who were incarcerated nearby within the bleak, cramped confines of a prison in the seaside village of Kinsale. Here, the author provides a concise picture of Hazlitt’s benevolent and occasionally extra-legal activities on behalf of the rebel prisoners, as well as his protests against alleged maltreatment by prison staff and the supervisor John How; and he also notes that these services went unrecognized by the American government. For all these worthy points, however, the article consigns a mere footnote to the role of Reuben Harvey.² Harvey, an Irish Quaker, had promoted the American cause and had aided American detainees at Kinsale well before Hazlitt, and, unlike the parson, he did receive significant recognition from the United States for his services.

In light of these facts, as well as his inauspicious contemporary anonymity, Reuben Harvey should merit some measure of historical redress. This chapter seeks to reconstruct not only Harvey’s efforts on behalf of American prisoners detained in Ireland and Britain, but also the various motivations that underlay his support for the precept of independence for the United States.

¹ Ernest J. Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt, A Friend of Liberty in Ireland During the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 21 (April 1964), 288–89. For more information on the Reverend William Hazlitt see George Bennett, *The History of Bandon and the Principal Towns of the West Riding of Cork* (Cork, 1859), 434–36.

² Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 290–97, 297, n19.

There were, of course, several prominent individuals within Ireland who expressed their affinity or sympathies toward the cause of the American rebels. Most noted perhaps was Edmund Burke who had offered his famed but unsuccessful Parliamentary oration shortly before hostilities erupted in 1775. Burke's plaintive exhortations urge concessions as well as reconciliation with the colonies. Other notable Irishmen who also entered their support included Sir Edward Newenham, James Hussey Burgh, Thomas Connolly, Robert Stewart, Henry Grattan, and Barry Yelverton. These men, though, represented Ireland's upper classes, including several landed gentlemen.³ Reuben Harvey was a man of the "middling sort" from that often-troubled island. In addition, Harvey was someone, apart from Britain's established order due to his religious adherence to a dissident Protestant sect, who endured repeated persecution for what the establishment considered their radical social and political, and theological tenets. For this fact, as well as other circumstances, this purportedly mild-mannered Irish merchant merits coverage.

Reuben Harvey was born on September 29, 1734 in Youghal, County Cork, the son of Susanna and Thomas Harvey. The Harveys had apparently arrived in Ireland originally as part of the Cromwellian forces dispatched there during the tumultuous religious developments that had marked the Commonwealth period in seventeenth-century Britain. In Ireland the family numbered among the many nonconformists won over to the Society of Friends through the travels and exhortations of George Fox. Their seemingly extremist social and religious doctrines had little appeal to other Protestant dissenter sects in Ireland; the established Church of Ireland endeavored repeatedly to undercut their pietistic gatherings; and their temporal partners often moved rigidly against them with civil incapacitations. Nevertheless, the cohesiveness of members of the Society of Friends, and their tendency to have larger families during their early Irish decades, saw their numbers rise to between three and five thousand by the latter part of the eighteenth century. A number of Quakers became landowners or farmers, but the majority settled in urban areas where, through diligent efforts and commendable reputations in their business practices, many of them prospered in trade or manufacturing.⁴

³ T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, vol. IV, *Eighteenth Century Ireland, 1691–1800* (Oxford, 1986), 200–16; Robert B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760–1800* (Oxford, 1979), 260–74; R. Dudley Edwards, *A New History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1972), 142–43; David N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America, 1760–1820* (Dublin, 1981), 152–69. A rewarding recent book dealing with Ireland and the American Revolution is Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 2002), 1–376.

⁴ T.H. Webb, "Harvey Pedigree," Ms Religious Society of Friends Library, Dublin, Ireland; Harvey Family Mss. c1655–1843, Religious Society of Friends Library, Dublin, Ireland; James G. Ryan, ed., *Irish Church Records* (Dublin, 1992), 17–18; Isabel Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland, 1654–1900* (London, 1927), 16–24; Helen E. Hatton, *The Largest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland, 1654–1921* (Montreal, 1993), 27–28, 34–42; Richard T. Vann and

Reuben's great grandfather, Henry Harvey, had been a landowner in County Kildare, but, like several other members of the Society, his grandfather Thomas moved to Dublin where there was a large Quaker community. Thomas's occupation was listed as a linen draper. This fact is borne out in his will dated April 9, 1710, which declares that Thomas's residence and business were located on Bride's Alley. Reuben's father, also named Thomas, had settled with his family in Youghal, at the mouth of River Blackwater in County Cork, where he became a successful merchant and was named a freeman of the town in 1738.⁵

The eldest of twelve children, Reuben Harvey spent his youth in Youghal. He was made a freeman of the town in 1755, but a few years later departed for Cork City, the largest community in the county. Quakerism had appeared in the city during the mid-1650s, spreading to other communities in the county. In 1678, in Cork City's Grafton Street Meeting-House, William Penn was converted through the preaching of Thomas Loe, a Quaker missionary.⁶

Cork City had, for years, offered members of the Society of Friends advantages, principally in commercial endeavors. Located between two channels on the Lee River, 159 miles southwest of Dublin, the community was the second largest urban center in Ireland. It boasted an excellent natural harbor well suited to the export of a variety of commodities to the European continent and to America. Such exports included cattle, fish, butter, pork, linens, woolens, hides, and leather goods. Still, during their early residence in Cork City, Quakers had endured their share of arbitrary arrests, fines, and imprisonment which were also experienced by their fellow sectarians throughout Britain. Yet despite the intermittent vexations and other inequities, most of the city's Quakers held fast to principles of non-resistance and inner discipline offered to them through their monthly meeting.

The years of monarchical rule under William and Mary, Queen Anne, and especially those of the first Hanoverians, produced a softening of sectarian tensions that in turn provided considerable religious toleration to Protestant dissenters throughout Britain. This moderating sectarian climate provided spiritual relief to Quakers in Ireland, and it also offered them broad new secular

David Eversley, *Friends in Life and Death; The British and Irish Quakers in the Demographic Transition, 1650–1900* (Cambridge, 1992), 46–53; T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1986), xlv, 41–42. One of the Harvey genealogists has stated that the first recording of the family name came in eleventh-century England when it was spelled Harve. See Gardiner H. Harvey, *The Harvey Families of Inishowen, Co. Donegal, and Maen, Co. Cornwall* (Folkstone, Kent, 1927), 9–16.

⁵ Webb, "Harvey Pedigree"; P. Beryl and Olive C. Goodbody, eds, *Quaker Records in Dublin; Abstracts of Wills* (Dublin, 1957), 51.

⁶ William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd rev. edn (Cambridge, 1955), 57–58; Richard S. Harrison, *Cork City Quakers; A Brief History, 1655–1939* (Cork, 1991), 1–2; Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (New York, 1942), 73–74; Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland*, 28, 33; Webb, Ms Harvey "Pedigree."

avenues for secular prosperity – a fact evidenced by the increasing number of this sect residing in Cork City. And while some civil disabilities still existed when Friend Harvey moved there, his co-believers were far better off than the suppressed Roman Catholic majority in County Cork.⁷

The actual reasons for Reuben Harvey's removal to Cork City from Youghal remain unclear. It is evident, however, that by 1775 he had settled into a comfortable family and business life. In 1761 he married Elizabeth Wheddon from Limerick, and during the ensuing fourteen years she bore him nine children. (Three more would be born prior to Elizabeth's death in 1781.)⁸ While his wife was increasing the size of the Harvey family, Reuben was providing for their welfare with a successful and wide-ranging mercantile enterprise. Not long after their arrival, Cork City Quakers had undertaken significant commercial enterprises, and, as Richard S. Harrison has noted, they effectively used their Men's Meetings to organize a variety of often successful mercantile endeavors. Harvey's commercial prosperity was evident when, in 1771, he moved his family into a newly constructed home in the residential district of Pleasant Field (Black Rock) just outside Cork City. Harvey's business dealings extended not only throughout the British Isles, but also to North America where his shipment bills (for example, for September 5, 1772) appear in the manuscript papers of the Pembertons, a prominent Quaker merchant family in Philadelphia.⁹ A burgeoning warehouse, built alongside the seaport's quay, became the centerpiece of his trading accomplishments.

The outbreak of the American Revolution in April 1775 had considerable ramifications for Cork City, which then numbered about 80,000 inhabitants. The community and county governments were controlled by a conservative Protestant elite which was certainly aware of the example the colonial uprising in America could have on the discontented and subjected Roman Catholic majority in Ireland. Consequently, the ruling establishment, buttressed by the established Church of Ireland, gave its overwhelming support to the Royal government's efforts to quell the American rebellion. Although the conflict eventually brought serious economic problems to County Cork, many of the

⁷ Leopold Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus; James Naylor and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 158–63; Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers* (Westport, CT, 1988), 29–30, 65–70; Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, chs II–VII; Harrison, *Cork City Quakers*, 2–7; Grubb, *Quakers in Ireland*, 60–68; Russell, *The History of Quakerism*, 73–75; William O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City, From the Earliest of Times to the Act of Union* (Dublin, 1937), 134–35, 150–202.

⁸ Webb, "Harvey Pedigree."

⁹ Dora H. Devlin, "Journal of Margaret Harvey, 1809," *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, XXIV (1927), 14; Reuben Harvey to Joseph and Charles Pemberton, September 5, 1772, Pemberton Papers, vol. 24, 18, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Harrison, *Cork City Quakers*, 16–30.

city's merchants, artisans, and farmers hoped to profit from supplying the forces of George III and initially backed the royal cause.¹⁰

Furthermore, many of the twenty-one British regiments stationed in Ireland on the eve of the Revolution passed through County Cork on the way to the fighting, and their support for the monarchy was similarly evident on board Royal Navy and merchant vessels that anchored in the county on their way to North America. In addition, aside from regular British units that still remained in the area throughout the conflict, there were several "Volunteer" societies enrolled in the county in order to sustain Crown authority. These "Volunteer" societies, which had taken their cue from the earlier Protestant militias, re-emerged during the years 1775 to 1782; they were designed to maintain the island's established order from what were perceived as dangers to internal stability, and increasing external threats from the French and American rebel activities.¹¹

Meanwhile, other direct evidence of the conflict had emerged in Ireland by the end of 1775, when rebel prisoners began disembarking from royal warships. Most of these forlorn and apprehensive captives were set ashore at the village of Kinsale, located about fifteen miles south of Cork City. (Perhaps the most noted event in Kinsale's history occurred on May 7, 1915, when the British Cunard liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk ten miles offshore with the loss of 1198 lives.) There they were remanded within the somber walls of a sixteenth-century stone tower house, originally called Desmond's Castle, but more recently known as the French Prison, after those detainees held there in recent British wars.¹²

The first American captives who had the misfortune to find themselves incarcerated in the prison at Kinsale were thirty-three rebels seized during a

¹⁰ Edward E. Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 1926), 2–3, 191; Reuben Harvey to the American commissioners in Paris, February 10, 1783, Reuben Harvey to General George Washington, February 12, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress, National Archives (M 247 r60, i46), 342–35; Richard Caulfield, ed., *The Council Book of the City of Cork from 1609 to 1643, and from 1690 to 1800* (Guilford, Surrey, 1876), 906; Francis H. Tuckey, *The County and City Remembrances, or Annals of the County and City of Cork* (Ire., 1837), 172–74; David N. Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America*, 154, 157, 165; O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City*, 148–51, 166–68, 175–81, 215–19, 225–28; Copies of Harvey's letters to the American commissioners and to George Washington are also found at the Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University Library.

¹¹ Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 2–3, 190–91; James O'Donovan, "The Anatomy of the Volunteers in Cork, 1775–82," pts I, II, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* (July–December, 1982), 28–42, 118–27; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 544–46; Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 162–66.

¹² Florence O'Sullivan, *The History of Kinsale* (Dublin, 1916), 128–29; Florence O'Sullivan, "Kinsale," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser., XI: 65 (January–March 1905), 9–10; James N. Healey, *The Castles of County Cork* (Dublin, 1989), 247;

skirmish near Montreal in September 1775. Transported across the Atlantic on board the warship *HMS Solebay*, they had arrived at Kinsale the following December and upon disembarkation were dispatched under guard to the nearby prison. A description of the size of the French Prison reveals that it had sufficient space to accommodate at least this initial inconsiderable group of detainees: "A small roughly three story tower topped [sic] by a battlement wall walk and slated gabled roof – A rectangular two storied extension only partly roofed about the northwest wall."¹³ In addition, this first batch of Yankee prisoners also appear to have obtained adequate personal provisions from their captors. Reuben Harvey later wrote that these early rebel captives "had comfortable Supplies of everything for their Winter Passage." The fate of each of these early arrivals is not cited by historians, but the prolongation of hostilities in America brought with it significant changes for captured rebels subsequently sent to the Kinsale prison.¹⁴

In March 1777 Parliament adopted legislation known as "[Lord] North's Act" which stated that any officer or crewman captured on armed American ships could be committed to land-based prisons in Britain. Further, because the vessels were assumed to have been "seized or taken in the act of high treason," these rebels, regardless of rank, were to be denied the status and rights of prisoners of war.

The act was followed by the designation of certain locales in the British Isles as detention centers, and providing for the staffing of these prisons. In England, Forton Gaol near Portsmouth and Mill Gaol (also known as Old Mill or Millbay) situated between Plymouth and Plymouth Dock became the principal detention centers, while the French Prison in Kinsale served this function in Ireland. A smaller number of these captives were incarcerated in several other scattered sites including Falmouth, Shrewsbury, Weymouth, and Chatham in England, Edinburgh in Scotland, and Pembroke in Wales. During the remainder of the war most of the American inmates at these sites were seamen taken on privateers, state navy vessels, or Continental Navy warships. After the subsequent entry into the conflicts of France (1778), Spain (1779), and Holland (1780), seamen from ships of other nations were also held at these confinement centers.¹⁵

James Colman, "Antiquarian Remains and Historical Places in Kinsale District," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser., XVIII: 95 (July–September 1912), 133–39. In January 1747 a fire at the prison killed fifty-four French prisoners. Colman, "Antiquarian Remains," 135.

¹³ Susan Zajac, John Cronin and Jacinta Kiely, *Urban Archaeological Survey of County Cork* (Cork, 1995), 55; Reuben Harvey to the American commissioners, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin, February 10, 1783, 339.

¹⁴ C.J.F. Mac Carthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 3rd ser., XCIV (January–December, 1989), 46; Reuben Harvey to the American commissioners, February 10, 1783, 339.

¹⁵ William C. Cobbett, comp., *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period*

Image not available

Plate 4.1 French Prison, Kinsale, Ireland. Photograph taken about 1930.

Source: Courtesy of the Cork County Council and Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

In the first years following the passage of North's Act, small numbers of American mariners, most of whom were taken on the high seas, were brought to Kinsale by their captors. Unless the captives could prove that they were not on armed vessels – a very difficult task before generally unfriendly British magistrates – the local justices generally remanded them to the French Prison located near the village's docks. Once inside the prison they were under the supervision of the prison's agent (also called the keeper), John How, an Anglo-Irishman.¹⁶

John How, for his part, was responsible to a governmental body in London which was subordinate to the Admiralty, and known as the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners. The governing policies that How was to follow at his gaol were generally those prescribed for the larger prisons in England. But in actual practices, they could not be the same. Because the prison at Kinsale was significantly smaller than the Forton or Mill prisons, How's administrative staff was smaller, but, as in the two English prisons, guards were furnished by local militia or regular army units stationed in the county. During its first years of operation, even with the addition of French and Spanish detainees, the Kinsale prison was not overcrowded. Moreover, a significant number of the early inmates remained only temporarily in the Irish prison before being moved to larger internment centers in England. For example, several crewmen of the Continental Navy brig *Cabot*, captured in October 1776, spent only nine months in Irish captivity before being sent on to a far lengthier incarceration at Mill Gaol. Occasionally, American captives at smaller detention centers in Britain were also conveyed to the larger confines of Forton or Mill. Kinsale was not unique among the smaller British gaols holding prisoners during the American Revolution. Pembroke, at the Western edge of Wales, imprisoned a smaller number of Americans "in an old farmhouse," and like those at the Irish prison, their conditions worsened as the war progressed.¹⁷

In nearby Cork City, Reuben Harvey had been aware of the confinement of the first American detainees in Kinsale's French Prison and reported later

to the Year 1803 (London, 1814), vol. 19, 3–4; Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 24–37; Colman, "Antiquarian Remains," 135–36; MacCarthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," 50, ns2, 8.

¹⁶ Sketch of present-day Kinsale from the "Coast of Cork" maps showing the location of Desmond Castle (Kinsale Prison) was supplied by Mr. Tim Cadogan, Reference Librarian, Cork County Library; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 17, 30; Moyne, "The Reverend William Hazlitt," 291, n7.

¹⁷ Peter Cashinberry *et al.* to Benjamin Franklin, November 2, 1779, Barbara B. Oberg, Ellen R. Cohn, Jonathan R. Dull and Kate M. Ohno eds, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 31 (New Haven, CT, 1995), 21–22; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 19, 32–38, 42; MacCarthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," 46. Because Kinsale was one of the smaller British prisons, the administrative regulations composed by the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen for Forton and Mill prisons had to be modified.

that he and other Friends had contributed money “to buy Cloathes [sic] and other Necessaries” for them. However, during this early phase of the prison’s operation, the principal activities of the Quaker merchant focused on protesting Britain’s overall prosecution of the war in America. Thus, in a subsequent letter to George Washington, Harvey claimed that from the onset of the conflict he had opposed the actions of “a weak and wicked Ministry” in their attempts to subdue the insurgent colonists.¹⁸

A recent history of Cork City Quakers appears to support these assertions. It has noted that Harvey participated in a Friends relief committee effort in 1778 to supply food to needy colonists. It has also declared that Harvey was “in constant contact with the British government in an attempt to provide independent information about the costs of the war to show how misguided British policy was.” Harvey himself also sought to inform the rebels in America that his endorsement of their cause was truly altruistic, since he declared pointedly that his “warm attachment to America” had prevented him “from reaping considerable profits as many of the Merchants of this City have done under [the] Government in the Provisioning and supplying the troops at New York.” In addition, guided by his pro-American sentiments, the Cork City merchant was said to have aided the rebels by allegedly supplying them with military and naval information and by once contacting colleagues in London who were able to contradict some false news that Harvey understood was “to be laid before Parliament against the Americans.”¹⁹

Harvey’s early and enthusiastic support for the American cause was not unusual for someone in his circumstances. Recent historical writings surveying Ireland during this period reveal that there was considerable sympathy and backing for the American rebellion among nonconformist Protestant sects in the country. The names of several such partisan individuals have been cited at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, many of these Irish Protestant dissenters had relatives or friends in America supporting the rebellion, and the fact that the great majority of the American prisoners were also nonconformists added to their existing sympathies for the Revolution. Even though Harvey’s activities were consequently not out of place for an Irish dissenter, his open and active support for the Americans resulted in a local backlash against him. The Royalist faction controlling the county establishment had little tolerance for such refractory actions, and in February 1783, Harvey wrote to the American Commissioners in Paris detailing some of the personal slights and recriminations to which he had been subjected:

¹⁸ Reuben Harvey to American commissioners, February 10, 1783, 340, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University; Reuben Harvey to General George Washington, February 12, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress.

¹⁹ John O. Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters, Vol. I, Friends and Relief* (York, 1975), 354–55. *Cork [Ireland] Mercantile Chronicle*, February 3, 1808; Harrison, *Cork City Quakers*, 46; Reuben Harvey to American commissioners, February 10, 1783, 340; Reuben Harvey to General George Washington, February 12, 1783; Devlin, “Journal of Margaret Harvey,” 14.

I have been severely reflected upon during the American War for my open and averred Attendance to your just cause. I have been threatened with the vengeance of the [British] Ministry and was once obliged to appear before the Mayor of this City to answer a charge brought against me by Robert Gordon Esq. Commissary: no less a charge than that of assisting the American Rebels, which however had no effect, for I told both Gordon and the Mayor, that I abhorred the American War; that I must ever wish Success to a People who bravely opposed the tyrannick [*sic*] Attempt of a Vile Ministry; and that if the Americans were reduced to their last province, I would still adhere to their Cause, believing it to be a just one and them an oppressed People.²⁰

But the various endorsements that Harvey made on behalf of the American rebels, the surreptitious information he supposedly supplied to them, and the consequent repercussions that he received for them were not the primary reasons for his notoriety. Instead it resulted from the humanitarian and unflagging assistance he provided to the distressed American prisoners confined at the Kinsale prison – most especially the indispensable assistance given to them during the Revolution's final phase. That there was such a pressing need was reflected in the significant upsurge in the number of rebel captives incarcerated within the Kinsale tower prison at this time.

This increase stemmed mostly from the growing number of British seizures of American privateers that had been plying the sea lanes off the southwestern coast of Ireland in late 1780 and early 1781. A considerable number of such privateers had sailed from New England where state governments had authorized their marauding voyages. Royal naval vessels that had participated in the capture of many of these ships subsequently deposited most of the seized seamen at Kinsale and then sold their prizes at courts of vendue. This practice proved quite convenient for the captors, but not so for the Americans who were consigned to an increasingly overcrowded, pestilence-ridden prison that now also included large numbers of French and Spanish detainees. How Reuben Harvey reacted to these particular captives, representing traditional, non-Protestant adversaries of Britain, is not clearly recorded, but, given his Quaker humanitarian strictures, it is quite likely that they too benefitted from his munificences.²¹

In Paris, Benjamin Franklin was aware, at this time, of rebel seamen incarcerated at Kinsale, but he focused more on the captives held at Forton and Mill. By March 1782, he felt an equally pressing need for attending to those in Ireland. This was evident in a letter sent by the American Commissioner

²⁰ Reuben Harvey to American Commissioners, February 10, 1783, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin; R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution* (Oxford, 1979), 238–45; E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution; Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh, 1994), 49–51; Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791–1798* (Oxford, 1994), 17–18; Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, CT, 1989), 112–13.

²¹ MacCarthy, "The Prisoners at Kinsale," 41–50; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 128, 165.

to a London sympathizer, in which he declared that the Kinsale prisoners “are destitute of every Necessary, and die daily in numbers.” Asserting that he had “no Correspondent in Ireland,” he continued, “Can you put me in a way of sending those poor Men some relief?”²²

The detrimental results of this aggrieved, overburdened prison population at Kinsale were soon made public. Allegations appeared under the pseudonym “Benevolus” in February 1782 in the form of an anonymous commentary in Cork City’s *Hibernian Chronicle*. In “To the Friends of Humanity,” Benevolus opened his remarks by declaring: “The case of the American prisoners now in Kinsale demands your compassion.” He then noted that the detainees “had been confined there for about six months without any prospect of being exchanged.” According to Benevolus, these men had been given only minimal rations, many of them were “almost naked, sickly and dying,” and that in fact, “sixty” of them had already died. Imperfections in medical care allegedly compounded such prevailing unhealthiness. He also charged that all the American inmates were forced to sleep on the filthy prison floor. Added to such physical shortcomings, the writer complained that the captives were “treated with a degree of severity which our most implacable enemies have never experienced.” He asserted that one example of such maltreatment was the practice of officers of the guard amusing themselves by randomly running their swords through the “hammocks of the sick.”²³

Benevolus next appealed to the citizenry of County Cork to provide immediate material and moral support to the American captives whom he sympathetically declared were “contending for those unalienable privileges, which they think the birth-right of every man, and which they wish us, and all men to possess, ‘till time shall be no more.” Emphasizing the fact that the incarcerated Americans “were once our fellow citizens,” he concluded his entreaties for immediate aid for their relief with a relevant reference of Scripture: “*I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. For inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” [Matthew, 25: v. 36–40, King James].²⁴

The accusations of prisoner maltreatment, neglect, and sufferings by Benevolus brought a quick rejoinder in a letter that prison agent John How sent to the printer of the *Hibernian Chronicle*. How began his rebuttal by

²² Richard Hare, Jr. to Benjamin Franklin, February 23, 1782, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 36, 606–07; Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, March 31, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

²³ *Hibernian Chronicle* [Cork City, Ireland], February 28, 1782. (The published letters of “Benevolus,” “Thy Friend,” and responses of Agent John How were reprinted in the Boston, Massachusetts newspaper *The American Herald* on November 22, 1784.) Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 289–94; MacCarthy, “The American Prisoners at Kinsale,” 46–47.

²⁴ *Hibernian Chronicle*, February 28, 1782.

accusing Benevolus of making a “false, and groundless representation of the state, situation, and treatment of the American prisoners.” How asserted that to the best of his ability he had complied with his instructions from the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen to supply any requisite clothing to needy captives and claimed that many of the inmates in fact had “hammocks with a bed and blanket for each and every man.” How admitted that several prisoners were sick, but insisted that they were well cared for in a hospital where they were “attended by three good surgeons including an American taken out of prison to assist.” Most of the infirm captives he declared were recovering, with few of them dying or having died since the previous October. He then added, perhaps in a deprecating tone, that most of the actual deaths resulted from smallpox, “a disorder, as I have been informed, commonly fatal to Americans.”²⁵

Fifteen days later, Benevolus made a rebuttal to agent How’s defensive remarks. The anonymous protagonist maintained that serious clothing shortages did persist at the prison, that the only blankets distributed to the confined Americans were those left by some recently exchanged Spanish sailors, and that the beds provided to the Americans actually consisted of “tow cloth, stuffed with handfuls of straw, and almost alive with vermin.” He also asserted that How had arbitrarily placed all the American officers and enlisted men on half-rations since the beginning of the month.²⁶ The commentator then turned to the matter of prison discipline and alleged that the prison’s soldier-guards had been allowed to assault the rebel inmates with impunity, and that despite repeated protestations, agent How had failed to investigate the firing of a bullet into the American compound at the prison. Finally, Benevolus restated his claims of mistreatment of sick prisoners in the hospital with many of the fifty-seven rebel prisoners there in “a dying condition,” in addition to the sixty who were said to have died since the previous October.²⁷

Agent How sought to mollify these continuing criticisms by canceling his half-rations order, easing some other punishment practices, and improving food allotments, but these actions had little effect on his antagonists.²⁸ A third critique signed “Thy Friend,” of prisoner treatment, appeared in March in the *Hibernian Chronicle*, but this time the writing style was different and the author used distinctive Quaker phraseology in making his case.²⁹

As for the allegedly autocratic prison agent (warder) John How, some of the limited information about him may be gleaned through printed records of

²⁵ *Hibernian Chronicle*, March 6, 1782; MacCarthy, “The American Prisoners at Kinsale,” 47; Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 291.

²⁶ *Hibernian Chronicle*, March 21, 1788.

²⁷ *Hibernian Chronicle*, March 21, 1782; MacCarthy, “The American Prisoners at Kinsale,” 47; Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 291–92.

²⁸ *Hibernian Chronicle*, March 28, 1782; Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 292–93.

²⁹ MacCarthy, “The American Prisoners at Kinsale,” 47–49; Moyne, “The Reverend William Hazlitt,” 293.

Kinsale itself. Thus in Richard Caulfield's edited work, *The Council Book of the Corporation of Kinsale, from 1652 to 1800*, John How, Esq. is listed as a member of the town's Corporation Council during the 1770s and in the following decade. And Florence O'Sullivan's *History of Kinsale* notes that the will of John How, Esq., was [proved] in the Registry of Cork in 1793. From this data, we can assume that How was a man of some prominence, and was quite likely a member of the Church of Ireland or a Presbyterian. We can also assume from this that he was a loyal British subject, that he therefore had disdain for the interned American rebels, and that he did not take kindly to the activities of interfering Quakers like Friend Harvey.³⁰

Addressing the agent as "Friend How," the commentator noted the warder's previous rejoinder to the complaints of Benevolus and his subsequent actions to improve conditions for the American inmates. However, "Thy Friend" also implied that How had made these changes belatedly and begrudgingly, only after the criticisms had appeared in print. He also challenged the agent to answer the question: "How, how thou wouldest like to be treated thyself, if thou wert a prisoner?" He then reminded How that the Americans also held many British prisoners and warned of possible retaliation if their government were apprised of the situation at Kinsale. Referring to specific allegations of continuing maltreatment, the author cited the case of one former prisoner, an affluent Boston merchant and ship captain who was said to have been generous to many British prisoners held in America. The merchant had later been captured at sea and taken to the Kinsale prison, where it was claimed that following a failed escape attempt he had been placed in the special confinement area known as the black hole for fifty-two days on half-rations.

In a second example, "Thy Friend" mentioned another captive, an allegedly prosperous and influential New York merchant who reputedly died in custody after being treated "no better than a common felon." The anonymous writer concluded his piece by asking agent How if he was aware of an assertion that the shots which had been fired into the American quarters had occurred in consequence of a reward offered by a Scotch officer. The reward to the sentinels consisted "of half a guinea, if they should kill an American out of the prison, and of a guinea if they should kill one in the prison."³¹

In his article, Professor Moyne has ascribed the letters signed "Benevolus" and "Thy Friend" to the Reverend William Hazlitt. In fact the differing third letter, replete with Quaker verbiage and signed "Thy Friend," was penned by Reuben Harvey; the two letters of Benevolus were probably the work of Hazlitt – very possibly with some collaboration from Harvey. The men were acquainted with each other; both had humanitarian feelings toward the Americans confined at Kinsale; and both had acted to assist the rebel captives

³⁰ Richard Caulfield, ed., *The Council Book of the Corporation of Kinsale, from 1652–1800* (Guilford, Surrey, 1876), 182–93; O'Sullivan, *History of Kinsale*, 230.

³¹ *Hibernian Chronicle*, March 28, 1782; Moyne, "The Reverend William Hazlitt," 293–94.

during this final phase of the conflict. Still, Harvey, whose material, moral, and verbal support for the unfortunate detainees had commenced in 1775, had undoubtedly provided the greater benefactions to them.³²

Harvey's assistance to the American prisoners by 1782 was revealed in new and more diverse ways. He had declared in his "Thy Friend" commentary in March 1782 that he intended to open a subscription on behalf of the American prisoners – then numbering about 200 – and he proceeded to do so. The proceeds, including his own "mite," were used to provide the captives with food, clothing, books, and personal necessities; often the Quaker merchant helped transport the items the fifteen miles from his Cork City business to Kinsale.³³ (At the time reports of "many robbers and Foot pads" on this route did not ease his task.) Once there, he distributed the supplies, and sometimes money, to the forlorn but grateful American inmates. He also passed along word of the latest political, military, and diplomatic news in the most positive terms. Simultaneously, he continued his extra-legal activities, especially providing sanctuary for American escapees whose numbers were increasing. In February 1783, Harvey wrote of the covert operations to the American Commissioners in Paris: "A great many of the Prisoners escaped from Kinsale to this place [Cork City] & were maintained by me & two other Friends to America for months until I could get them Passage to different parts of France & the Continent." (Perhaps it was with this same service in mind that his daughter Margaret later wrote, "Sailors of every description that had the name American, went to him and were never turned away empty.") Harvey also continued his protests on behalf of the American inmates to various governmental officials in Ireland and England, appealing for further improvement of conditions at Kinsale. In this respect his achievements were less evident until March 1782, when the Lord North Ministry collapsed and the American captives were officially recognized as prisoners of war.³⁴

³² Moyne, "The Reverend William Hazlitt," 291–94; MacCarthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," 48–49. The full texts of these three letters, revealing the differences between the first two and the third letter, are printed in the Moyne article.

³³ Reuben Harvey to American commissioners, February 10, 1783; Moyne, "The Reverend William Hazlitt," 294; MacCarthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," 47. On March 31, 1782, Benjamin Franklin wrote to William Hodgson, a London merchant, who assisted American prisoners held in England. Franklin asked Hodgson if he could recommend someone in Ireland who could help "200 of our People, prisoners there, who are destitute of every Necessary, and die daily in numbers." Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, March 31, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University Library.

³⁴ John Raithby, ed., *The Statute Laws of England and Great Britain*, vol. XV (London, 1811), 255; Reuben Harvey to Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen, July 22, 1782. Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 339–40; Cobbett, *Parliamentary History of England*, vol. 22, 988–90; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 164; Devlin, "Journal of Margaret Harvey," 15; Tuckey, *The County and City of Cork Remembrancer*, 186; Reuben Harvey to American commissioners, February 10, 1783. For other relevant works dealing with American prisoners in Great Britain and their management see Olive Anderson, "The

The spring and summer months of 1782 marked the culmination of Reuben Harvey's indefatigable efforts on behalf of the distressed American detainees at the Kinsale prison. Curiously, it was not until February 23 of that year that a letter from Richard Hare, Jr., a Cork merchant, to Benjamin Franklin in Paris, in fact apprised the American commissioner of the desperate plight of these captives. A letter to Dr. Franklin from Nantes dated March 24 and signed by Job Whipple and Elijah Lewis, two naval officers who had successfully escaped from Kinsale, also deplored the unpleasant conditions at their former gaol. After receiving the communications from Hare, Whipple, and Lewis, Franklin, on March 31, expressed the following plea to William Hodgson, a friend and pro-American London merchant: "I just hear, [*sic.*] from Ireland, that there are 200 of our People, prisoners there who are destitute of every Necessary, and die daily in numbers. If a sincere reconciliation is desired, kindness to the Captives on both sides may promote it greatly. I have no Correspondent in Ireland. Can you put me in a way of sending those poor Men some Relief?" The following month, the Duke of Portland, a supporter of the newly installed Peace Ministry of Lord Rockingham, arrived in Dublin with his appointment as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Harvey quickly took this opportunity to write the Duke "concerning the hard treatment (in many respects) endured by the poor Americans at Kinsale." The Duke, however, had other pressing affairs and delegated such prison matters to his secretary, Colonel Richard Fitzpatrick.³⁵

On May 10, 1782, Harvey addressed his concerns to Colonel Fitzpatrick about the welfare of the American captives, emphasizing their physical hardships, their unsatisfied medical needs, persistent food and clothing shortages, and the failure of prison officials to respond to his several remonstrances. Harvey also informed Fitzpatrick that he had heard of an inquiry into prison conditions made by two military officers earlier that year, and although he had not seen the report, he was prepared to dismiss it. The Quaker merchant then declared it was common knowledge that British army officers "hold the American Rebels (as they call them) in great contempt." Besides, Harvey claimed, the unchecked cold and damp within the prison had been the cause of several cases of consumption (tuberculosis), and consequent deaths had occurred among the captives. Here, he cited the instances of the Holden

Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain During the American Revolution," *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research*, 28 (January 1955), 63–83; Catherine M. Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England During the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (April 1975), 261–94; Jonathan Williams, Jr. to Benjamin Franklin, June 26, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

³⁵ Moody and Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, IV, 231–35; Richard Fitzpatrick to Reuben Harvey, May 10, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 355; Richard Hare, Jr. to Benjamin Franklin, February 23, 1782, Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, March 31, 1782, Job Whipple and Elijah Lewis to Benjamin Franklin, March 24, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

brothers from Rhode Island who had been held for many months in the prison. Both were said to have contracted consumption in the prison's unhealthful confines; one brother had already died of the affliction, while the other, although weakened, had escaped and was being nursed by Quakers in the city. Perhaps with the adverse prison conditions in mind, Harvey pointed out that a tender had recently returned from transferring seventy prisoners to Plymouth, and he suggested to Fitzpatrick that the ship might now be used to transport the remainder of the Americans to the English port, "where I dare say, they would be well treated & perhaps soon be embarked for their Native Country."³⁶

Two weeks later, Harvey again contacted Colonel Fitzpatrick. He enclosed a letter "from my friend in Bandon" concerning prison management. Apparently both Hazlitt and Harvey suspected a possible cover-up by officials at the prison because Harvey suggested that a general officer be sent to examine the American prisoners after their embarkation for England. He noted that several American prisoners from other parts of Ireland had recently arrived in Kinsale, and unlike the other detainees, they had been very well treated. Harvey concluded this letter by again insisting that the charges against prison officials were accurate and that he should discount all reports to the contrary.³⁷ Fitzpatrick replied to Harvey on May 28, declaring that the Lord Lieutenant had indeed received a report concerning prisoner treatment from those American captives embarking for England and that he had afterwards "given such orders respecting the conduct of the Military appointed to guard the Prisoners as he trusted would make them very cautious and circumspect in the future." He also assured Harvey that all of the Quaker's papers had been forwarded to the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen, that the released American prisoners would be questioned about their incarceration experiences, and that any official connected with the Kinsale prison found guilty of abuses would be punished.³⁸

Colonel Fitzpatrick returned to England in June 1782, and the following month Harvey was conveying his protests about prisoner treatment directly to the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen in London. He insisted once more that the investigative report which had exonerated the supervisory staff at Kinsale was a whitewash. He also warned this governmental body, as he had in his earlier letter titled "Thy Friend," that the American Continental Congress might very likely retaliate against British prisoners held in America

³⁶ Reuben Harvey to Richard Fitzpatrick, May 10, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 347; Catherine Green to Benjamin Franklin, May 8, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

³⁷ Reuben Harvey to Richard Fitzpatrick, May 24, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 348–49.

³⁸ Richard Fitzpatrick to Reuben Harvey, May 28, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 359.

when it was informed of the Kinsale captives “Sufferings & the great Mortality amongst their Countrymen in that Tower last winter through hard usage.”³⁹

By the beginning of 1783, changing external occurrences led Harvey away from his efforts to obtain redress for abuses against the American prisoners. In November 1782, the Preliminary Articles of Peace had been signed in Paris signifying that an end to hostilities was at hand. Furthermore, after a temporary administrative delay, prisoner releases were practically completed by the following spring – the remaining Kinsale prisoners having been returned to America by way of England.⁴⁰ By this time, Harvey was directing letters to the American Commissioners in Paris and to General George Washington. True to Quaker form, his salutations were penned “Respected Friend” or “Respected Friends.” His messages detailed his long-standing support for American independence, his exertions on behalf of the detainees at Kinsale, and his willingness to serve the United States in future years. Both the merchant’s dispatch to the American Commissioners, dated February 10, 1783, and his message to Washington two days later, were particularly revealing. They recapitulated his efforts on behalf of the patriot cause; they denied any desire for monetary compensation; and they cited an eager willingness to trade in American exports. Both messages concluded with rather unsubtle declarations of Harvey’s willingness to serve as a United States consul in Cork. The shorter letter to Washington illustrates these circumstances:

Cork 12th Febr'y 1783

Respected Friend

On Application from one so remote and whose name is most probably unknown to thee may appear rather forward in a plain Merchant to Genl. Washington, but I have great confidence that I shall experience the benefit of thy friendship when thou understand how Ye allows [allows] an advocate [that] I have ever been for the Liberty and Independence of America, and as thy time is too valuable to be taken up unneses. [unnecessarily], I shall avoid enlarging on the particulars farther than to enclose a copy of a letter written by me to the Commissioners of American affairs at Paris, also a copy of some letters between the Lord Lieutenant’s secretary and me, a few of the original ones from him & a copy of my last letter to the office for exchanging prisoners of war, all stating [relating] to the poor Americans who were confined at Kinsale – in addition to the content of these papers, I shall only say that my known principles of warm attachment to America prevented me from reaping considerable profits, as many other Merchants of this City have done (under Government in the Provision line) for supplying the troops at New York &c [etc.], and therefore I earnestly request that thy interest [intervention] on my behalf both

³⁹ Reuben Harvey to Richard Fitzpatrick, July 28, 1782, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r60, i46), 364.

⁴⁰ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 159–63, 170–74; Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 261–465; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 164–65, 201–07.

by recommending me to the Virginia and other Merchants who may ship tobacco, Flour, Wheat, Lumber hither, and by applying to Congress if they should employ any agent in this City for mercantile or other purposes. Thou may rest assured that I shall never disgrace thy recommendation, and security can be given. . . . I served my apprenticeship in a Merchant house here that did much Business for [with] Philadelphia, Boston, and other parts of America, and I remember once receiving Flour made on thy Estate in Virginia or Maryland –

I hope to be Favored with any answer, and thy excuse for taking the liberty, and am very respectfully

Thy sincere Friend

Reuben Harvey⁴¹

By themselves, these overtures to obtain a likely lucrative Cork consulship might well give the impression that Reuben Harvey was merely impelled by opportunistic or self-serving objectives in executing his supportive activities. It was just as likely, however, that his motivations were prompted by Quaker strictures which encouraged Friends to strive diligently in the material world, and employing any of its rewards for humanitarian purposes. Historians of the Society of Friends during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have noted this aspect of their religious tenets.⁴²

The Continental Congress did not follow up on Reuben Harvey's offer to serve as a commercial consul. In fact, it was not until the creation of an American Federal government that the United States established consulates in Ireland. The first was in Dublin (1790); the next was in Belfast (1796); and in 1797, one was instituted at Cork. Reuben Harvey, Jr. would only later (1827) be appointed American Commercial Consul in Cork, but Reuben Harvey, Sr. nonetheless acted throughout much of 1783 to champion American trade with Great Britain.⁴³

From May to July Harvey interceded with the British Commissioners of the Revenue to release *Nancy*, a North Carolina trading vessel loaded with lumber and tobacco that Harvey felt had been unjustly detained at Castletown (Castletown Bere), County Cork, on charges of smuggling. The incident was the focus of a letter that Harvey sent to Benjamin Franklin in July. In the letter Harvey explained the constrictive Irish trade laws under which *Nancy* had been detained, but he also assured Franklin that he was doing his utmost to get the ship released and that he would keep interested American officials apprised of his efforts. He in fact did send copies of his correspondence with

⁴¹ Reuben Harvey to American Commissioners, February 10, 1783, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin; Reuben Harvey to General George Washington, February 12, 1783, Ms. Papers of the Continental Congress.

⁴² Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House; The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682–1763* (New York, 1963), 53–55.

⁴³ Evan M. Duncan, Office of the Historian, United States Department of State to Sheldon S. Cohen, June 3, 2003; MacCarthy, "The American Prisoners at Kinsale," 50–51, n10.

royal revenue officials to the American negotiators in Paris. He also dispatched other copies to the influential South Carolina merchant-planter Henry Laurens, accentuating this case as one example of his several endeavors on behalf of American commerce. Another individual then living in Britain with whom he sought to initiate contact was the pro-American merchant-diplomat Benjamin Vaughan. However, in the long run Harvey's hopes of opening extensive trading markets with the United States were thwarted by Britain's restrictive trade regulations.⁴⁴

Regardless of his meager successes in stimulating Anglo-American commerce, the Cork City merchant received commendations from another quarter. Less than two months before the formal signing of the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783, Harvey was awarded due recognition for his various and valuable gestures on behalf of both the prisoners and American freedom. Previously, on June 23, George Washington had written to Harvey from his headquarters at Newburgh, New York, acknowledging the letter and papers that the Irish Quaker had sent to him the previous February. Washington informed Harvey that he had transmitted these items to Elias Boudinot, President of the Continental Congress. He further stated that he had recommended to Boudinot that the Congress bestow on Harvey proper recognition for the "early part he had taken in the cause of this country," and his exertions in "relieving the distresses of our fellow citizens whom the chances of war threw into the hands of the enemy."⁴⁵ Washington's letter also conveyed to Harvey that his actions had "claimed the regard of every American and will always entitle you to their & my particular esteem." In response to the general's request, on July 18, 1783, Congress adopted the following well-deserved and appreciative resolution that Washington, "with every particular gratification," passed on to Harvey. The Cork City merchant thus became the only Quaker living in Britain who was so honored for his individual wartime services to America.

⁴⁴ Reuben Harvey to the Commissioners of the Revenue, May 29, 30, June 5, 6, 16, 20, 25, July 3, 1783; Reuben Harvey to Benjamin Franklin, July 25, 1783; Reuben Harvey to Henry Laurens, July 1, 1783, Benjamin Vaughan to Reuben Harvey, June 20, 1783, Papers of Benjamin Franklin; Henry Laurens to Reuben Harvey, July 5, September 4, 1783, Henry Laurens Papers, University of South Carolina; Reuben Harvey to George Washington, May 25, 1784, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington, from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, vol. 27 (Washington, DC, 1938), 408–09; Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*, 53–55.

⁴⁵ George Washington to Reuben Harvey, June 23, 1783, Washington Papers, Library of Congress; Fitzpatrick, *Writings of George Washington*, vol. 27, 28; George Washington to Elias Boudinot, President of the Continental Congress, June 23, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress (M247, r171, i52, v11), 341–42; Fitzpatrick, *Writings of George Washington*, vol. 27, 29; "Letters from George Washington to Reuben Harvey Esq. of Cork," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 2nd ser., II (1896), 89–90.

Resolved: That his Excellency, the Commander-in-Chief be requested to transmit the thanks of the Congress to Mr. REUBEN HARVEY, merchant in Cork in the Kingdom of Ireland, and express the just sense Congress entertains of the services he has rendered during the late war to American prisoners.⁴⁶

Not all of the diverse activities undertaken by Reuben Harvey to assist Americans' struggle for freedom were included in this congressional resolve; nor did the resolution give any hint of the parallel events within Ireland that had transpired while the Quaker merchant was performing his endeavors to benefit the Americans. These occurrences, however, should also be cited in order to better comprehend the Irish framework within which his actions were performed. Mention has been previously made of the initial support by the island's landholding gentry and the established Church of Ireland for the London government's actions to suppress the American insurrection. Mention was also made concerning the immediate economic effects of the war on the residents of County Cork.⁴⁷ Yet subsequent Irish economic and political developments during the remaining years of the conflict also had ramifications; therefore a general recapitulation of these occurrences should be offered.

The original backing for quelling the American revolt was evident when the Irish Parliament, dominated by the island's landholding gentry, adopted a resolution (October 1775) approving the North Ministry's hard-line overseas policies. Conversely, however, many of Ireland's less privileged classes had family, commercial, and sectarian ties with the dissident colonists, and they joined with other liberal-minded Irish sympathizers in anti-war protests that included conciliatory petitions, newspaper criticisms, and pro-American sermonizing, particularly in such places as Presbyterian Ulster. Such personal disillusionment with the war was augmented by restrictive British trade policies and persistent economic dislocation. The entry of Catholic France (1778) and Spain (1779) into the conflict temporarily lessened the ardor of dissident Protestant groups, but Britain's wartime reverses in 1780, followed by the catastrophic reversal at Yorktown (October 1781), and the subsequent collapse of the North Ministry, provided new momentum for reform-minded Irishmen led by Henry Grattan. The British Parliament's new Rockingham–Shelburne

⁴⁶ Gallard Hunt, ed., *Library of Congress, Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, vol. XXIV, January 1–August 29, 1783 (Washington, DC, 1922): 439–40; George Washington to Reuben Harvey, August 10, 1783, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, vol. 27, 94; "Letters from George Washington to Reuben Harvey Esq. of Cork"; Elias Boudinot to General George Washington, July 24, 1783, *Papers of the Continental Congress* (M247, r27, i16), 228. After the American Revolution, George Washington was said to have sent Harvey a gold ring that contained a miniature of the General. "Letters from George Washington to Reuben Harvey Esq. of Cork," 90.

⁴⁷ Moody and Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, vol. IV, 216–23; McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution*, 274–79; Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 152–65; O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City*, 148–51, 166–68, 178–81.

Ministry felt obliged to offer concessions, and, in the spring of 1782, it abandoned its claim of control over Irish Parliamentary legislation and allowed more power to Ireland's judiciary. Britain, though, still retained considerable power over the island through its appointment of a Lord Lieutenant, and with its continued economic hegemony over the region. The Roman Catholic majority in the country was still denied a share of power and continued to suffer disabilities.⁴⁸ Reuben Harvey was certainly aware of these significant internal developments, yet his opinions about them remain unclear.

The remaining years of Harvey's life were generally prosperous, yet somehow less fulfilling than his years of activity during the American Revolution. He continued to reside in his comfortable home at Pleasant Field (Black Rock). There, he and his wife Elizabeth raised their children, instilling them with the humanitarian and philanthropic tenets of the Society of Friends. However, in 1800, the aging Reuben suffered a stinging rebuff. The Society's list of disownments (expulsions) for that year included his name, albeit for reasons which were not completely clear. Nevertheless, the elder Harvey and most especially his third son, Reuben, Jr., were cited as active proponents of Quaker-sponsored schooling for the community's indigent children. (A grandson, Dr. Reuben Joshua Harvey (1804–1878), and a great-grandson with the same name (1845–1881), became eminent physicians in County Cork.) His business dealings were conducted largely at his Cork City firm which was now registered under the name Deeves (Deaves) and Harvey. The company tried its best to stimulate trade with the United States, but it too was circumscribed by the mercantile trade policies of the royal government.⁴⁹

Perhaps this situation was a significant element in Reuben Harvey's generally pessimistic attitude toward Britain's rulers. This belief was evident in a letter he sent to George Washington in May 1784: "Our nation is far from being a happy one, being under the power of Parliament entirely sway'd by

⁴⁸ Tom Ireland, *Ireland, Past and Present* (New York, 1942), 203–42; Moody and Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland*, vol. IV, 223–41; McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution*, 280–89; O'Sullivan, *The Economic History of Cork City*, 193–95; Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen, and Revolutionary America*, 165–80.

⁴⁹ Pedar McCann, "Charity Schooling in Cork City in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, LXXXVII (July–December, 1982), 134; Sile NI Chinneide, "A New View of Cork City in 1790," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, LXXXVIII (Jan–June 1973), 4; Edward Cooke, Under-Secretary for Ireland, to Deaves and Harvey, February 27, 1801, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Official Papers, ser. 1OP 331/5; Harrison, *Cork City Quakers*, 27; Reuben Harvey to George Washington, May 25, 1784, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, vol. 27, 408–09; Richard S. Harrison, *A Biographical Dictionary of Irish Quakers* (Dublin, 1997), 38–39. For further information concerning Quaker benevolence and philanthropy in Ireland see Helen E. Hatton, *The Largest Amount of Good: Quaker Relief in Ireland, 1654–1921* (Montreal, Canada, 1993). The information regarding the disownment of Reuben Harvey was furnished by Ms. Mary Shackleton, Curator, The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, Dublin. Letter to author, November 20, 2003.

Image not available

Plate 4.2 Undated photograph of the Deaves and Harvey warehouse. The original warehouse, begun by Reuben Harvey, had undergone considerable expansion during the nineteenth century.

Source: Courtesy of the Cork County Council and Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

English Councils which prevents salutary Laws from being pass'd that would materially advantage the Commerce of Ireland & America, particularly respecting Tobacco, Wheat & Flour." His later letters to George Washington continued into the American leader's second presidential administration. Aside from Harvey's comments or advice on news he had read about America, the letters also focused on the Quaker's disenchantment with his own government. His regard for the British government paled before his idealistic assessment of the infant United States.⁵⁰

This romantic image of America, notwithstanding its factional turmoil, the perpetuation and expansion of chattel slavery, and other internal problems remained quite prominent in Reuben Harvey's mind. Furthermore, he was quite proud of his contributions, however minimal, to the establishment of the United States. In addition to the recognition by the Continental Congress for his aid to American prisoners, Harvey enjoyed an outstanding reputation

⁵⁰ Reuben Harvey to George Washington, May 25, 1784, March 1, 1792, March 3, 1794, April 17, 1794, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, vol. 27, 408–09, 462–63, vol. 33, 412; National Archives, Washington, DC, Records Group 59, Miscellaneous Letters, 46615, 59680, 59728. Harvey's pessimistic attitude toward Britain's rulers at this time was shared by many members of the educated Irish Protestant dissenter middle classes. See Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, 17–18, 35, 175–76.

locally. When he died on January 30, 1808, an obituary printed four days later in *The Cork Mercantile Chronicle* outlined his upstanding character and his influence in the community:

DIED

On Saturday last, at an advanced period of life, and after an illness of considerable duration, **REUBEN HARVEY**, Esq., of the Society of Quakers. The record of this Gentleman's character in the minuteness which it merited, we must leave to other hands; it would far exceed the limits which a newspaper could assign to it. We shall endeavour to sketch it briefly, but we feel imperfectly – we mean to do it justly. Mr. Harvey, in the usual acquirements of a Gentleman united a vigour and strength of mind – a conception from which nothing could escape; a memory tenacious of what had been impressed upon it – and a power of reasoning and prejudging from circumstances, which in their combination formed him a man of the first order of ability, scarcely excelled and equalled by very few. . . . In the softer relations of life, **MR. HARVEY** was as distinguished – he was a good and affectionate father – a generous and sincere friend. The tribute of our own regard for him while alive, was mixed with the public estimation of him – and our concern is not less sincerely added to the public feeling for his death. . .

More importantly, however, it highlighted his undertakings and successes on behalf of the nascent transatlantic nation:

Those talents warmly cherished civil liberty, and for many years were exerted in its maintenance against every effort at its depression. – When the madness and imbecility of an English Ministry had forced America from her connection with England, and compelled her to assert her independence, he strenuously and steadfastly rebuked the folly and vice of the measures which had pressed her to it, and ardently and zealously advocated her cause in conjunction with the best and ablest men of that time. By his intercourse with America, he supplied them with information to defend her – and through him were first communicated in the British Parliament the most important occurrences of the War in America. The value of his talents was fully appreciated by some of the ablest Statesmen who have been in the English Administration and a reliance upon his ability, his truth, and his honour, gained him their confidence and their friendship. His love of freedom and his attachment to America only ended with his life.⁵¹

If historical accounts have relegated Reuben Harvey's involvement to the periphery, this re-examination of the emphasis by his colleagues – from George Washington to the local Cork City business newspaper – on Harvey's initiatives should help to restore the due recognition for his interventions on behalf of the imprisoned American rebels, his active promotion of transatlantic trade, and generally his commitment to the cause of American independence.

⁵¹ *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, February 3, 1808.

Image not available

Plate 5.1 Robert Heath, 1741–1800, Deacon, Plymouth Tabernacle, Pastor, Rodborough Tabernacle.

Source: Theological Magazine, 9 (1801)

Robert Heath

Evangelist and humanitarian

Totnes, still a picturesque and venerable Devon community by the River Dart, was the birthplace of several noteworthy, and also several less heralded individuals from Britain's storied past. Two men befitting the former category, and honored by townspeople today, were Charles Babbage (1795–1871), and William John Wills (1834–1861). Babbage, a celebrated mathematician, has been justly extolled for his “Analytical Engine,” the forerunner of computer technology: Wills was a member of the ill-fated first expedition that crossed the Australian continent in 1860. But in addition to such memorialized men were those less illustrious but nonetheless significant personages born in this tenth-century Saxon settlement, whose overlooked careers call for exposition. Such is the case with one Robert Heath, a man who had his eighteenth-century roots in this once small hamlet.¹ His life (1741–1800), while not that long, encompassed determinative spiritual and secular forces which, in turn, also affected Britons themselves during his career.

The *Theological Magazine*, a British religious publication, that appeared during the final years of the eighteenth, and first years of the nineteenth centuries, is the primary source offering biographical information concerning the career of Robert Heath. A somewhat limited memorial to him notes his birth in Totnes in the year 1741, but does not cite the month or day, or the names of his parents. Yet his family was not among the community's more affluent residents, since the account notes “he received an education for trade, and about the age of fourteen was apprenticed to a white-smith [tinsmith]” in Totnes. There were a number of such tradesmen in the area, and Robert's master was apparently not among the more adept of them. According to the

¹ Totnes Borough and Local Government, *The History of Totnes Priory and Medieval Town*, vol. II (Torquay, Devon, 1911), 905–10; *A Book of British Towns* (Basingstoke, Hants, 1980: 304; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Babbage, Charles”; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Wills, William John.” (According to Devon County Council, the population of Totnes in 2000 was 8058. According to Ms Deborah Stock, research assistant at the Institute of United States Studies, University of London, the population of Totnes at the time of Robert Heath's birth would have numbered between approximately 1200 and 1500 residents.

biographical account, the artisan's business soon collapsed, and "he was released from the bond term of his indenture."²

Later, the youth moved twenty-three miles westward to Plymouth where he worked briefly for a "Clock and Watchmaker." Afterward, Robert bound himself out to a silversmith, but again, his master proved a poor entrepreneur, and he too failed before Heath's indenture expired. But the young apprentice himself had absorbed the basics of the trade, and was able to establish a successful enterprise in this field at Plymouth Dock, also called Devonport, a separate community which then adjoined Plymouth at its western edge.

Even before Robert Heath had established his residence and his business in Plymouth Dock, he had already undergone a spiritual Epiphany. Religious revivalism was already sweeping England's western counties, and the youth from Totnes was apparently one of many affected by this evangelistic fervor. His biographical memorial declares that while residing at the Plymouth home of his silversmith master, Heath had experienced a spiritual conversion that would determine much of his later career.³

Reportedly, much of Heath's pious regeneration had allegedly stemmed from the example of the son of his clock- and watchmaker master in Plymouth. His memorial states that he slept in the same bedroom with this youth who reportedly studied the Bible and prayed fervently each evening. It was also this boy who seemingly imbued Robert with a personal sense of religious inadequacies. But whatever the cause, the apprentice from Totnes was soon spending some of his free evenings with his master's son attending evangelical services at the Methodist tabernacle in Plymouth itself. In addition to these gatherings, his memorial mentions that Heath's conversion experience was also speeded along when many of his spiritual inadequacies were assuaged through the exhortations of "the Reverend Mr. Julian" (most likely in fact a curate) at the Stoke Demerel Church in Devonport.⁴

Robert Heath's spiritual conversion evidently brought him inner confidence, but it also reportedly produced a family rift. His father, a communicant in the traditionally oriented Episcopal church in Totnes, "was much mortified at his son having turned Whitefieldite."⁵ Yet, despite such strong parental disdain, the young enthusiast held strong to his newly embraced religious precepts, and pursued them along with his vocational training. In Plymouth he eventually

² "Memoir of the late Rev. Robert Heath," *Theological Magazine*, 9 (1801), 160.

³ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 243–48, 252–64; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain; A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 20–34; Richard N. Worth, *A History of Plymouth from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Plymouth, Devon, 1890), 196–201; Charles Bracken, *A History of Plymouth and her Neighbors* (Plymouth, Devon, 1931), 96; "Memoir of Robert Heath," 161.

⁴ "Memoir of Robert Heath," 161–62.

⁵ "Memoir of Robert Heath," 162. For opposition to the Methodist movement in England see Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 264–70.

became a deacon in the tabernacle presided over by the Reverend Andrew Kinsman, and he helped spread his evangelical zeal at this time to some of the smaller communities in Devon and Cornwall. Apparently his sermonizing soon caught the attention of none other than the famed revivalist and Oxford-educated George Whitefield.⁶ As a result, Heath then traveled to London where “Mr. Whitefield introduced him to his own tabernacle.” Whitefield’s endorsement of the young, pious enthusiast even included recruiting him temporarily to supply the recently established tabernacle in Bristol. In all of these activities, Heath must have shown himself to be divinely inspired, for it was reported that, like other spiritual zealots, he also made it a point “to visit the sick and distressed among this poor in Devon.”⁷

Opportunities arose to move to other locales and spread Calvinist Methodist doctrines, but Robert Heath remained in Plymouth Dock until after the American Revolution. One such opening had occurred in 1773. It was a call to minister at the Independent (moderate Calvinist) church on Jewin Street in London. Heath’s memorialist declared that this impressed congregation desired him to be a candidate for their pastoral office, but that Heath declined the offer. His biographical sketch claims the reason was that it meant severing his “long standing ties” to the Plymouth Tabernacle and his many friends and relatives in Devon. Perhaps, though, there was a related reason for rejecting this attractive overture. On October 3, 1765, Heath, recorded as a “silversmith,” had married a Miss Jane Ivey, listed as “spinster,” at the Stoke Damarell Parish Church; their ten children, born during the ensuing two decades, were enough reason to keep the evangelist anchored to his silversmith enterprise.⁸

Although the pious young tradesman appeared happy in his married life and his commercial dealings, personal tragedy seemed to call at his door quite often. Children, at this time, appeared especially subject to what were sudden, unexplainable mortal illnesses, and such a misfortune befell young William, the Heaths’ 6-year-old son. It struck less than a decade into the Heaths’ marriage. This calamity must have been a devastating blow, but Robert Heath produced a written account indicating an enormous degree of stoicism and pious resiliency which was expressed by an undoubtedly grief-stricken father:

Friday August 14, 1772, got safe to my dear Family and found my dear William very ill. All things work together for good to them that love God. His illness increased upon him until it pleased the Lord to remove him by death, on Thursday morning August 20th a few minutes after two o’clock. It was to me sorrow upon sorrow; but

⁶ Edwin Welch, “Andrew Kinsman’s Churches at Plymouth,” *Transactions of the Devonshire Historical Association*, 97 (1965), 212–36; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 162.

⁷ “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 163–64.

⁸ The Devon and Cornwall Record Society, Ms Stoke Damarell Parish Registers, vol. 5, Marriages, 1765–1779; Walter Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Meeting Houses in London, Westminster and Southwark* (London, 1808), 343–50; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 164. The “Memoir of Robert Heath” mistakenly refers to his bride as a “Miss Ivy.”

shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil? – The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen. The Gardner has an undoubted right to pluck what flower of his own Garden he pleases, without contradiction.⁹

News of the outbreak of the insurrection in America reached Devon communities by the late spring of 1775. Reactions to this revolt found strong initial support behind Crown actions to suppress the upstart colonists represented by the government's Proclamation of Rebellion adopted in August of that year. Plymouth and Plymouth Dock, like Portsmouth and Gosport, maintained Royal Navy facilities, and military as well as naval personnel were stationed in these communities.¹⁰ Merchants and other middle-class individuals involved in trade or supplying governmental forces for the most part rallied to back the government, as did those parish vicars and members of the established church. Reactions of Devon's minority dissenter sects, Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, and Quakers during this initial stage of the war were more cloudy. The county's political establishment led by Lord Barrington gave their backing to the doctrine of Royal Supremacy and the Ministry's actions to suppress the rebellion. Convoys transporting troops or supplies to America in this first stage of the conflict were usually given enthusiastic send-offs, and news reports from ships' crews arriving from the North American station were eagerly sought after by the seaport residents.¹¹

A direct impact of the war in America upon the residents of Plymouth and Plymouth Dock came in the spring of 1777. In March of that year Parliament adopted [Lord] North's Act, under which any officer or seaman captured on armed American rebel vessels could be incarcerated in land-based British prisons. Several sites were employed for this purpose, but the two primary and previously unused detention sites were Forton Gaol in Hampshire and Mill, Old Mill, or simply Milbay Prison in Devon situated between Plymouth and Plymouth Dock.¹²

Mill Gaol had a lengthy and intriguing past. The detention center was situated on a windswept tidal headland (once occupied by several windmills)

⁹ "Memoir of Robert Heath," 164.

¹⁰ Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 35–37; Crispin Gill, *Plymouth, A New History* (Newton Abbot, Devon, 1979), 2, 56, 90–104; Bracken, *Plymouth and Her Neighbors*, 90–96; Llewellyn F. Jewett, *A History of Plymouth* (Plymouth, 1873), 585–97; Worth, *History of Plymouth*, 242–44. When Mill opened again in 1777, the population of Plymouth was about 13,000 and the population of Plymouth Dock (Devonport) was slightly less. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 56.

¹¹ Gill, *Plymouth, A New History*, 2, 108–17; Jewett, *History of Plymouth*, 492–535; Worth, *History of Plymouth*, 23–24.

¹² William C. Cobbett, comp., *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, vol. 19 (London, 1814), 4–5, 11–14, 27–33, 52–53; *The Annual Register for the Year 1777* (London, 1778), 53–65.

that lay about a quarter of a mile between both Plymouth and Plymouth Dock (Devonport). In 1697 during the War of the League of Augsburg, Britain's supervisory Commission for Sick and Hurt and the Exchange of Prisoners oversaw the replacement of the aging windmills with an internment site intended for about 300 enemy captives. Larger and more permanent prison structures constructed during the War of the Austrian Succession (1744–1748) made it possible to hold many more internees. By 1762, during the final stage of the Seven Years' War, with about 7000 captives, Mill became the largest detention center in Britain. After the war's end in 1763, the gaol was closed once again.¹³

A map survey of the Plymouth area composed in 1778, along with prisoners' descriptions, offers reasonably clear pictures of the appearance of Mill Gaol. A curving road leading from Plymouth Town westward to Plymouth Dock ran past the front of the prison. Across the road were several smaller buildings, most evidently there to offer services to the gaol. A small woodland or orchard lay near these structures. High double stone walls about twenty feet apart surrounded Mill Prison. An iron gate located in the center wall and facing the road acted as the main entrance. This gate led to an outer courtyard where prison offices and cooking facilities were situated. Wooden gates on the inner wall opened into a sizable courtyard about 250 feet long and 158 feet wide. A tall lamp-post for illuminating the area was placed in the center of the yard, and a water pump was located near the gate. The walls themselves varied in height from ten to twenty feet, and were all frieze-topped with broken glass.¹⁴

Prison facilities were situated principally around the inner courtyard. Most notable was a two-storey windowless structure along the north side, referred to as the Long Prison. It was said to measure 132 feet by 20 feet. The deliberate absence of windows on its outside walls allowed the Long Prison to function as part of the overall prison enclosures. The inner courtyard area also contained two other smaller confinement buildings, the prison hospital, plus other administrative structures. A path, evidently used for disposal purposes, led downward a few hundred feet to Mill Bay itself. Overall security at this Devon detention center was therefore far tighter than at its counterpart of Forton Prison in Hampshire. Guards were recruited primarily from the local militia or companies of invalids, although at times troops from garrisons within the county were also called upon.¹⁵

¹³ Reverend Samuel Cutler, ed., "Samuel Cutler's Diary," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 32 (1878), 42–44; Andrew Sherburne, *Memoir of Andrew Sherburne, a Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution* (Providence, RI, 1831), 80–82; Bracken, *Plymouth and Her Neighbors*, 220–23; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 33–36.

¹⁴ Map survey of Plymouth, 1778, by Richard Cowl, West Devon Record Office, Plymouth, Devon; "Samuel Cutler Diary," 185–86; Bracken, *History of Plymouth*, 222–24.

¹⁵ Howard Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777–1782," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 97 (October 1961), 304–06; Cowl, Map survey of Plymouth; Sherburne, *Memoir of Andrew Sherburne*, 80–84, 88; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 35–38.

The first American seamen confined at Mill following its reopening in May 1777 generally found it an improvement over shipboard confinement, but still a menacing environment. Thousands of miles from their homes and loved ones, and unsure if their rebel state governments or the Continental Congress knew or even cared about their detention, these men must have been quite apprehensive upon viewing the unfriendly stone walls surrounding Mill. One of them, Samuel Cutler, a ship's clerk from Massachusetts, wrote with apparent foreboding that he and his shipmates were remanded to the prison "*for high treason*," and not considered as prisoners of war. Charles Herbert, a fellow shipmate, also from Massachusetts, cited similar apprehension. On June 5, when his commitment formally began, Herbert wrote forebodingly in his journal, "Alas, I have entered the gates, but the Lord only knows when I shall go out of them again."¹⁶

Circumstances encountered by the early rebel inmates within the prison confines seemed to justify many of their fears. The prison director, also referred to as "keeper" or "agent," was an individual named William Cowdry. He quickly earned the captives' contempt and was regarded as an imperious scoundrel who seemed to delight in telling the rebel detainees that he hoped to see them all hanged as pirates or traitors to the British government. Seaman Cutler described him this way: "Mr. Cowdry is as great a tyrant as any in England, and uses us with the greatest severity." The strict prison rules, which Cowdry read to the inmates, were a reflection of what Cutler meant. And the Mill staff serving under Cowdry also proved largely unsympathetic, arbitrary, and malicious.¹⁷

Other shortcomings also proved distressing for these first inmates. These arriving detainees were packed into crowded, pestilence-prone, stuffy confinement areas. Most of the captives had to wear the same attire they had on at the time of their capture. Sanitary conditions were substandard, and the prison physician, Dr. Manheir (Manheim), proved incompetent, and failed to check an outbreak of smallpox that occurred shortly after the detainees arrived. Most perplexing for these seamen was the insufficient victualling they received.¹⁸ Again, Samuel Cutler provided a revealing portrayal of this

¹⁶ Richard Livesey, ed., *The Prisoners of 1776: A Relic of the Revolution . . . by Charles Herbert of Newburyport* (Boston, MA, 1854), 44.

¹⁷ "Samuel Cutler Diary," 32 (1878), 186–87; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 37–38. The International Genealogical Index indicates that Cowdry, Cowdrey, Cowdery, or similar spellings suggest that William Cowdry was possibly born in the county of Berkshire or the county of Buckinghamshire.

¹⁸ Marian S. Coan, ed., "A Revolutionary Prison Diary: The Journal of Dr. Jonathan Haskins," *New England Quarterly*, 17 (June–September 1944), 297–99; John Alexander, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777–1782, An Evaluation," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 102 (October 1966), 324–25; Cutler, "Samuel Cutler Diary," 187–88; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 57–89; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 62–65. John Alexander has noted apparent plagiarism in the journals of Samuel Cutler, Charles Herbert, and Jonathan Haskins. See John Alexander's "Jonathan Haskin's Mill Prison Diary, Can it be trusted at face value?," *New England Quarterly*, 40 (1967), 561–64.

unpleasant situation in July 1777. He noted that although he and his fellow seamen were scheduled for a daily allowance of three-quarters of a pound of beef, one pound of bread, one quart of beer, and a few greens, in actuality, the beef “when boiled” weighed only about six ounces, the bread was “ordinary,” and when they did receive cheese, it was inedible. Similarly, Charles Herbert, at this time, noted having a “continual knawing [sic] at my stomach.” Herbert and several fellow prisoners with vocational skills were able to craft artifacts which they sold or exchanged for food at a prison market, but even this work did not solve recurrent provisioning problems.¹⁹

Traveling between his Plymouth Dock home and Plymouth itself, Deacon Robert Heath was aware of these new captives interned at Mill Prison. Residents of the area could readily observe prisoners being led under guard to the gaol, and they could often see them through the gates of the prison and visualize their plight. Heath, who was one such individual, acted during the summer of 1777 to alleviate the detainees’ adversity. His material beneficences were somewhat limited, but there was need for his assistance in another sphere. Charles Herbert had noted, early in his confinement, “It is a great grievance to be shut up in prison, and debarred from hearing the Gospel preached on the Lord’s Day.” This other worldly want then was eminently suited for Heath, and by early that September, the deacon had commenced his personal visits offering Christian comfort to the captives.²⁰

During his initial authorized visits to Mill, Heath was a welcome visitor for the imprisoned Americans. He would dispense the most recent information concerning the war; he did his best to pass on letters to the inmates’ families in America; he also donated what limited personal supplies he could muster; and he provided small monetary sums. But, on a more personal – and perhaps even more significant spiritual basis – he tried to bring comfort, reassurance, and sanctification with the aid of the Scriptures.²¹

Robert Heath surely had his work cut out for him in this last-mentioned objective when dealing with these rebel captives. Colonial seamen – even in captivity – were an extremely individualistic, egalitarian-minded, rowdy, and recalcitrant lot. Perhaps this was a factor stemming from their American formative roots. These recalcitrant “Yankee” mariners gambled, drank from secretly concocted or purloined alcoholic beverages, regularly spewed forth profanity, quarreled, and often defied their own officers. The fact that the devout Deacon Heath was confounded by such immoderate, rowdy, and impious conduct by these transatlantic prisoners was reflected in a journal entry of one of the Mill detainees:

¹⁹ “Samuel Cutler’s Diary,” 186; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 45, 69; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 59–62.

²⁰ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 59.

²¹ Sheldon S. Cohen, “The Preachers and the Prisoners,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 126 (January 1990), 6–7; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 78; Coan, “A Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 424–25; “Samuel Cutler’s Diary,” 395–97.

14th, [June 1778] Munday [sic] The Revd. Mr. Heath has returned from London and yesterday was here to see us. He gave in [dispensed] a few books but says he learns that we pay little attention to the Sabbath, which is too true; for many spend their time in bawdry [sic], obscene, discourse, profanely cursing and damning their eyes and odd joints, and blaspheming their Maker continually, a most disagreeable place for a religious person to be confined.²²

The evident need for moral and spiritual reform among these Mill inmates was something that the Plymouth Dock deacon sought to satisfy during his initial visits. Evangelists such as Heath, for one thing, sought to bring virtuous sentiments to the minds and virtuous expressions of their hearers. Here, he had much to do. Seamen regularly chanted ballads to relieve the monotony of long voyages, and similarly voiced them in captivity. And while many of these songs expressed longings for home, defiance toward their captors, and the adventures of sail, many others contained ribald or extremely sexist lyrics.²³ Timothy Connor, committed to Forton Prison from June 1777 until July 1779, penned a songbook that included such salacious lines as these:

A Tar's Song No. 46th [sic]

As I was walking through Francis Street
A lively Frigate I chanced for to meet
She was well fitted for the Sea
And all she wanted was company
foldrol etc –

2
I asked where was her place of abode
She told to me in black Squirs road
And at that night she'd send me word
That I was welcome to come on board
foldrol etc –

3
I boarded her the truth I'll tell
Because the Boatswain had sign'd her so well
With her tacks and her sheets and bobins too
With her collours flying both red and blue
foldrol etc –

4
Her sails was of the Sattin fine
Her ropes was of the hollow twine
But when I entered her cabin fine
I found her to be Venous Wine.²⁴

²² Cohen, "The Preachers and the Prisoners," 23; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 110; Coan, "A Revolutionary Prison Diary," 426–29.

²³ George Carey, *A Sailor's Songbag: An American Rebel in an English Prison* (Amherst, MA, 1976), 13–20; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 39–42.

²⁴ Carey, *A Sailor's Songbook*, 128.

How then did Deacon Heath employ his evangelist crusade at Mill Prison to undercut such examples of immorality and to spark a spiritual regeneration among the detained backsliders? Heath, in this respect, seems to have modeled his discoursing on the methods of his own mentor, the revivalist George Whitefield. Whitefield had repeatedly adopted such methods during his evangelizing tours throughout much of Britain and America. Like Whitefield, Heath probably instilled the concerned captives with a sense of guilt and inadequacy over their excessive worldliness and a lack of true piety. Once the alleged sinners had confronted and admitted their spiritual failings, they were shown that freedom from their temporal guilt was possible through accepting God's grace and the sacrifices of Christ. And as Whitefield had done, the deacon then urged the audience of American captives to strive for a divinely inspired conversion experience that would overturn their immoral conduct. Concluding such exhortations, Heath may have promised to return so that he might gauge the success of his exhortations, and, adding to his personal importunings, he also had the practice of dispensing religious tracts to the prisoners who heard him.²⁵

The number of mariners at Mill, who did claim a conversion experience as a result of Deacon Heath's repeated religious exhortations, has not been recorded. Nevertheless, he seems to have earned the respect of the American detainees at Mill. And because the captives were not yet accorded the privilege of having weekly services conducted by a clergyman, it fell upon Heath to fill this spiritual void. Accompanying the deacon on his visits to Mill was a linen draper (dealer in yard goods) named Miles Saurey who was evidently also a member of the Plymouth Tabernacle. Saurey could likewise give a testimony of his own religious regeneration to the prisoners.²⁶ Both of these men were enthusiastically welcomed and highly respected by the American captives. This fact, along with a seaman's own hopefulness and steadfastness, was recorded on March 12, 1778 in this journal entry by Charles Herbert:

To-day our two fathers came to see us, as they commonly do once or twice a week. They are Mr. Heath and Mr. Sorry [Saurey], the former is a Presbyterian minister [mis-identification], in Dock; the latter a merchant in Plymouth. . . . A smile from them seems like a smile from a father; they tell us that every thing goes on well on our side, so that I hope that our long wished for prize is just at hand – a prize that

²⁵ Frank Lambert, "Pedlar in Divinity"; *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revival, 1737–1770* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), chs 1–5; Luke L. Tyreman, *The Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London, 1966, 1977), vols I, II; Clarence C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800*; *Strict Congregationalists and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT, 1962), 25–38, 48–49; Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York, 1957), 21–32; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 108–09.

²⁶ Francis D. Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners in the Revolutionary War; The Captivity of William Russell* (Annapolis, MD, 2001), 78–79; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 104; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 117–18.

is preferable to any other earthly enjoyment. I hope our days of trouble are nearly at an end, and, and after we have borne them with a spirit of manly fortitude, we shall be able to return to a free country to enjoy our just rights and privileges, for which we have so long been contending. This will make ample satisfaction for our sufferings.²⁷

By March 1778, when Charles Herbert was citing the high esteem the captive had for Robert Heath and Miles Saurey, he also noted that these two Samaritans had been given additional responsibilities for their relief. Such supplemental duties had their origins at a London gathering the previous Christmas Eve of sympathetic Britons concerned over reports alleging maltreatment of American rebel captives in British gaols. A subscription drive had been commenced at this assemblage which netted £1300 in pledges, a sum that increased to £3700 by the end of the following month. A twenty-man committee that emerged from this conclave of Londoners was selected to administer this fund. Thomas Digges, an American expatriate businessman from an old Maryland family, was chosen as the committee's director and given responsibility for distributing the fund's monies.²⁸ Digges, who had his own London mercantile concerns, chose the Reverend Thomas Wren of Portsmouth to perform the actual distribution of allotted funds at nearby Forton Gaol, and Deacon Robert Heath and Miles Saurey to perform this same function at Mill. And Charles Herbert, in his March 12 entry, noted that Heath and Saurey were already complying with their supplemental duties, stating that "we received two shillings per mess, which is sixpence per man." He also added that they were supposed to receive "two shillings per man a week," adding that what they did not receive in provisions they would receive in monetary sums.²⁹

The relief assignment necessitated either Heath or Saurey to travel to London, obtain the assistance funds from Thomas Digges, and afterward return to Plymouth. This was a considerably longer journey than was required of the Reverend Thomas Wren of Portsmouth, but since both Devon men were engaged in trade, they could usually combine their journey with business matters. When the paymasters at both gaols actually commenced their disbursement, officers were generally granted somewhat more in funds than were common seamen. Likewise, detained rebel officers had seen to it that they had separate confinement quarters from lower ranks. The Continental

²⁷ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 104.

²⁸ William B. Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 77 (October 1953) 390–91; John A. Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Montreal, 1987), 141–43; *The Public Advertiser* (London), January 2, 1778; *London Evening Post*, December 22–25, 1777; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 47 (1777), 607, 48 (1778), 43.

²⁹ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 104–05; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 390–92; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 88–89; Coan, "A Revolutionary Prison Diary," 303, 305.

Navy ships, and particularly the generally smaller American privateers, had sailed with a surprising extent of egalitarianism among their complements, but, once in detention, such leveling of ranks was considerably diminished.³⁰

As Deacon Heath was beginning his duties distributing relief funds to the Mill detainees, external events were prompting a new role for this patron of the American prisoners. News of General John Burgoyne's surrender with several thousand men at Saratoga in October 1777 had reached Britain before the year's end, and the rebel captives at both Forton and Mill soon noticed changes in the treatment they received. The quality of food served to them improved, and issues of new clothing were distributed during the last days of December and the first days of 1778. One of the interned New Hampshire seamen seemed to grasp the mood of change when he wrote, "Since the beginning of the year, we have lived very well, and want for nothing but Liberty."³¹ And the North Ministry, fearful of an impending Franco-American alliance, became more willing to budge on the issue of prisoner exchanges. The American commissioners in Paris had offered a proposal to this effect in April 1777, but Lord Stormont, Britain's Ambassador to France, had firmly rejected such an arrangement. However, in the wake of the disaster at Saratoga, the urgings of the pro-American British landowner-politician David Hartley, and the growing number of British mariners taken by armed vessels and held in France, the North administration was more willing to accommodate.³²

The actual negotiations to finalize such a prisoner exchange, also referred to as a cartel, began in early 1778. Most of the British seamen held in France had been placed there by the forays of American privateers or the depredations of the famed Continental Navy Captain John Paul Jones. Negotiations, once started, became protracted due to the obvious need to include French officials. Nevertheless, Charles Herbert no doubt reflected the hopeful sentiments of his fellow inmates when he wrote in his journal for April 8, 1778 that Deacon Heath informed them that a Franco-American alliance had indeed been effected, but early the following month he wrote rather disconsolately, "most of us despair of being exchanged this summer."³³ But Herbert's spirits might

³⁰ Jesse Lemisch, "Listening to the Inarticulate: William Wigder's Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," *Journal of Social History*, 3 (1969), 11–29; Coglianò, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 81–82; Alexander, "American Prisoners in the Mill Prison," 330–32; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 97, 219.

³¹ *New Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth), September 3, 1778. (The newspaper published the letter that contained a date of April 28, 1778); Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 80, 85–88; Coan, "A Revolutionary Prison Diary," 302–04.

³² American Commissioners to Lord Stormont, April 2, 1777, in William B. Willcox, Dorothy Bridgewater, Claude Lopez and Kate Ohno, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 23, 548–49; Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth, April 2, 1777; William B. Clark, William J. Morgan and Michael J. Crawford, eds, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC, 1980), 773–76.

³³ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 110, 123; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 210–11.

subsequently have been restored had he known that on the 29th of that same month, David Hartley had written Benjamin Franklin that he would reply “for the exchange of prisoners without delay.” Negotiations thereafter proceeded somewhat fitfully, but on September 18–19, 1778, the American commissioners in Paris directed letters to the American prisoners informing them of an imminent exchange, with priority for release given to those “in captivity the longest.”³⁴

Charles Herbert first noted receiving word of an anticipated prisoner exchange on October 7, 1778, but he was obliged to wait several more frustrating months before the event was attained. During this disappointing delay, it devolved upon Robert Heath and Miles Saurey to provide solace and hope to these American captives. It was no doubt a daunting task, but Heath especially, with his own feelings of spiritual regeneration, quite likely was up to the task. Furthermore, the opportunity for both of these Devon men to offer encouragement was readily available during their regular visits to dispense prisoner relief funds.³⁵

Keeper Cowdry had raised inmates’ hopes in early December, telling the men that they were to be exchanged very soon, but when he and other prison officials contradicted their prediction several days later, the detainees smelled a plot.

Charles Herbert and Dr. Jonathan Haskins, a former Connecticut physician, deduced an intrigue. Herbert claimed, with possible justification, that prison and Admiralty officials “wanted to entice us to enter on board the men-of-war.” This alleged tactic failed to meet with much success, but an endeavor to offer special consolation to the internees was needed during their bleak Christmas and New Year’s holidays. Robert Heath did his best under these circumstances, since Charles Herbert and Dr. Jonathan Haskins noted on January 3, 1779 that Deacon Heath had tried to lift their pessimistic mood with fresh loaves of white bread for each man, which were augmented by words of spiritual encouragement to the prisoners.³⁶ Four days later, however, both internees noted disheartedly that their subscription funds had run out, but that at least one kind-hearted, though unidentified, Devon gentleman had stopped by the gate and given in a crown for the inmates. But this paltry donation, along with pairs of shoes for most of the inmates, could not change the captives’ deteriorating food provisions. Shortly after the New Year, some of the prisoners’ alleged hunger pains reduced them to eating an unlucky dog which had wandered into the gaol.³⁷

³⁴ David Hartley to Benjamin Franklin, July 27, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 27, 94–95; American commissioners to officers and prisoners at Forton and Mill prisons, September 18–19, 1778, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 27, 422–23.

³⁵ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 102, 166, 173, 178, 181, 182, 186, 187, 189; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 439.

³⁶ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 194, 195, 197, 200–02, 208–09; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 433, 435, 437, 439.

³⁷ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 210, 212; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 439–40.

Just when the fortunes of the Mill captives seemed to have reached a new low point – matching the dismal January 1779 weather – welcome news came at last regarding the exchange negotiations. It was conveyed through a messenger from Robert Heath on January 10 who had the captives informed that indeed “a cartel ship had arrived in Plymouth.” Miles Saurey arrived soon afterward from his work, confirming Deacon Heath’s message and adding further details. The agreement provided that the designated cartel ship, *Milford*, was to be used in the transfer, and that the prisoner exchanges would be promulgated on the groups of one hundred prisoners each from Mill and Forton gaols for an equal number of British seamen captured by Americans and held in France. And because Mill had incarcerated the Americans first, their prisoners would comprise the first group of the Yankee rebel internees to be traded.³⁸ The French port of Nantes was to be the cross-Channel port for the official exchange of prisoners. Subsequent transfers were expected to be made dependent upon the integrity of each side and the availability of detainees. The day after this joyful news arrived, Heath appeared at the prison to congratulate the detainees and to repeat again that freedom was at hand.³⁹

There were still small matters to arrange, but, to Charles Herbert and others scheduled to be among the first hundred to be exchanged from Mill, the devil in the final details mattered little. Herbert noted in his journal on January 22 that he was included as number forty-three on the list of seamen to be exchanged. He and Dr. Haskins were also pleased that several days before this, money had arrived from London hopefully to restart the prisoner relief program. As for the execution of the cartel itself there would continue to be delays for several more weeks, weeks that would require Robert Heath to appear and offer benefactions, pious urgings for patience, and probably spiritual solace to those who respected him.⁴⁰ Charles Herbert’s diary describes some of the Plymouth Dock Deacon’s humanitarian activities which continued up to the seamen’s departure:

[February] 24. [1779] This morning Mr. Sorry [sic] came, and brought each of us another sixpence. . . . This afternoon, also, Mr. Heath came to see us; he has lately returned from London. He read a letter to us, which informed us that the cartel is in the Downs, detained only by contrary winds. . . . Mr. Heath also sent us some soap and tobacco.

[February] 26. Yesterday three gentlemen, who are our friends, came with Mr. Heath to see us. We have been so long confined, that when a friend comes into the yard to see us, we flock around him like children, and love the ground he treads upon.

³⁸ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 213–14; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 439; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 122–23.

³⁹ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 214–15; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 440.

⁴⁰ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 217–18; Coan, “Revolutionary Prison Diary,” 439.

[March] 18. Today Mr. Heath came on board [Milford], and another of our friends [possibly congregants at the Plymouth Tabernacle]. and brought some wine tea, and sugar, and other necessities for those who are sick.⁴¹

In March 1780, a second cartel agreement, in which 119 American detainees at Mill were set free in France, proved to be a botched affair. The French, who in actuality controlled the procedure on their territory, prevented the release of a reciprocal number of British captive seamen. Robert Heath, who had evidently served once again as a secular and spiritual mentor to the Mill prisoners prior to this cartel's initiation, thereafter had to face the fact that subsequent exchanges would be difficult to arrange. Nonetheless, he did assist several smaller or individual exchanges that involved Mill prisoners until March 1782, when the American captives were formally granted prisoner-of-war status by the British government.⁴²

There was, of course, another means by which the rebel captives at Mill Prison could leave confinement aside from exchanges or agreeing to serve in the King's forces in exchange for a pardon. (On the whole, not a great number of American captives chose this backsliding role.) The other manner for an early prison departure was escape, or as the prisoners referred to it, "making leg bail." This unauthorized means of leaving confinement proved more difficult at Mill than at the less secure Forton Prison in Hampshire, but it provided little deterrent at either British detention center. It is difficult to obtain an exact number of actual escape attempts at both gaols, but Admiralty manuscript records and one British naval historian have estimated that there were about 536 escape attempts at Forton compared to 129 at Mill during their wartime operation.⁴³ Such figures would seem to indicate that despite a multitude of obstacles facing them including rewards for the fugitive's apprehension, unfamiliarity with surrounding countryside, and cramped solitary confinement in the filthy "Black Hole" on half rations, the captives repeatedly, and employing a variety of methods, attempted to flee confinement. (One persistent prisoner at Forton was alleged to have tried at least fourteen breakouts until successful.) The ultimate goal of the fugitives was almost always Paris, where the American Commissioners could provide the means of return to America.⁴⁴

Virtually all of the escaping Americans required some form of outside assistance in order to achieve their ultimate freedom. Several Britons, including

⁴¹ Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 224–25; Coan, "Revolutionary Prison Diary," 411–12.

⁴² Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 154–60.

⁴³ ADM to CSHS, February 16, 1782, Ms Library, National Maritime Museum (Greenwich); Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 99.

⁴⁴ Catherine M. Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England During the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (April 1975), 271–75; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 108–11, 117–18, 121–24, 148–451.

the Reverend Thomas Wren in Portsmouth, the Reverend Thomas Denward in Dover, and Shubal Gardner, Thomas Digges, and Griffith Williams in London, definitely played a role in facilitating the flight of the rebel fugitives.⁴⁵ In the case of Deacon Robert Heath of Plymouth Dock, however, the evidence is inconclusive and circumstantial.

Three cases illustrate the inconclusiveness of Robert Heath's actual role in the matter of escapes. Samuel Cutler, one of the first Americans remanded to Mill during the spring of 1777, apparently became acquainted with the Plymouth Tabernacle deacon when he first began his visits to the inmates in September of that year. Heath, as previously noted, was dispensing needed material for their physical needs, and also attempting to provide spiritual consolation. On October 21, 1777, Cutler recorded in his journal that he had received £77 from various sources, including £20 from Robert Heath. Cutler did not specify how these sums were to be employed.⁴⁶ Five days later, Samuel Cutler and William Morris, another Yankee inmate, used part of the money to bribe some of the sentries, and "pressed themselves through the Prison bars." The two fugitives, disguised as Quakers, subsequently made their way to London and from there to eventual freedom in Holland. The incident naturally focuses suspicion on Heath as one who abetted their flight. It should be noted, however, that Cutler, who had been ship's clerk on his captured privateer *Dalton*, was the ideal inmate to supervise the use of the funds donated by Robert Heath and the other Devon benefactors. Furthermore, Samuel Cutler, even afterward, in the safety of his New England home, never claimed that the Deacon had facilitated his breakout.⁴⁷

The second incident, regarding Deacon Heath's possible collusion in escape attempts, involved the colorful Captain Gustavus Conyngham, also known as the "Dunkirk Pirate." Conyngham was first incarcerated at Mill in October 1779. Early the following month, Conyngham effected his breakout with the help of an unnamed external source, but, once he reached safety in Holland, he wrote to Benjamin Franklin in Paris that assistance given him came from a certain "Mr. Cuming," apparently a Devon resident. The "Dunkirk Pirate," who was later captured by the Royal Navy and confined again to Mill, participated in a group breakout in 1781, but again there was no subsequent mention that any outside assistance emanated from Robert Heath.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 392–93, 405–06, 420–22; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 108–11, 123–24, 148–51.

⁴⁶ Cutler, "Samuel Cutler's Diary,," 396–98; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 82–83.

⁴⁷ Cutler, "Samuel Cutler's Diary," 42, 397–98; Livesey, *The Prisoners of 1776*, 243.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Neeser, ed., *Letters and Papers Relating to the Cruises of Gustavus Conyngham; A Captain in the Continental Navy, 1777–1779* (New York, 1915), xix, 11–12, 173, 190; Gustavus Conyngham to Benjamin Franklin, November 18, December 1, 1779, Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, November 10, 18, 1779, vol. 30, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 79–81, 119–20, 139, 191–93; Gustavus Conyngham to Benjamin Franklin, June 16, 1781, July 4, 1781, Benjamin Franklin to Gustavus Conyngham, June 20, 1781,

The third case related to the incarceration of the intrepid Captain Joshua Barney who was detained at Mill in December 1780. Joshua Barney, who had first gone to sea as a teenager, would later have a distinguished career as a commodore in the United States Navy. He effected a daring and successful escape from Mill on May 18, 1781, disguised as a British officer. After several narrow brushes with the authorities in Britain, Barney reached France, where he was personally welcomed by Benjamin Franklin. Barney's daughter Mary, who later authored a reverential biography of her illustrious father, described the captain's flight from Mill, and she noted that after Joshua's audacious breakout, he was guided to a temporary refuge in Plymouth at the residence of a "venerable clergyman." Such a reference could have been made to the Reverend Andrew Kinsman who led the Plymouth Tabernacle, but it was more likely to the then elderly Reverend Philip Gibbs of Plymouth's Baptist congregation. It definitely did not refer to Deacon Robert Heath, who was only in his fortieth year in May 1781.⁴⁹

Although Robert Heath's involvement in escape attempts is still debatable, his continued benevolent actions and spiritual concerns on behalf of the American captives at Mill Prison have been recorded. France, Spain, and later, Holland, entered the conflict against Great Britain during the period from spring 1778 to December 1780. Many of their captured combatants ended up at Mill, but since they came from recognized nations their detainees received prisoner-of-war status upon their seizure.⁵⁰ Heath and Miles Saurey consequently had to center their attention on maintaining material relief for only the rebel prisoners. This continued to be a difficult task since, during the war's later stages, more and more of these American captives were repeatedly sent to the Devon gaol rather than Forton Prison, and Mill had become even more crowded after early 1780 when the original cartel plan collapsed. Further troubles emanated from the fact that relief funds destined for Mill detainees proved less dependable, and, as Benjamin Franklin discovered, Thomas Digges, the fund's supervisor, revealed himself as not only less dependable, but also as downright dishonest.⁵¹

Rebel captives during the latter phase of Mill Prison's operation, such as seamen – and New Englanders – William Wigder, William Russell, and Andrew Sherburne, all noted the appearances of Robert Heath and his associate Miles

vol. 35, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 170, 176, 218; William H. Bowden, ed., "Diary of William Wigder of Marblehead Kept at Mill Prison England, 1781," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 73, 74 (October 1937, January, April 1938), 40, 148.

⁴⁹ Mary Barney, *A Biographical Memoir of the Late Commodore Joshua Barney* (Boston, MA, 1832), 89–105; Ralph D. Paine, *Joshua Barney, A Forgotten Hero of Blue Water* (New York, 1924), 113–48; Bowden, "Diary of William Wigder," 73, 343–44; Welch, "Andrew Kinsman's Churches at Plymouth," 212–36.

⁵⁰ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 126, 135.

⁵¹ Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, April 11, 25, 1781, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 34, 507–08, 572–73; Prelinger, "Franklin and the American Prisoners," 288–89.

Saurey at the detention center to offer whatever assistance they could. Their manuscripts show the indefatigable labors these two Britons performed for the prisoners' benefit. Saurey is depicted during this later phase as appearing to deliver monies from the often delayed prisoner relief fund. On this matter, seaman Wigder noted on June 2, 1781, with apparent concern, "this day Mr. Miles Sowrey [sic] brought our Donation and informs us of Thomas Diggs [sic] Elopment and Carrying a considerable Sum of Money with him belonging to the prisoners and others."⁵² Nevertheless, Heath and particularly Saurey continued to provide material assistance, often using their own limited funds. In addition, they repeatedly urged Devon residents or fellow congregants to give what they could to the needy American inmates. Wigder's journal cites many appearances of Saurey at Mill to distribute the small amounts of cash that did arrive, and when it did not, he and Deacon Heath would advance their own sums. They also continued to bring donated material goods such as shoes, hats, and clothing. Both men would also bring the captives the latest wartime news, and inform them of possible new prisoner exchanges, though usually these were not implemented.⁵³

The spiritual needs of Mill's rebel inmates were likely handled by Robert Heath until the autumn of 1781. In October of that year the Reverend Philip Gibbs of Plymouth's Baptist congregation was permitted to offer regular Sunday sermons to the American prisoners. William Wigder notes two such lessons. On October 28, 1781, he recorded that Mr. Gibbs's sermon was based upon St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 16, verse 15: "And he saith unto them, go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." The following November 11, Gibbs's sermon was based upon the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 13, verses 10, 11: "Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." And on the following Sabbath the lesson was Hebrews, Chapter 12, verse 25: "See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape for we reject the one who warns from heaven." However, even with the appearance of Mr. Gibbs to offer weekly scriptural discourses to the detained and often anxious American captives, Deacon Heath could and did offer these men his own spiritual consolation. In addition, he continued to distribute Bibles and religious pamphlets to the prisoners.⁵⁴

⁵² Bowden, "Diary of William Wigder," vol. 73, 314, 319–21, 324, 329–30, 332, 334, vol. 74, 26–27, 29, 32, 39, 40; Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 80–82; Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 124–25.

⁵³ Bowden, "Diary of William Wigder," vol. 74, 26, 28–29, 32, 36, 39, 40, 45–47; Thomas Digges to Benjamin Franklin, August 18, 1780, John Manley to Benjamin Franklin, June 4, 1781, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 33, 208, 35, 122.

⁵⁴ William T. Whitley, *A Baptist Bibliography . . . 1777–1837*, vol. II (London, 1922), 234; Bowden, "Diary of William Wigder," vol. 74, 151, 154.

By the spring of 1782, it became evident to the American prisoners at Mill, as well as to Robert Heath in Plymouth Dock, that the operation of the Devon prison center was coming to an end. Once the new Rockingham–Shelburne Peace Ministry was installed in Britain and recognized the captive rebels as prisoners of war, it was obvious that extensive prisoner releases would soon follow. The fact that peace negotiations were being arranged in Paris also affected the implementations of such exchanges. Understandably, the belligerents preferred their appointed mediators not to be side-tracked or bogged down with comparatively minor issues such as the remaining detention of a significant number of their nationals.⁵⁵

On June 23 and 24, 1782, a new large-scale prisoner release, approved by the Admiralty, was initiated from Mill. In it were included seventy or eighty American captives who had been transferred to the Devon internment center from Ireland. Seaman William Russell quite likely reflected the sentiments of the liberated men when he wrote in his journal: "I am compelled to cry out, O God, in the midst of thy Judgement, thou has remembered Mercy!" Russell also noted that Robert Heath and Mr. Saurey appeared at dockside in Plymouth Harbor to wish them *bon voyage*. Also present was the Duke of Richmond who had come to Plymouth to witness the event. The sympathetic nobleman reportedly augmented the prisoners' joyfulness by announcing to them that they "had gained what we had been fighting for, and we should find it so in America."⁵⁶

In total, this particular two-day release comprised about 400 men, including Russell, who embarked on board the ships *Lady's Adventure* and *Hope*, bound for Boston. Before departing, the Americans scheduled for release made a final show of resentment toward their former captors. It was demonstrated when they unceremoniously tore up a request from Keeper William Cowdry that they sign a document declaring that he had treated them well.⁵⁷ Russell, who was placed on *Lady's Adventure*, made plain in his journal the tremendous exuberance he felt as his vessel slipped out of Plymouth Harbour in the early morning of June 24:

We immediately hove up anchors, and at 8 o'clock made sail. I was so transported with Joy at my deliverance from a loathsome prison, where I've been confined 30 months & 5 days almost despairing of seeing my Native Country, my Loving Wife & Dear Children and my relatives and friends who are so dear to me; but Glory to God I've a prospect now before me of seeing America that Land of Liberty and on

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 164–65; Cobbett, comp., *Parliamentary History of England*, vol. 22, 988–89; Prelinger, "Franklin and the American Prisoners," 290–91.

⁵⁶ Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 135–36; Prelinger, "Franklin and the American Prisoners," 291; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 194; Bowden, "Diary of William Wigder," vol. 73, 328, 344, vol. 74, 23, 28.

⁵⁷ Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 135–37; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 201–04; William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, June 7, 1782, Ms. Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

my arrival of finding all connected with me in health and happiness. . . . We have a fine wind, and may God grant us a quick passage and guide the Ship to her desired Port.⁵⁸

There continued to be American captives at Mill following the June 1782 release. In September of that year, five prisoners, whose illness had prevented them from departing on the June cartel, successfully petitioned Lord Shelburne for their immediate freedom. The following month, the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen and the Exchange of Prisoners admitted that there was a lack of clothing at the Devon prison and requested immediate assistance from the Admiralty. Almost simultaneously, the Admiralty also admitted that there were delays in dispatching the remaining Americans home. The bureaucratic log jams were not broken until early 1783 when new releases were effected.⁵⁹ As late as April of the new year, there were still four Americans listed as still being held at Mill. It is likely, however, that Robert Heath and Miles Saurey continued to persist in trying to meet the needs of these remaining detainees. Nonetheless, with the conflict concluding, the British government had no need to keep Mill in operation, and on 20 August, 1783, the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen forwarded a request for a survey of vacated buildings at both Mill and Forton. Mill's use as a detention center declined afterward, and when Britain and the United States were again involved in hostilities (1812–1814), the inland Devon prison of Dartmoor near Princetown was employed to hold most of the American naval captives in Britain.⁶⁰

For all of Robert Heath's prominent relief efforts for the rebel prisoners from 1777 to 1783, the tradesman-evangelist did not remain grounded in his Plymouth Dock roots. Perhaps his beneficial wartime exertions had added to his religious sense of pursuing a spiritual mission for the advancement of true Christianity. And perhaps something else spurred him to fill a full-time religious calling rather than concentrate solely on the material world. Heath had already experienced tragedies in his personal life; six of his ten children died before the age of 10. In 1787, however, he suffered an even closer blow when his beloved wife, Jane, became ill and succumbed. Heath, who would remain a widower, showed what resilience he could muster to meet this great loss, and he seemed somehow to believe that this momentous tragedy was a sign that he should strive even further in God's work.⁶¹ This renewed religious zeal was exemplified barely two years after his wife's death; and it was reportedly helped along by the urgings of the Reverend Andrew Kinsman, who then presided over the Plymouth Tabernacle. In early 1789, Robert Heath was

⁵⁸ Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 136; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 203.

⁵⁹ William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, July 13, October 14, 1782, Mss Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

⁶⁰ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 207–08; James Walsh to Benjamin Franklin, January 4, 1783, John Audley to Benjamin Franklin, July 26, 1783, Mss Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

⁶¹ "Memoir of Robert Heath," 164.

ordained as a Calvinist Methodist minister by the Reverend Rowland Hill (1744–1833) at Hill's chapel at Wooten-Under-Edge [Underwood], a hamlet situated between Gloucester and Bristol. Unlike clergymen in the Church of England and some other dissenter sects, certain Calvinist Methodist pastors had the authority to administer such unorthodox ordinations.⁶²

The newly ordained Reverend Robert Heath abandoned the greater part of his commercial endeavors to participate actively in the Evangelical movement which was then covering many of the western counties of England and also Wales. This influential spiritual movement had begun during the late 1730s, after the break of the Wesleyan Methodist from the established Church of England. John Wesley (1703–1791), perhaps its greatest spokesman, together with Wesley's followers in Britain, had advocated a new form of theology, distinct from that which he found in the somewhat ossified and too tradition-based Church of England. Wesley endorsed what he considered was a true spiritual conversion based upon the individual's inner regeneration and good works.⁶³ The Calvinists, or Primitive Methodists, were a breakaway group motivated by the supplications of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–1791). The Countess intended to impart a more vivid and more active form of theological teaching to the British common man and woman.⁶⁴

Historians surveying this period of religious developments in Great Britain have offered glimpses into these pervasive religious developments. For example, Paul Langford, in his volume *A Polite and Commercial People; England, 1727–1783* (1989), has rendered a perceptive account of the Methodist movement and the related evangelist campaigns during the mid-and later eighteenth century. It was not only a movement but also a crusade against what was viewed the conservative, socially indifferent, out of touch, and conventionally oriented religious establishment.⁶⁵ It was also a crusade against what were considered spiritually subversive forces of deism, skepticism, liberalism, radical Arminianism, and other rationally emphasized aspects of

⁶² Edwin Sidney, *The Life of the Reverend Rowland Hill, A.M.* (London, 1834), 66–69; Vernon I. Charlesworth, *Rowland Hill, His Life, Anecdotes and Pulpit Sayings* (New York, 1876), 39–45; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 164.

⁶³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN, 1995), chs 2–5; John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley* (London, 1899), chs 1–3; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 46–52; Welch, “Andrew Kinsman's Churches in Plymouth,” 212–36.

⁶⁴ Edwin Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim. A Reassessment of the Life of the Countess of Huntingdon* (Cardiff, Wales, 1995), 169–211; Boyd S. Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Durham, 1997), chs 5–12; Albert D. Belden, *George Whitefield, the Awakener; A Modern Study of the Evangelical Revival* (New York, 1957), 104–218.

⁶⁵ Susan O'Brien, “A Transatlantic Community of Saints; The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1734–1755,” *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 811–32; Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 97–168, 293–308; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 243–75; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 248–62.

the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Those clerics who were involved in this evangelistic movement often employed outdoor or “open field” preaching, and they stressed a “vital religion,” in which individuals were to demonstrate their own spiritual sentiments of justification. The movement had a trans-Atlantic connection with the so-named “Great Awakening” in the American colonies. In both cases, emotionalism and revivalism (often with largely attended outdoor, devotional meetings) served as connecting elements.⁶⁶

The Reverend George Whitefield (1714–1770) represented one aspect of this religious connection with his popular and emotive sermonizing in both Britain and America. Whitefield had required of his listeners that they reject an emphasis on good works in seeking salvation, and stressed, instead, the need for a personal spiritual conversion experience. His precepts thus resembled those of the Calvinist-oriented seventeenth-century Puritans. After Whitefield’s death, a split emerged between the regular and more numerous followers of John and Charles Wesley and these activist Calvinist-inspired evangelists connected to the circle of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.⁶⁷ The Reverend Rowland Hill, who had ordained Robert Heath, was a particularly prominent member of this latter group of Methodist clerics who strove to bring their congregants an awareness of the Gospel, which, in turn, might bring about a personal regeneration and rebirth. Heath, early in his life, had subscribed to, and embraced, these theological precepts, and they remained with him throughout his involvement with the rebel captives at Mill Gaol.⁶⁸

The diligent evangelizing labors that the freshly ordained Robert Heath performed in Devon and Cornwall soon caught the notice of fellow Calvinist Methodist clerics, and it helped earn him a prominent settlement. In 1790, he received a call to lead the congregation at the Rodborough Tabernacle, located near Stroud in Gloucestershire, succeeding the Reverend Mr. Robert Anlezark, who reportedly was not up to the pastoral work. The Tabernacle had been founded in 1739, and almost from its inception it had followed Primitive or Calvinist Methodist sectarian precepts.⁶⁹ The first actual church

⁶⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 28–31; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 235–42, 723.

⁶⁷ Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England*, 15–18, 37–39, 83–85; Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim*, 169–211; Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists*, chs 6–12; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 162–66.

⁶⁸ Sidney, *The Life of Rowland Hill*; Charlesworth, *Rowland Hill*; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 30–34, 42–50; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 162–66.

⁶⁹ A.M. Brown, Eliezer Jones and W. Wheeler, *A Memorial of Nonconformity, Elicited by the Centenary Services of the Rodborough Tabernacle, Gloucestershire* (London, 1886), 39–40, 42–50, 60–61; Charles E. Watson, *The Story of Rodborough Tabernacle*, Ms Records of the Rodborough Tabernacle, Ms Gloucestershire Record Office, D 4248, 13, 13/1, 1, 5, 7–8, Gloucester; “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 164. The population of Stroud at the time of Heath’s appointment was approximately 5000 residents. See N.M. Herbert, ed., *A History of the County of Gloucester*, ser. XI (Oxford, 1976), 100.

structure for housing the congregation was completed and opened in 1750, largely through the efforts of the Reverend George Whitefield, who had recently returned from America. Whitefield preached there occasionally afterward, filling in primarily for the absent or ill resident pastor. He was reportedly enthusiastically received on his appearances, and the grateful congregation even presented the noted evangelist with his own specially made chair, which he in turn later donated to the Tabernacle.⁷⁰

The Rodborough Tabernacle, presently known as the Rodborough Tabernacle-United Reformed Church, had its difficulties prior to Mr. Heath's arrival. There had been four settled pastors prior to the new minister from Plymouth Dock. Heath's friend, the Reverend Rowland Hill, had been a popular leader, but he apparently became dissatisfied with the position and moved to Wooten-Under-Edge. There he was able to make evangelizing tours and also lead his own tabernacle. Robert Anlezark was criticized by one historian of Rodborough Tabernacle as "unsuitable for the position"; he lasted less than three years and returned to the Church of England.⁷¹ But Mr. Heath, who was described by this same historian as "a good and useful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ," accepted the call, and, gathering his motherless children, he relocated to Gloucestershire. Fortunately, the newly arrived pastor had enough money from his Plymouth silversmith dealings to purchase a small clothing mill nearby to augment his meager church salary. Heath subsequently delegated the tabernacle clerk to manage the mill so that he was able to concentrate on spiritual enterprises which at times took him away from Stroud.⁷²

From his memoir in the *Theological Magazine*, and from historical accounts of Rodborough Tabernacle, the Reverend Robert Heath proved satisfactory – albeit with some congregant criticisms – in performing his pastoral duties. John Knight (1763–1860), whose association with the Tabernacle began when he was 19 years old, stated that Mr. Heath "had been very useful, both in awakening sinners and comforting saints." Knight also mentioned that this cleric tended the ill and infirm in the area and those plagued with material needs, and those requiring spiritual comfort.⁷³ The benefactors of his humanitarian deeds included – as Knight implied – unfortunates in other counties as well as in Gloucestershire. Heath also oversaw structural changes at Rodborough itself: the Tabernacle was pewed; the pulpit moved; and an area was set aside in the gallery for the choir. When he was not directing such

⁷⁰ Brown *et al.*, *A Memorial of Nonconformity*, 50–52; Watson, *The Story of Rodborough Tabernacle*, 5–6.

⁷¹ Brown *et al.*, *A Memorial of Nonconformity*, 61.

⁷² Brown *et al.*, *A Memorial of Nonconformity*, 52–61; Watson, *The Story of Rodborough Tabernacle*, 8.

⁷³ John Knight to the Reverend Benjamin Brockhouse, August 17, 1844, in *The Early Days of Rodborough Tabernacle*, Ms Records of the Rodborough Tabernacle, Gloucestershire Record Office, D 4248; "Memoir of Robert Heath," 165.

renovations, and performing altruistic deeds in the region, he would attend convocations of like-minded Methodists, part of what was called the “Rodsborough connexion” [sic]. The following excerpt from a poem describing the Tabernacle’s early years by a congregant, Jephtha Young (1812–1894), offers some rather charming theological impressions of Robert Heath’s tenure:

Then Heath took up the sword, and he
Told formalist and Pharisee
That only Christ could save;
That seas of blood could not atone
For the transgressions that they had done
They must be saved by Christ alone
Or sink beneath the grave!⁷⁴

The lifetime tribulations for Robert Heath had been considerable. However, the protracted and painful death of his cherished and only surviving son Benjamin, along with the afflictions of advancing age, were taking their toll on the Rodborough pastor. Heath’s biographer declared that Benjamin, who died at age 15, was stricken with an unspecified illness which kept him bedridden for ten months. The ailing youth was reportedly visited by several friends and other clergymen “who received pleasure in the evidence of saving work wrought upon him.” It was also mentioned that at one moment when it appeared that he was dying, Benjamin smiled and told listeners by his bedside that “he would yet live to praise God.” Six weeks later, however, on July 2, 1797, Benjamin passed away.⁷⁵ Heath, who apparently had so much love and hope invested in Benjamin, was greatly shaken by the loss. Perhaps he may even have compared his many adversities to the biblical tribulations endured by Job, as he sought a personal reinvigoration. Nonetheless, the evangelist strove courageously to pursue his clerical obligations, but he was simultaneously slowed by palsy and other physical infirmities. As his strength declined and an awareness of his own approaching end increased, Heath’s biographical sketch noted that he took the prospect of his impending death stoically: “He relied entirely upon the Saviour, and was determined to abide by him, expecting salvation only in virtue of his vicarious sacrifice.”⁷⁶

Robert Heath’s own life concluded as the new century began. In early July 1800, he witnessed with appreciation Rowland Hill’s sermonizing at his own Rodborough Tabernacle. Afterward, he accompanied Mr. Hill on an evangelizing tour in the area. Heath was said to have been especially pleased

⁷⁴ Jephtha Young, “Rodborough Tabernacle, Gloucestershire, A Poem,” in *The Early Days of Rodborough Tabernacle*; John Knight to Benjamin Brockhouse, August 17, 1844, Ms D 4248, 14/11, Gloucestershire Record Office; Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrim*, 190–99; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 29–30; Brown et al., *A Memorial of Nonconformity*, 61.

⁷⁵ “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 164–65.

⁷⁶ “Memoir of Robert Heath,” 164.

Image not available

Plate 5.2 Rodborough Tabernacle, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Source: Courtesy of the Rodborough Tabernacle United Church of Christ

by the exhortation that his fellow cleric had delivered to a congregation at Shortwood, a hamlet located about four miles south of Stroud, on Wednesday, July 17. Later, when he had departed for home by coach, he began relating to his servant how pleased he was by Hill's lecture. Suddenly the retainer noted that something was amiss when his master was "stricken by a sudden silence." The servant, discerning that it was a stroke, immediately brought the clergyman to his home for treatment. It was all to no avail; and during that evening, Robert Heath was gathered to his fathers.⁷⁷

The Reverend Cornelius Winter, another Calvinist Methodist clergyman, presided at his funeral obsequies, basing his sermon on Genesis, Chapter 49, verse 18: "I will wait in hope for salvation." The *Gloucester Journal* in its July 21 issue noted his death, listing him merely as "rector of the Society of Dissenters."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Brown *et al.*, *A Memorial of Nonconformity*, 61; Watson, *The Story of Rodborough Tabernacle*, 8.

⁷⁸ *Gloucestershire Journal* (Gloucester), 21 July 1800; "Memoir of Robert Heath," 196.

Nothing was mentioned in the biographical sketch of Robert Heath concerning his labors on behalf of the American detainees at Mill and any personal motivations for such efforts. In this regard, the Plymouth Dock silversmith, turned Calvinist-Methodist evangelist, was distinct from the other middling-level pro-Americans surveyed in this study. Unlike the other four Britons described in this work, Heath never made any declaration of his affinity to the precepts expounded by the leaders of the American Rebellion. There is no doubt that he and Miles Saurey, his Plymouth linen draper colleague, often supplied spiritual and material comfort to the downtrodden American rebel detainees, but, in their extant communications, neither man declared any support for the independence of the United States.⁷⁹

In searching for a probable answer to Mr. Heath's apparent apolitical attitude, one should focus on spiritual rather than secular influences. It has been shown that the leader of the largest and most prominent faction, John Wesley, looked with considerable disdain on the colonial dissidents. In his 1775 essay, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, he supported the doctrines of Royal and Parliamentary Supremacy. The less numerous Primitive or Calvinist Methodist followers of George Whitefield took no one single position regarding the American Rebellion. Whitefield had died in 1770, and obviously could not comment on the conflict itself. Shortly before his death, however, he had written of his sympathies to the suffering colonists, declaring, "Poor New England is much to be pitied; Boston people most of all." But whether Whitefield would have supported an open split with Great Britain remains debatable.⁸⁰ Mark Noll, of Wheaton College, Illinois, who has studied eighteenth-century evangelical movements in England, has concluded that while English Calvinist-Methodist clergymen were certainly aware of the hostilities in America, many of them stood apart from the conflict. For such men, their divinely ordained duties on earth were to be spiritually directed; they were to concentrate their efforts on expounding the Gospel and bringing souls to Christ.⁸¹

This spiritual incentive is what I conclude impelled Heath during his recurrent efforts to provide material and devotional comfort to the American captives confined at Mill Prison. In accomplishing these tasks, he sought no special honors or rewards for the assistance that he brought to these men who, after all, were considered British and who were also Christians. Therefore, it was only natural as part of his own Christian obligation to assist these confined men and to offer them spiritual, not political, guidance. Part of such spiritual

⁷⁹ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 115–18, 132–34, 186, 193, 198.

⁸⁰ John Wesley, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (London, 1775), 1–23; George Whitefield to Robert Keen, September 23, 1770, in Tyreman, *Life of George Whitefield*, vol. II, 593.

⁸¹ Professor Mark Noll to author, April 9, 2003; D. Bruce Hindman, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Oxford, 1996), 194–95, 202–03; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 723.

guidance, of course, was to exorcise sin from these men of the sea who had often been led astray. Deacon Heath consequently felt that he surely had fertile ground – and a captive audience – for leading such unregenerate men away from impious practices such as gambling, petty thievery, lewd verbiage, drunkenness, and falsity, and bring to them, through an inner conversion, to accept the word of God and the teachings of Christ.⁸² It would be extremely difficult to measure the success of Robert Heath in his earnest attempt to bring regeneration to these detained, unfortunate men, but we cannot deny, and should commend, the sincere efforts of this religiously motivated Briton.

There are numerous biblical passages that could be cited as possible written guides for Robert Heath's humanitarian actions at Mill Prison, and his later beneficences as an ordained clergyman to many ill and indigent Britons. When he visited the Devon gaol seeking to comfort the American captives, he may even have considered such scriptural excerpts. One such relevant example could be found in Psalms, Chapter 69, verse 33: "For the Lord listens to the poor and does not despise his captive people." Another such biblical selection could be found in Zachariah, Chapter 9, verse 12: "Come to the Citadel you captives waiting in hope!" And perhaps for this zealous Plymouth Tabernacle deacon, another oft-quoted passage came even closer in relevance to the many benefactions he delivered to the American detainees. It may be found in Matthew, Chapter 25, verse 36: "When naked, you clothed me, when I was ill, you came to my help, when in prison, you visited me."

These passages from the Holy Bible, and others, were particularly pertinent to the labors that the Plymouth deacon performed on behalf of the American prisoners and, with such benevolent efforts, for America itself. However, as for this zealous clergyman himself, the Scriptures have an even more appropriate selection. It is found in the first Epistle of John: "The man who continues in the light is one who loves his brother; there is nothing in him to cause a fall." Robert Heath was one such man "who continued in the light!"⁸³

⁸² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 40–66, 105–50; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 119, 237–91.

⁸³ Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace; Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in its British Context* (New York, 1991), 39–40, 53–57, 80–82, 151–56, 165–66, 173–76; Cohen, "The Preachers and the Prisoners," 6–10.

Griffith Williams

Apothecary and friend to American liberty

Audience of His Majesty, King George III, with the Reverend Dr. Francis Willis, 5 December 1788:

George III: Sir, Your Dress and appearance bespeaks You of the Clergy, do you belong to it?

Dr. Willis: I did formerly, but lately I have attended chiefly to physick [medicine].

George III: I am sorry for it; You have quitted a profession I have always loved, and You have embraced one I heartily detest!

Dr. Willis: Sir, our Savior himself healed the sick.

George III: Yes, yes, but he had not £700 a year for it!¹

The above discourse, which occurred during the initial interview of King George III with the Reverend Dr. Francis Willis, has become somewhat of a classic in the histories of Britain's monarchy. Most recently, the noted playwright Alan Bennett cited this interchange in his prize-winning play, *The Madness of King George*. This dramatization portrayed the initial descent into severe and tragic mental decline by the monarch, and it also told of the unorthodox methods employed by Dr. Francis Willis, who endeavored to restore the King's psychological stability. Much has been written concerning George III; considerably less has been recorded about Dr. Francis Willis (1718–1807), an Oxford graduate, Fellow of Brasenose College, ordained Episcopal priest and Rector of St. John the Baptist Church in Wapping.² Simultaneously, there has been an absence of mention for one Griffith Williams (c. 1741–1792), an obscure yet significant communicant in Willis's parish.

¹ Ida Macalpin and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad Business* (New York, 1969), 52–53.

² Alan Bennett, *The Madness of King George* (New York, 1995), 50; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v., “Willis, Francis”; Macalpin and Hunter, *George III and the Mad Business*, 52–91.

Griffith Williams, the last of the five “middling-level” Britons surveyed in this work, is clearly the least well known of this group. Historians and genealogists are not absolutely certain about his year of birth, nor the definite identity of both his parents, and the facts concerning his upbringing in Wales leave some matters to speculation. We do know a little more regarding his career in the Wapping district of London working as an apothecary-surgeon. Even there, however, an investigator must rely considerably on secondary sources describing an apothecary’s vocation during the latter half of the eighteenth century.³ Nevertheless, there are some exact observations that can be proffered concerning this rather uncelebrated individual. Socially, Williams would rank in, or below, the median level of Britain’s middle classes. He resided in one of London’s least desirable sections, and his family life – like that of so many of his contemporaries – included personal tragedies. Most salient of the facts that can be discerned about the rather short life of this obscure Welshman are his adherence to the American cause, and the services – both unlawful and risky – that he assumed on behalf of that cause. It is these particular actions which shall be highlighted in this concluding chapter.

Extant data, combined with the assessments of genealogical searchers, and colleagues in Britain, point to a strong, although admittedly not absolutely positive solution to the identity of this particular Griffith Williams. (It was, and still is, a common name in Wales.) The parish register for St. John’s Church in Wapping cites Williams’s date of death as March 29, 1792 with the notation of his age as 50. Using this entry as a guideline, the best indication would be that he was probably born after March 29 during the year 1741, or between January 1 and March 29, 1742.⁴ This hint led to an examination of the massive *International Genealogical Index* assembled by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The *Index* provides an excellent, albeit not always perfect, tool to initiate a search. Nevertheless, moving backward from the 1792 entry citing Williams’s death, the *International Genealogical Index* narrowed the list of candidates to three possible prospects for the subject of this study. One likely Griffith Williams was born in Shropshire on October 20, 1740, in the town of Whitechurch along the Welsh border, the son of David Williams. Another Griffith Williams was listed as baptized on March 24, 1741 at Llanelly (Llanelli), Carmarthenshire, Wales, the son of William Griffith. The third Griffith Williams, son of William David Griffith, had a baptism date cited as May 15, 1743 at Llangyfelach, Glamorganshire, also in Wales.⁵

³ Sheldon S. Cohen, “Griffith Williams; Friend to Benjamin Franklin and Friend to American Liberty,” *Franklin Gazette*, 11: 3 (fall 2001), 6–10.

⁴ St. John the Baptist Church, Wapping, Original Parish Records, Burials, London Metropolitan Archives, London; Mr. Gervase Belfield, Professional Researcher, to Sheldon S. Cohen, May 30, 2001.

⁵ *International Genealogical Index*, Surname, Williams, Forename, Griffith, 4.02, British Isles, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Inferring that the *International Genealogical Index* had pinpointed the three likely Griffith Williams, it was possible, with professional advice, to whittle down this trio to the one person who appeared to be the actual Wapping apothecary. Thus, the Griffith Williams from Shropshire in England was dismissed as born too early to fit the time frame for this Williams's birth. And the Griffith Williams who was baptized on 17 May 1743 was omitted principally for being too late. In addition, this particular individual was recorded as having a spouse, Mary Richard. And the Griffith Williams baptized at St. Elli Parish Church Llanelly on 24 March 1741 initially appeared to fall a few days short of the established parameters, since the given age at death for Williams in Wapping was 50.⁶

Mr. Gervase Belfield, a genealogical researcher in Hampshire, Mr. E.A. (Ted) Hackett of the Dyfed Family History Society in Wales, and Mr. N.W. Griffith of the National Library of Wales all agreed that the Llanelly (Llanelli)-born Griffith Williams was very likely the same Wapping apothecary who carried the name. Along with other genealogists, they also pointed out that while the date of death entries in eighteenth-century church records was almost always entered correctly, there are numerous instances when the age of the deceased may have carried a slight error, and that, in fact, he had just passed his fifty-first birthday. Their conclusions then would appear to confirm the Llanelly, Wales birthplace of Williams. Further, Mr. N.W. Griffith noted that because the father of this Griffith Williams was entered as William Griffith, "it would mean that in accordance with the Welsh patronymic naming custom, he adopted his father's Christian name as his surname."⁷

Assuming that these various suppositions concerning the origins of Wapping's Griffith Williams are correct – suppositions with which this author concurs – it then becomes possible to formulate a general description of the apothecary's Welsh boyhood in Llanelly. This spelling of the community's name will be used in this biographical outline.

Carmarthenshire (Carmathend), presently part of the County of Dyfed, was the largest county in Wales in the eighteenth century. Situated in South Wales, it was bounded to the north by Cardiganshire, to the east by Brecon and Glamorgan, and to the west by Pembrokeshire, and to the south by the Bristol Channel. Carmarthenshire was a source of coal, timber, sandstone, marble, copper, and other metals which were mined during this period. Those limited lands, suitable for agriculture, were set aside primarily for sheep and

⁶ *International Genealogical Index*, 4.02, British Isles, Surname, Williams, Forename, Griffith.

⁷ Mr. Gervase Belfield, Report to Sheldon S. Cohen, April 19, 2001; Mr. E.A. Hackett, Director, Dyfed Family History Society to Sheldon S. Cohen, May 19, June 5, 2001; Mr. N.W. Griffith, National Library of Wales to Sheldon S. Cohen, July 20, 2001; Mrs. Benita Rees, local historian and author of *Llanelli, Birth of a Town* (1998), also takes the view that their Griffith Williams was later to become the Wapping apothecary. If this assumption is correct, she noted that Griffith had two surviving brothers and sisters. Benita Rees to Sheldon S. Cohen, July 12, 2003.

cattle – the latter, in part, providing dairy products and hides. One historian of this period noted that “Most Welsh farms were small (ranging from 30 to 100 acres) and fragmented, and capital resources were severely limited.”⁸ As for religion, the Church of England was the established faith to which the great majority of the residents more or less subscribed, but, by the mid-1700s, there were definite rumblings of Methodism in the air. In the realm of learning, Carmarthenshire’s progressive features were apparent in the work of Griffith Jones (1683–1760) and his “circulating schools,” an innovation that helped modernize education in Wales. Politically, the movement of largely prosperous arrivals from England was increasingly challenging the local aristocracy, and to many seemed a threat to Welsh traditions.⁹

Llanelli, situated on the River Lleidi and on the Bury Estuary, ten miles northwest of Swansea, was one of several small market towns in the county. At the time of Griffith Williams’s birth, the hamlet probably counted less than 1500 residents. The coal trade consumed much of the economic life in the community, but it also had fishing, and some commerce involving farm and stone production. Religious life centered around St. Elli’s [St. David’s] Parish Church, and the capable writing style that Griffith was to exhibit in his later correspondence seemed to testify to a very satisfactory education conferred upon him in the local school.¹⁰

The events which precipitated Williams’s departure from his Welsh roots were not spelled out, but one essay by David Howell in the edited volume, *Carmarthenshire Studies*, claimed that the years prior to 1760 were economically weak ones for the county in agriculture and to some extent in trade. Mrs. Benita Afan Rees of Llanelli, who has written a history of the community, notes that if this was the future Wapping apothecary, his father’s occupation would have been that of a farmer. For the Williams family, evidently struggling on their small Carmarthenshire farmland, their fragile lifestyle was constantly tied to external developments. As such, they were likely to have been affected

⁸ John E. Lloyd, *A History of Carmarthenshire*, vol. II (Cardiff, Wales, 1939), 322–76, 381–86; David Howell, “Pembrokeshire in the Eighteenth Century” in Tudor Barnes and Nigel Yates, eds, *Carmarthenshire Studies* (Carmarthen, 1974), 158–85; Geraint Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales, 1642–1780* (Oxford, 1987), 112–16; John G. Bartholomew, *Gazetteer of the British Isles* (Edinburgh, 1961), 126; John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), 304–13.

⁹ John Tones, *Blue Guide: Wales* (London, 1995), 875; Jenkins, *Foundation of Modern Wales*, 222–43, 282–84, 313–15, 341–80; Lloyd, *History of Carmarthenshire*, vol. I, 124, vol. II, 121–24, 190–97, 213–14, 313–15, 342–80; Davies, *History of Wales*, 304–13.

¹⁰ Benita Rees and William Rees, *Llanelli, Birth of a Town* (Llanelli, Wales, 2002), 1–1430; Lloyd, *History of Carmarthenshire*, vol. II, 322–76, 734–36; “The Llanelli Coalfield,” *Llanelli Historical Society* (1998), 1–3; “A Short History of Llanelli [as told in 1897],” *Llanelli Historical Society* (2003), 1–10. In 1928, the famed aviatrix, Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly the Atlantic Ocean, landed her airplane at Llanelli at the end of her twenty-four-hour flight from Newfoundland. See Tones, *Blue Guide: Wales*, 230.

by the economic slump.¹¹ And if son Griffith were the youngest son, and family finances were strained, it was common for Welsh, as well as other British households, to follow the practice of apprenticeship for younger children. In addition, many parents, in agreeing to set out a male child as an apprentice, sought to do so in a profession that would secure a middle-class status for their son, and the trade of apothecary would certainly seem one vocation that could achieve this end. For the apprentice himself, this calling also may well have seemed an opportunity to leave his unchanging small hamlet environment for the beckoning life in larger, more vibrant urban areas, within and outside of Wales.¹²

Regardless of the circumstances leading up to Griffith Williams's apprenticeship, the term of training for this calling normally took seven years, and the apothecary directing the apprenticeship for the youths under him had rather complete, unchallenged rights over his charges. The status of this profession, which in the mid-eighteenth century still attracted recruits, therefore deserves some mention.¹³

Individuals functioning as apothecaries were in evidence in the world's earliest civilizations. Indeed, primitive mortars and pestles, often symbolizing this profession, have been uncovered among artifacts of ancient peoples on several continents. Such relics were visible in the cultures of China, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Extant records, paintings, and drawings, and even writings, are illustrative of this fact.¹⁴

Subsequently, in Central and Western Europe during the many evolving decades of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Early Modern period, the apothecary, particularly in emergent urban centers, became a very prominent figure. Medical training was quite limited and in a rudimentary form, and physicians' availability to the general public was practically

¹¹ Trevor Herbert and Gareth E. Jones, *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, Wales, 1988), 6–7, 78–79; Lloyd, *History of Carmarthenshire*, vol. II, 284–85, 293–303; Howell, “Pembrokeshire in the Eighteenth Century,” *Carmarthenshire Studies*, 162–64; Jenkins, *Foundation of Modern Wales*, 257–59, 276–84; Davies, *History of Wales*, 317–18.

¹² Juanita G.L. Burnby, *A Study of the English Apothecary from 1660 to 1760* (London, 1983), 92–93; Penelope Hunting, *A History of the Society of Apothecaries* (London, 1998), 129–47; Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales*, 277–80, 298–99.

¹³ Leslie L. Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain* (Edinburgh, 1962), 114–19; Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, 93–96; Jenkins, *The Foundation of Modern Wales*, 104, 119, 137. Mr. E. A. Hackett, Director of the Dyfed Family History Society, thinks that Griffith Williams may have served his apprenticeship in the nearby English seaport of Bristol where many Welsh youngsters performed their service. Typescript, “Eighteenth Century Dyfed apprentices in Bristol.”

¹⁴ Edward Kremers and George Urdang, *History of Pharmacy*, 3rd rev. edn (Philadelphia, PA, 1963), introduction, preface, chs 1–2; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 1–14. See also “Apothecary” listing, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, vol. II (1910), 204–06.

non-existent. Consequently, the incipient pharmacologist, grinding out his potions, herbal remedies, and elixirs, was especially relied upon by the disease-prone populace. Often, these men were part of guilds which sought to regulate, maintain, and promote their profession within the immediate vicinity. Their notoriety was evident during these years in extant town records, paintings, drawings, and in various writings. The King James Bible, compiled at the beginning of the seventeenth century, gave notice to these practitioners: (Exodus, Chapter 30, verse 35): "And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary"; (Ecclesiastes, Chapter 10, verse 1): "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour." Shakespeare, living at this time, employed such tradesmen as minor characters in some of his plays. Most notable, perhaps, was the apothecary who furnished Romeo with poison when this young gentleman believed his beloved Juliet was dead.¹⁵

By the time Griffith Williams entered upon his apprenticeship for this vocation, shortly after the mid-eighteenth century, the functions and status of British apothecaries had become rather more stabilized. The process had begun in 1617 when James I granted a charter to the Society (Company) of Apothecaries, officially separating this vocation from the Company of Grocers. Members of the Society used its independent position thereafter to augment their powers at the expense of physicians. Thus, in 1703, they were granted the right to produce and dispense their medicinals and to prescribe such remedies in treating diseases. Later, in 1721 and 1748, the London Company of Apothecaries was empowered to inspect practitioners in this trade and to oversee the licensing of all members of the profession.¹⁶ Simultaneously, British apothecaries outside of London and a number within the city, who performed minor operations, assumed the additional title of surgeon. By and large, they could then be considered members of the "middling" social level, although one apothecary admitted in 1768 that a great number of his fellow tradesmen were still not regarded as "professional men." Juanita Burnby's study of the group estimates that by the mid-eighteenth century, average incomes of apothecaries ranged from £50 to £110 per year, with London practitioners in the topmost range. Criticism of the vocation, however, was in evidence at this time, much of it coming from envious physicians and chemists. In response, the Company of Apothecaries sought to uphold the quality of its members by upholding a seven-year training period for apprentices, but this effort was unsuccessful.¹⁷

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act V, scene 1; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy*, 21–57; "Apothecary" listing, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 205–06.

¹⁶ Hunting, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, 70–99; Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, 41–57; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 112–18.

¹⁷ Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, 92, 94–95; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 90–115; Hunting, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, 77–93.

Leslie G. Matthews, who assembled *A History of Pharmacy in Britain*, offers a general glimpse of the tasks of the apprentice apothecary during the later eighteenth century. Under his master's tutelage, the trainee was expected to familiarize himself with the shop's contents and other items which were not on hand. The apprentice would be instructed in the preparation of medicinals and assist in procuring and arranging of such medications. One other duty that was probably included during this training period was to help in allotting medicines, "as may be directed for the Sick by a licensed physician."¹⁸

The duration of Griffith Williams's apprenticeship, or where, when, and with whom it was served, have not been recorded. Nevertheless, he was given the title of apothecary in the exhaustive compilation of P.J. and R.V. Wallis's *Eighteenth Century Medics; Subscriptions, Licenses and Apprenticeships* (1988). Ms. Tina Craig, Deputy Librarian of the Royal college of Surgeons in England, and Ms. Dee Cook, Archivist of the Society of Apothecaries in London, were unable to find his name within the extensive membership list of their associations. And Ms. Cook wrote that although he was listed in the Wallis's compilation, Griffith Williams "did not appear to have been examined by her organization." She added, however, that although such appointments and examination procedures ordinarily occurred after the expected seven-year term of service, several individuals in Britain – particularly outside of London – "slipped through the net."¹⁹ It appears quite likely, therefore, that Williams took his apprenticeship a considerable distance from the British capital, possibly in Bristol, and that, as an apothecary in a more remote area, he may well have engaged in the practice of medicine. Others, including the noted Edward Jenner, did so during this period. Similarly, the title of surgeon in the late eighteenth century still did not carry the same prestige level linked to university educated physicians so that it was not unusual that Williams would assume that title. The combined "surgeon-apothecary" designation thus often appeared in distant communities in Britain's countryside.²⁰

The exact date when Griffith Williams appeared in Britain's capital is not known, although records reveal that he was definitely there in the mid-1760s. Probably, as it did to many other middle-class merchants, professionals and tradesmen, London seemed an enticing beacon offering numerous opportunities leading to success and prosperity. Welsh men and women had gravitated to this metropolis since the Tudor period, and, as at least one scholar has noted,

¹⁸ Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 189–83; Hunting, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, chs 2–4; Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, ch. 5.

¹⁹ Peter J. Wallis and R.V. Wallis, comp., *Eighteenth Century Medics; Licenses, Apprenticeships* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 1988), 652. Ms. Dee Cook, Archivist, Society of Apothecaries, to Sheldon S. Cohen, May 28, 2001; Ms. Tina Craig, Deputy Librarian, The Royal College of Surgeons of England, to Sheldon S. Cohen, February 7, 2001.

²⁰ Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, 92–96; Hunting, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, 135–54; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, ch. 3, 113–14; Tina Craig to Sheldon S. Cohen, February 8, 2001.

they flocked to London again as the British Empire expanded during the eighteenth century. These new arrivals tended to live in particular districts of the city where they established Welsh societies, at which topics of mutual interest were discussed and the ancient language of their region could be spoken.²¹

It is more than likely that Griffith Williams participated in some of these gatherings attended by emigrants from his native soil. How much he did so is unclear. What was of record in London, however, was cited on the parish register of St. Andrew of the Wardrobe, City of London. It noted that on August 21, 1765, "Griffith Williams, batchelor [sic] of the parish of St. Andrew Blackfryars [Blackfriars], and Ann Hubbuck, spinster of the parish aforesaid, married after calling of the banns on 4, 11, & 18 August 1765." St. Anne's Anglican Church, where both Ann and Griffith were communicants, was then the parish place of worship for the Society of Apothecaries.²²

Following their nuptials, the newlyweds apparently remained briefly within the parish bounds, but perhaps under the sponsorship of the Society, after a possible short stay in the City of London, they relocated to Wapping (High) Street in the district of Wapping. This locale was situated along the north bank of the Thames east of the Tower of London, Whitechapel, and Stepney-St. George in the East, and before reaching Shadwell and Limehouse. It was in Wapping where Griffith Williams established his combined business and residence. It was also there that the Williams family had their first child, Mary, whose baptism was recorded on July 24, 1768, thirty days following her birth. Ann and Griffith were then members of the parish church of St. George in the East in Stepney, though shortly afterward, following Mary's grievous death, they became congregants in their own parish church of St. John, where the Reverend Dr. Francis Willis often held forth.²³

Griffith Williams would spend the remainder of his life in Wapping. He seems to have received no special notice in the records of this district, but it was within this crowded, unsavory district of Britain's capital that he performed his still unheralded labors on behalf of a nation that he would never see.

Wapping itself had its origins in a once marshy tidal area along the north bank of the Thames whose lands had been drained during the reign of Henry

²¹ Emery Jones, ed., *The Welsh in London* (Cardiff, Wales, 2001), chs 1–3. Jones states (p. 83) that, "in many ways, the latter part of the eighteenth century was the most distinct period of the Welsh in London." Davies, *History of Wales*, 259, 291–92, 334–36.

²² Percival Boyd, comp., *Ms. Boyd's Marriage Index in England* (London, 1967), 249; Parish Register, St. Andrew by the Wardrobe, London, Parish Register, Marriages, August 21, 1765; Hunting, *History of the Society of Apothecaries*, 156–67; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 48–51.

²³ July 24, 1768, Baptism, Mary, daughter of Griffith Williams, Apothecary of Wapping Street, Parish Register, St. George in the East, London Metropolitan Archives; Land tax assessments for St. John Wapping, 1736–1826, Microfilm, Guildhall Library, London, British Film Archives, nos 1517674–1519676.

VIII. Later, during the reign of Elizabeth I, wooden buildings were constructed there, and the separate settlements of Wapping-Stepney (St. George in the East) and Wapping itself were established. In 1694, Parliament separated these hamlets into two distinct parishes. Docks and dock stairs were built along the river in both parishes, and the population of each parish increased significantly during the eighteenth century.²⁴

Wapping experienced many significant events and hosted several significant personages since the district's beginnings. It was in Wapping that the notorious and arbitrary Judge George Jeffreys was arrested in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution. It was also the place where the famed pirate Captain William Kidd met his end on Execution Dock in 1701. Madge Darby, author of a recent historical survey of her community, declares that it was in Wapping in 1725 where John Newton was born and spent his earliest years. Newton was the reformed slave-trader and later clergyman who composed the famous hymn, "Amazing Grace." Darby also noted that in Wapping was the residence of Hannah Lightfoot, the subject of an apocryphal story in which this beguiling Quaker girl was alleged to have secretly married George III in 1759 when he was Prince of Wales.²⁵ James Boswell, the biographer, wrote in 1783 of making a cautious visit to the district. During the nineteenth century the American expatriate artist, James McNeill Whistler, composed some of his paintings and sketches alongside this section's waterfront. Wapping was badly damaged during the World War II "Blitz," and although its shipping trade has now almost disappeared, it is currently the site of a great many upmarket business and apartment complexes along the Thames.²⁶

When the Williams family established themselves there in 1768, the district had little of the well-ordered respectability that may be seen there today. Instead, when Griffith Williams set up his combined home and apothecary shop there, Wapping, for a great many years, had the reputation of being one of the most disreputable sections of London. It definitely had a plenitude of public houses, frequented by lower class prostitutes and other low life. Its many riverside slums were more or less the dumping grounds for nearly destitute free Africans, Irishmen, and a plethora of derelicts from all parts of the realm. In addition, at this time, Wapping had the nefarious reputation of being a gathering spot for thieves, cutthroats, and dealers in purloined goods. In short, it was not the ideal locale in the city to set up one's residence and business.

²⁴ Madge Darby, *Wapping's People; A History of Wapping* (Colchester, Essex, 1988), 3–41; Kenneth J. Panton, *Historical Dictionary of London* (London, 2001), 449; A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of London Place Names* (Oxford, 2001), 240.

²⁵ Darby, *Wapping's People*, 45–47.

²⁶ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson*, vol. IV (Oxford, 1934), 436; Robin Spencer, ed., *Whistler, A Retrospective* (New York, 1989), 43–44, 82, 89; Darby, *Wapping's People*, 57–86.

Nonetheless, it was where Griffith Williams was living in 1775, and where he was regularly dispensing his remedies and concoctions to ailing customers.²⁷

Word of the outbreak of fighting with the North American colonies reached Britain before the spring of 1775 had concluded. Griffith Williams was quite literate, and, as one who followed current events, was not oblivious to the distant hostilities. In Wales, much as in Scotland and Ireland, the established order, along with many in the lower classes, supported the Crown and the North Ministry's efforts to suppress the American insurgents. And many Welshmen were also among the troops sent to America or who served in the Royal Navy. (Interestingly, a certain Major Griffith Williams, apparently no close kinsman of the Wapping apothecary, was among the captives surrendering at the British débâcle at Saratoga in October 1777.) The initial outpourings of support from the Crown, however, later receded as the conflict dragged on and seemed deadlocked.²⁸

Griffith Williams was doubtlessly cognizant of the troops, ships, equipment, and supplies departing outward from London wharves to the conflict in North America. His own Wapping district was clearly involved in this sea traffic. In addition, his well-expounded communications to the American commissioners in Paris indicate that he was aware of the political concepts of Whig theorists such as John Locke, Thomas Gordon, and John Trenchard. Furthermore, it should be noted that several Welsh writers, who supported the American rebels, including Richard Price, David Williams, Wotkin Lewes, and Robert Jones, lived in London. There they openly expressed their radical views, and Williams, who maintained a fondness for his birthplace, may well have heard discussions of their precepts at gatherings of London's Welsh societies. If so, the Wapping apothecary listened to, and probably was further influenced by, arguments advocating American "rights." Whatever the actual inducements, he definitely decided in the early phase of the war that he, like many other "middling-sorts" of Britons, was willing to play an active and personal role to assist what George Washington labeled the "glorious cause" of American freedom.²⁹

By the end of 1777, Griffith Williams's opportunity to render service to the American insurgents – risky though it was – had presented itself. The catalyst,

²⁷ "Wapping," *The Copartnership Herald*, II: 22 (December 1932), 1; Pantón, *Historical Dictionary of London*, 449; Darby, *Wapped's People*, 41–59.

²⁸ Philander D. Chase, Frank E. Grizzard and Beverly Runge, eds, *The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series*, vol. 11 (Charlottesville, VA, 2001), 514; Peter D.G. Thomas, *Politics in Eighteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, Wales, 1998), 214–22; Jones, *The Welsh in London*, 67–84; Davies, *A History of Wales*, 218–27, 335–38. Gwyn A. Williams, "Beginnings of Radicalism" in Herbert and Jones, eds, *The Remaking of Wales*, 111–17.

²⁹ Bernard Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968), 43–54; Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause; The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (New York, 1982), 296, 581; Thomas, *Politics in Eighteenth-Century Wales*, 215–28; Jenkins, *The Foundation of Modern Wales*, 300–21.

as it was for the four previously surveyed Britons, appeared in the form of “[Lord] North’s Act” which had instituted charges of “High Treason or Piracy” against rebel seamen who were seized on the high seas in armed vessels. The legislation also provided for the reopening of previously used detention centers to house such culprits. Some smaller internment centers were created, including a sizeable farm in Pembroke Wales, but the two main prisons were Forton, near Gosport in Hampshire, and Mill, between Plymouth and Devonport (Plymouth Dock) in Devon. Both sites were reopened during the spring of 1777, and shortly afterward a considerable number of American rebel mariners – several coming from prison ships – were confined there.³⁰

Aside from understandable concern about their ultimate fates, these early interned Americans at both Mill and Forton gaols were obliged to endure onerous conditions associated with their confinement. The prison guards were unsympathetic: the agents (supervisors) at each locale proved especially imperious, petty, and arbitrary. Billeting at both confinement centers was unsatisfactory; clothing and victualling were, at first, inadequate; and the detainees had no real inkling of any source of relief. Externally, the fact that the beginning of the conflict in America was generally going badly for their comrades added to apprehensions, as did the reality that the North Ministry was deaf to any discussion of prisoner exchanges. Timothy Connor, one of the first American mariners committed to Forton in June 1777, perhaps captured this disconsolate mood at the year’s end among his fellow inmates when he wrote, “O now that the cold winter comes on, And Forton runs *hard* by my side!”³¹

It was in light of such frustrating, oppressive, and overall gloomy circumstances that many of the captives from the beginnings of their confinement turned to a more immediate course to attain freedom. After all, it is a time-honored adage that “the first duty of a prisoner is to attempt an escape,” and many among these intrepid Americans sought to follow this dictum. They did so almost from the onset of their confinement at both Forton and Mill. Thus, on June 23, 1777, the Admiralty reported that five days before, eleven American detainees had broken out of Forton, and, at the more secure Mill Gaol, Captain Francis Brown of the sloop *Charming Sally*, made an individual attempt to flee the prison on June 4 of the same year. One impressive fact about these attempts to escape was that they were made even during this early stage of confinement.³²

³⁰ Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777–1783* (Newark, DE, 1995), 30–37; Catherine Prelinger, “Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England During the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (April 1975); 262–70.

³¹ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols*, 55–67, 134.

³² Olive Anderson, “American Escapees from British Naval Prisons during the War of Independence,” *Mariners Mirror*, 41: 3 (1955), 238–41; Francis D. Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners in the Revolutionary War; The Captivity of William Russell* (Annapolis, MD, 2001), 53–54, 96–112.

There were certainly several impediments to their success. Few of the attempted runaways had knowledge of the countryside or had a conception of secure escape routes. Most of them lacked sufficient funds to underwrite their flight, and recaptured fugitives were faced with a thirty-day stay in the secluded “Black Hole” confinement area for many weeks on half rations. If the escapees succeeded in passing the prison confines, nearby residents were given the very tempting reward of £5 if they assisted in retaking them. Even if the runaways reached London, they still faced perils, since wanted notices containing their descriptions were also forwarded to the British capital. And other dangers were present in this metropolis. By the start of February 1778, there had been at least four instances in which American fugitives were seized by press gangs and forced to serve on His Majesty’s fighting vessels. Furthermore, should the Americans actually reach the European continent, there was at this time no certainty that they were home free – nations such as France and Holland having not yet joined the American cause.³³

By the spring of 1778, however, changing external circumstances made the possibilities of prisoner escape attempts more attractive. In February of that year, France had concluded treaties of alliance with the American commissioners in Paris that recognized the independence of the United States and which prepared the way for French entry into the conflict against Great Britain. This development seemed to promise runaway rebels safe haven should they somehow flee from captivity. Meanwhile, in Britain, Major John Thornton, a representative of the American commissioners, had been able to report to Dr. Franklin on a recent visit to Forton, thus establishing the first such contact with the detainees held there. From London, David Hartley, a Whig Member of Parliament, and an old and close friend of Franklin, had pledged to the American that he would do what he could for the rebel detainees in his nation. A short time afterward, small cash subsidies began to be distributed to the internees at both prisons as a result of a prisoner relief fund which had been organized at a pro-American meeting in London in late December 1777. One of the things that was still needed by the captives, however, was a covert means of facilitating escapes, and shepherding the fugitives to freedom on the Continent. It was in this capacity that the Wapping apothecary entered the picture.³⁴

The implementation of such an organized, clandestine group of Britons abetting the runaway rebels’ flight to freedom clearly emerged during 1778,

³³ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols*; Cogliano, *American Maritime Prisoners*, 96–98.

³⁴ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin, An American Life* (New York, 2003), 192–93; Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 283; “John Thornton, Memorandum for the American Commissioners, 5–8 January 1778”; Leonard W. Labaree, William B. Willcox, Dorothy Bridgewater and Barbara Oberg, eds, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 25 (New Haven, CT, 1987), 269–70, 350, 414–19, 692–96; *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, hereinafter cited as PBF; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 90, 94.

and it was most discernible among those rebel detainees who effected breakouts from Forton Gaol. For those internees who successfully managed that task, an almoner named Mr. Duckett in nearby Gosport was prepared to guide them across the then narrow Portsmouth Harbour to Portsmouth itself. For those who lacked Duckett's personal guidance, crude maps of the area enabled the fugitives to take a considerably longer, but still risky, trek around the harbor to the Royal seaport. Caution at this time was required, whichever route was chosen. Portsmouth's naval facilities had been closely monitored since a failed attempt (December 1776) by James Aitken, alias "Jack the Painter," to burn the Royal Dockyard. But if the escapee was successful in reaching Portsmouth, sanctuary was available from the Reverend Thomas Wren at his Dutch-style Presbyterian chapel. Lieutenant Nathaniel Fanning, who remained at Forton until his exchange, later described Wren's way-station:

His house [the chapel on High Street] was an asylum for the Americans who made their escape from confinement [at Forton]; and every one of those if they could make [reach] his abode, was sure to find a hiding place, a change of wearing apparel, and some money, if they were in need of it and, also a safe conveyance to London.³⁵

London was the next station on this "underground railroad"-styled escape route. Although the main roads from Portsmouth northward to the British capital were guarded by sentinels, there were, however, stage-coaches that were not well scrutinized which departed daily from Portsmouth. In addition, the Reverend Thomas Wren, whose residence was on St. Thomas Street, just behind his chapel, was in an excellent location to start the runaways on their journey. Supplied with false identification papers, some expense monies, addresses, and directions to sympathizers in London itself, the fugitives set off. (One uncorroborated, yet certainly possible tale, was that on occasion, the Reverend Mr. Wren, a bachelor, would accompany them.) Once in London, with its teeming population of about 700,000 people, Nathaniel Fanning declared that the runaways considered themselves "in perfect safety." In fact, these men realized full well that they were still being hunted, and that the authorities would attempt to retake them before they could get transportation to the Continent. But the rebel escapees, now to their advantage, had names, addresses, and quite likely directions to residents in the metropolis who had the means of facilitating their flight to freedom.³⁶

Most prominent, and perhaps most key, among the Londoners who were instrumental in succoring the escaped rebel mariners, was Thomas Attwood

³⁵ Neil L. York, "Burning the Dockyard; John the Painter and the American Revolution," *The Portsmouth Papers*, 71 (2001), 1–23; John S. Barnes, *Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning, an American Naval Officer* (New York, 1967), 16–17.

³⁶ William B. Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 77 (October 1953), 405–07; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 18–19; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 108–10.

Digges. Digges was a Maryland-born entrepreneur who, along with his brother George, had sponsored surreptitious trading ventures to the American colonies, even after hostilities had commenced in 1775. But Thomas soon went even further in support of the American rebel cause. He signed London petitions of protest against government actions to suppress the insurrection; he informed the American commissioners in Paris and members of the Continental Congress of his willingness to support the struggle for independence; and by the beginning of 1778, he had become supervisor of the relief organization created in England to distribute small amounts of money to the incarcerated American seamen in Forton and Mill.³⁷ A few years later, however, he was to be exposed by Benjamin Franklin for pocketing some of these monies. But in 1778 he was still a trusted friend of America, and his residence at Number 23 Villars Street, Strand, became a beacon for those desperate American fugitives fleeing from British gaols. For Digges and his fellow conspirators, who also concealed the runaway mariners, their illicit actions in conveying these wanted men to freedom in Europe may have seemed quite in line with their own beliefs in liberty.³⁸

Digges's home at 23 Villars (now Villiers) Street, Strand, was not close to docks where a great many ships departed for the Continent. In addition, the nearest ones from which they did sail were generally given a close inspection of both cargo and passengers by customs officials, so they were not that propitious as exit points for the fugitives. But the vessels leaving from those wharves to the east in Wapping seemed more promising. There, the runaway mariners could blend in more easily with the diverse, downtrodden denizens of the district. There, the authorities maintained a looser hand over the area; there was no maritime policing of the area until 1798; and both customs and Crown officials were said to be more susceptible to bribery and "looking the other way." Because of these understandable advantages, it must have made sense to Thomas Digges to seek out dependable and sympathetic residents of this parish to participate in this unlawful exploit. Further, some of the Digges brothers' business associates were Welsh, and shared their political sympathies, so it is conceivable that these men introduced the Marylanders to the Wapping apothecary. Conversely, it may have been the apothecary, knowing these men from Wales, who sought an introduction to Digges. Regardless of the facts, however, it appeared evident that by the summer of

³⁷ Robert J. Elias and Eugene D. Finch, eds, *The Letters of Thomas Attwood Digges, 1742–1821* (Columbia, SC, 1982), xxiii–xlv; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 385–90; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 82–84, 87–88.

³⁸ Benjamin Franklin to Thomas Digges, March 8, 1781, William Hodgson to Benjamin Franklin, March 20, 1781, Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, April 25, 1781, 34 PBF, 428, 475, 572; Benjamin Franklin to William Hodgson, July 8, 1781, 35 PBF, 233–40; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 194–97.

1778, Griffith Williams was evidently entangled in the final stage of escape for several of the escapees.³⁹

On its surface, the first of the existent communications from Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin in Paris merely expressed his affinity to the American cause. And perhaps the apothecary was demonstrating his sincerity in the person of American naval Lieutenant John Channing, who had recently escaped from Forton, and likely had assistance from Williams. Noticeably, his rather brief communication included his words, “I need not enlarge,” and “Captain [actually Lieutenant] Channing will fully inform you of particulars” – words which themselves seem to offer some insight into the broad intrigue of Thomas Digges:

London, 24 August 1778

Sir:

By favor of Captain [John] Channing send you few lines Acquainting you that matters in this Country are likely to take a very diffrent turn to What was expected by the favourers of despotism to the West'ard of London.

All men agree (Confesedly) that the Conquest of America is now utterly impracticable; the most Bloody invoakers [sic] of the destruction of that Country are now reduced to wish for peace at any rate, a very diffrent language to their Boasting threats few years ago.

I need not enlarge. Captn. Channing will fully inform you of particulars have the honour to Remain Yours very Sincerely

G. W. London 24 Aug 78.⁴⁰

An enclosed memorial (declaration), signed by forty-one men, reflects further on Digges's enterprise, in which Griffith Williams appears to have played an important role. The one-page manuscript list is entitled “Friends to American Liberty are Friends to Mankind.” The reverse side of the register carried this notation: “List of Gentm [Gentlemen] in Engd [England] who have assisted the American prisoners.” Heading the list of signatories is Griffith Williams, followed by “Surgn [Surgeon] Wapping.” Perhaps Williams was assuming the title of surgeon to impress Dr. Franklin, as did another signer, Benjamin Cox, who was also, in fact, a London apothecary. Others on this roster included former American seamen or ship's officers then living in London, namely Tristram Barnard, Samuel Pearson, Shubal Gardner, and Hezekiah Clarke. Another American mariner on the list was John Locke from Cape Cod, who had recently been released from Forton in return for his agreement to serve on whaling expeditions to the South Atlantic.⁴¹

³⁹ Darby, *Wappea's People*, 58–59; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 386–88, 391–93, 405–09.

⁴⁰ Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, August 24, 1778, 27 PBF, 299; John Channing to Benjamin Franklin, August 24, 1778, 27 PBF, 295.

⁴¹ Friends to American Liberty are Friends to Mankind (1778). Ms Historical Society of

Image not available

Plate 6.1 Petition gathered by Griffith Williams headed, “Friends to American Liberty are Friends to Mankind,” and sent to Benjamin Franklin in Paris, August 1778.

Source: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Similarly, the subscribers also contained the names of several Nantucket whalers such as John Chadwick, Elisha Clarke, William Folger, and Francis and Reuben Macy. Others, not from Massachusetts, but who were associated with this fishery trade, were William Goldsmith and Richard Holmes from Long Island, and Aaron Sheffield from Newport, Rhode Island. The roll also included Noah Herbert, who signed for “all the crews of the Southern Whale Fishery [who] have been very generous to the American prisoners in Distress.” In a subsequent letter to the American commissioners (October 30, 1778), Williams mentioned that “several of these men had collected detailed intelligence on the valuable English whale fishery [trade] off the coast of Brazil.”⁴²

This interesting document also contained the names of several Britons, who were pro-Americans but not seamen. One was the Reverend William Prior, a nonconformist clergyman, and John Hardy, who noted his occupation as “bookseller.” A Mr. Plummer, whose address was given as Mincing Lane in the City of London, plus a Mr. Scot and a Mr. Hill, both citing their residence as Tower Hill, not far from Wapping, were among those signing the document. This locale placed these men in a pivotal site for securing the rebel fugitives’ route to freedom. There was, in addition, a Mr. Wray [Ray?], who signed himself “first friend.” And, at the end of the memorial were the names of John Lamb, cited as a “Pilot at Deal,” and Robert Murray, cited also as a resident of this small seaport community located on the English Channel.⁴³

From this seemingly innocuous roster of disparate individuals pledging support for the American Rebellion, it is possible to discern a general insight into the route used by many of the runaway mariners on their dash from London to freedom in Europe. As seems likely for many of them, the starting point would have been at or near the residence of Thomas Digges on Villars Street (present-day Villiers Street next to Charing Cross Station). They would have walked in a northerly direction to the Strand where they would have moved in an easterly course. Continuing their transit, they would pass St. Mary’s and St. Clement’s churches. They would then take Bristol Street; again walking east on this journey they would soon pass by London Bridge and the Thames on their right. Next, the travelers would go by Tower Bridge

Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Wallis, ed., *Eighteenth Century Medics*, 139. For information concerning seaman John Locke see 27 PBF, 295n. For information concerning many others listed on this memorial see 27 PBF, 660n.

⁴² Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 30, 1778, 27 PBF, 657–60; Ms Friends to American Liberty. See also 25, 27 PBF, 392, 660n.

⁴³ Dr. David Wyckes, Director, Dr. Williams’s Library, London, to Sheldon S. Cohen, April 3, 2001. Dr. Wyckes noted that the Reverend David Prior was a Presbyterian clergyman in England. He was a strong advocate of nonconformist religious rights in England and a supporter of protests of American colonists. Wyckes stated that although Prior had died before 1778, his name may have been inserted on the memorial because of his radical beliefs. Ms Memorial, Friends to American Liberty.

and Great Tower Hill, where two of the signatories on the aforementioned memorial lived. From this locale, they would probably take Catherine Street, again in an easterly direction, passing by the tenements of St. Bartolph Aldgate, and thence to Wapping Street. Following this long, winding roadway, they would reach the melting-pot of Wapping itself. There, they most likely came under the supervision of Griffith Williams, and the final stages of their flight. In this setting the fugitives were more secure amidst the multitude of transients, miscreants, and, above all, less officious customs officials who were amenable to subornation.⁴⁴

Two of the hitherto mentioned individuals on the declaration, evidently gathered by Griffith Williams, brought another element into the story of the rebel fugitives' getaway adventure. The men were John Lamb, a pilot at Deal, and Robert Murray, who, while not cited as a pilot, likely had something to do with vessels calling there. In this respect, such men were certainly able to serve as another link in the chain of escape. Mrs. Sarah Quail, local historian and head of the Portsmouth Museum and Record Services in Hampshire, has pointed out that the English sailors who transported the rebel escapees "could probably do a run to France and back within 24 hours, with a fair wind." It would appear that many of the Americans took this option, and fair winds to France brought them their ultimate liberation.⁴⁵

Not all of the American mariners who achieved successful escapes to the European Continent took these outlined steps to obtain their freedom, and it seems that relatively few of the Mill runaways sought their path to liberation by way of the Maryland expatriate's guidance. But there is no doubt that Digges, assisted closely by other Britons, including Griffith Williams, did oversee successful breaks to freedom of a great number of the Forton fugitives, and the Maryland merchant subsequently claimed (January 1782) to have concealed 160 of the escapees. Like many other boasts, Digges was exaggerating the figures, but he nevertheless did assist a considerable number of the escaped Americans in obtaining their liberation. The stories of two such rebels who fled Forton in 1778, therefore, merit a recounting.⁴⁶

Elisha Hinman, from Connecticut, was Captain of the Continental Navy frigate, *Alfred*. In late December 1777, he was obliged to surrender his

⁴⁴ Ralph Hyde, comp., *The A to Z of Georgian London* (London, 1981), maps nos 11–15; Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 405–06. A direct, but rather risky and more discernible course for the fugitives would have been to walk the short distance to the banks of the Thames, and there hire a boatman who would transport them straight down river to Wapping Stairs. However, it was more likely that their knowledgeable London handlers would choose to start the escaped rebels' trek by strolling in a northerly direction to the close-by Strand, at which point they would take the easterly path.

⁴⁵ Ms. Sarah Quail, Portsmouth Museum and Record Services, to Sheldon S. Cohen, June 21, 2001.

⁴⁶ Clark, "In Defense of Thomas Digges," 393–94, 405–06, 428; Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols*, 109–13.

outgunned vessel to a Royal Navy warship in the West Indies, and he was subsequently incarcerated at Forton. In July 1778, Hinman succeeded in breaking out of Forton, and after allegedly paying a “Mr. Jackson” five guineas for concealing him in a cart loaded with cabbages, he successfully reached London. There he was concealed by a “Mr. Hardy,” who lived in a house near Portman Square, and was probably known by Thomas Digges. (In all likelihood, “Mr. Hardy” was John Hardy, the bookseller listed on the 1778 memorial assembled by Griffith Williams.) From there, the two men, with Hinman posing as Mr. Hardy’s servant, made their way to Deal. There, possibly with assistance from the two residents who had signed the Williams memorial, they boarded a packet that took them to Dunkirk.⁴⁷

Alexander Dick, from Virginia, was a Captain of Marines who had been captured on the Virginia State Navy privateer Brig, *Mosquito*, in early 1777 and forthwith sent to Forton. In September 1778, he and several other officers effected an escape from the prison, and through the covert efforts of Thomas Wren, they arrived safely at the residence of Thomas Digges in London. Digges arranged for their concealment, and he provided monies to each of the nearly destitute runaways for which Digges took notes that were to be repaid by Dr. Franklin. At the propitious moment, the Maryland expatriate had them conveyed, possibly by the previously cited route, to the care of Griffith Williams in Wapping. The resident apothecary was no doubt aware of shipping activities along the district’s wharves and could discern which of the ship captains would secrete the escapees and which customs officials were corruptible. The fact that the district was swarming with many passers-by or transients made the work even easier.

Whatever the exact circumstances, it was not long after Captain Dick’s arrival in Wapping that he obtained transportation to France and resurfaced in Paris with his comrades. There he met the illustrious Dr. Franklin, described his flight to France, arranged for a return to America, and reportedly passed on his note of indebtedness to Thomas Digges. The American commissioner himself kept a list of the monies he gave to such escapees who reached him.⁴⁸

In October 1778, Griffith Williams dispatched two more letters to Benjamin Franklin, the last of his extant communications to the American commissioner. The first, dated October 2, repeated his strong attachment to the American cause, referring to himself as “a sincere friend of freedom &c.” But the letter

⁴⁷ Ann Bridge, *Portrait of My Mother* (London, 1955), 31–34; Roger R. Hinman, *Catalogue of the First Settlers of Connecticut. A Family Record of the Descendants of Sgt. Edward Hinman* (Hartford, CT, 1856), 816–17; William M. Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail; The American Navy During the Revolution* (New York, 1976), 56–58, 96–97, 266.

⁴⁸ Robert Stewart, *The History of the Virginia Navy of the Revolution* (Richmond, VA, 1933), 179–80; William Cutter, ed., “A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 31 (1877), 190, 287; 32 (1878), 73, 281. See also Alphabetical List of Assistance given to escaped American prisoners by the American commissioners in Paris, Ms The Papers of Benjamin Franklin.

also obliquely called attention to activities that went beyond such declarations of support. Williams mentioned that Tristram Barnard, the bearer of the message, would elaborate on an apparently sensitive matter, “without going into particulars.” He then requested that Franklin reply to his unspecified remarks in a return message that would be carried personally by Barnard.⁴⁹

The lengthier of the two letters to Franklin was dated October 30, 1778, and it was forwarded from Normandy by Elisha Clark (Clarke), a Nantucket whaling captain. In it, without mentioning specifics, Williams noted “the active part I have taken to assist the Unfortunate Americans on this Side of the Water.” Williams did not elaborate on this delicate point, but instead shifted the subject to the whale fisheries in the South Atlantic. In this respect, the apothecary accused the “Wretched” North Ministry of being short-sighted in barring Americans from this profitable trade, and for detaining colonial ship captains such as Elisha Clarke for allegedly poaching in these waters. (His intimation was that Americans had a right to a share of the trade.) He also criticized David Murray (Lord Stormont), Britain’s recent Minister to France, for his rigid opposition to a general cartel (prisoner exchange) for all belligerent captives. And Williams mentioned – but without comment – “the diffrent [sic] attempts they had made to go home,” and he urged Franklin to continue to pursue the object of a prisoner exchange.⁵⁰

The first such exchange was not effected until the following March. Meantime, escape attempts continued at Forton, and to a less frequent extent at Mill. Previously, on December 29, 1778, George Seegar (Segar), a surgeon’s mate who had spent time in Forton before escaping, wrote to Benjamin Franklin from Nantes. Seegar asserted that he was advancing the suggestions of “all our best friends in London & other parts of England; that an agent should be appointed in London, who should advance small sums to such prisoners, who break out of Prison to bring their persons to France.” He added that the Reverend Thomas Denward at Dover, who had aided some of the runaways, had recommended a “Capt. Moses Robertson” for such a task – a recommendation that Seegar seconded. No such covert agent was appointed, and the initial cartel was completed three months later, but if Dr. Franklin had approved of Seegar’s scheme, Griffith Williams may well have been his selection.⁵¹

The last extant letter in the papers of Benjamin Franklin that cites Griffith Williams was dated October 28, 1779. It was sent by John Locke, one of the previously mentioned whaling captains from Massachusetts. He had been

⁴⁹ Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 2, 1778, 27 PBF, 491.

⁵⁰ Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 30, 1778, 27 PBF, 606–08; Elisha Clarke to Benjamin Franklin, December 5, 1778, 228, PBF, 189, 189n.

⁵¹ George Seegar [Segar] to Benjamin Franklin, December 29, 1778, 28 PBF, 295–96. The Reverend Thomas Denward was a nonconformist clergyman in Dover, PBF, 295n; Barnes, *Memoirs of Fanning*, 18.

captured on the high seas, and, as he then wrote, “and Con’d [conveyed] to Portimoth [Portsmouth].” Locke then declared that he was a prisoner there (perhaps at nearby Forton) for thirteen months before “I obtaind [sic] my lebbarty [sic],” apparently as part of a parole agreement. Captain Locke continued, saying that he had later gone to London intending to find passage to America, but he had been stricken there with smallpox. He added that it was “Dr.” Griffith Williams and two Americans residing in the capital who had assisted in his recovery, and thereafter getting him to the French seaport of Nantes where he then contacted the American commissioner. Locke closed his letter pledging his devotion to the cause of American freedom, and also requesting his help in obtaining release from the local prison where he was being detained.⁵²

However John Locke had engineered his exit from confinement in Hampshire, it was nonetheless a fact that he had been a recipient of Griffith Williams’s assistance. It was also a fact that the Wapping apothecary continued to be involved in aiding escaped American prisoners. No doubt Thomas Digges had exaggerated the claim in 1782 that he personally had cared for 160 such fugitives, but certainly many were abetted by him in their flight. One such runaway who benefitted was Caleb Foot (Foote), a prizemaster from Massachusetts. Foot had been incarcerated in Forton in late 1778.⁵³ Two years later he gave this colorful, allegorical account of his escape to Holland – an escape in which the Wapping apothecary may well have had a hand:

Saturday, October 14th, 1780.

At 8 A.M. I left my country seat, in company with Mr. [George] Dissmore, Mr. [Samuel] Rice and Mr. [Ebenezer] Atwood. We fled from the Valley of Destruction to the City of Refuge [Gosport], where we spent but little time, and then we crossed the Gulf of Despair [Portsmouth Harbour], and arrived safely at the Promised Land [Portsmouth], where we dined and spent the remainder of the day very agreeably, to think that we had passed thus far on our pilgrimage. On the 15th, at five o’clock in the morning, Mr. Dissmore took stage with me, and we arrived at the New Jerusalem [London] at eight P.M., where we were received with joy, and happy were we to arrive safely at our port. We spent some days in the most agreeable manner. But there being something more than all this happiness to call our wandering minds, we must leave this new abode, and cross the water once more, for which we embarked on the 26th of October, on board of a small ship commanded by John

⁵² Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 30, 1778, 27 PBF, 666–68; John Locke to American Commissioners, October 28, 1779, 30, PBF, 606–07. John Adams, as well as Benjamin Franklin, was also apprised of the tensions with Britain involving American participation in the South Atlantic whale fisheries trade. See Tristram Barnard to American Commissioners, October 9, 1778, in Richard Ryerson, Anne D. Cecere, Celeste Walker, and Greg Lint, eds, *The Papers of John Adams*, 7 (1989), 125–26.

⁵³ “Prison Letters and Sea Journal of Caleb Foot,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 26 (1889), 90–92; Clark, “In Defense of Thomas Digges,” 428.

Handy. We dropped down the river and nothing remarkable happened to us except head winds, which made our passage very tedious. But on the 3d of November fortune smiled in our favor, so that we arrived at Bremers haven [Bremerhaven], where we spent one night, and the next morning embarked for Rotterdam, where we arrived on Sunday, the 5th. We were very much abused by some of the lower class, but others received us very kindly.⁵⁴

Whatever assistance Griffith Williams continued to provide to such escaped rebel mariners was no longer needed by the spring of 1782. The ramifications of Britain's *débâcle* at Yorktown (October 1781) had precipitated the collapse of the North Ministry, which was followed early the following year by the Rockingham–Shelburne Peace government. As part of its maneuvers to bring the expanded American war to a conclusion, the new Ministry finally recognized the rebel captives as prisoners of war in March 1782. Afterward, there were still occasional escape attempts by the detainees, but the impending promulgation of general releases, in effect, obviated any real reason for breakouts. The final departure of American internees from these existing internment sites carried on until the following year, but both Forton and Mill prisons were closed in 1783 prior to the official signing of a peace agreement in Paris that September.⁵⁵

With the war's end, Griffith Williams might have felt an inner satisfaction for his own limited yet significant association with the victorious rebels. He had definitely taken risks in assisting American fugitives in their flight to freedom and, for several of these mariners, this also provided a means of returning to the fight. In addition, the apothecary's messages sent to Benjamin Franklin, together with many other pro-American sympathizers in Britain, helped to provide assessments of the increasing wartime disillusionment within that nation. His remarks relating to the Royal government's supervision of the South Atlantic fishery trade were useful in the later peace negotiations at Paris. His 1778 memorial, "Friends to American Liberty are Friends to Mankind," for which Williams gathered signatories, was notable from another perspective than merely serving as one more expression of support for the rebels. A majority of the signers were Americans living in England, but the disparate Britons who placed their names on this document were clearly of the nation's middling social class. None of these men sought or received recognition from the United States, but, as rather ordinary Britons, they did not shrink from adding their support for this struggling republic. Such affection was clearly exhibited by a very personal action of Griffith Williams. On April 24, 1779 at St. John's in Wapping, the second of the apothecary's five sons was christened Gideon Washington Williams.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Prison Letters and Sea Journal of Caleb Foot," 111.

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 180–84, 200–08.

⁵⁶ Griffith Williams to Benjamin Franklin, October 30, 1778, 27 PBF, 666–68; St. John the Baptist, Parish Church Records, Christenings, April 24, 1779, London Metropolitan

The municipal records for Wapping show that Griffith continued his professional labors as an apothecary. He was probably rather successful in his endeavors, as illustrated by the fact that he became part owner of a ship engaged in the whaling trade. But for any profits earned from this investment, he remained in his combination home and shop. There, like other apothecaries or druggists of the period, he peddled his nostrums and other varied items considered medicinals by the ailing public. One can imagine in his shop commodities such as balsams, liniments, smelling salts, mineral and treacle water, dressings, gargles, and emetics. Also likely among his wares were popular patent medicines such as ointments, “scots pills, cream of tartar, volatile and fixed oils,” gums, resin and a multitude of placebos, tonics, and various elixirs. Williams also probably continued to perform minor surgical procedures for which he felt more justified in adopting the title “Dr.” And health care, which was particularly inadequate in the Wapping district, necessitated that the apothecaries doing business there often render medical advice and even personal encouragement.⁵⁷

Regardless of any financial success or respect he received from his clientele, the Wapping apothecary’s last postwar years were not without personal tragedy. As noted above, the parish register of St. John had listed five sons born to Ann and Griffith, but any parental pleasure and contentment they quite likely received from their boys proved fleeting. On October 18, 1788, the St. John’s register of burials contained the name “Stephen Griffith Williams of Wapping Street, aged 7, of convulsions.”⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, Griffith and Ann were shattered by this unexpected loss of their youngest son, and perhaps the apothecary thought of his own impending mortality. But whatever his inner sentiments, Griffith Williams’s life’s journey would conclude three and a half years later when his own death was cited in the church’s record book for March 29, 1792. According to the parish register, the cause of death was cited as a “nervous fever,” often involving debilitating and lengthy fatigue, which may have accounted for the fact that Griffith died intestate. Ann Williams, who was given control of the family finances, subsequently reported that their holdings amounted to £330. He was interred in the sizeable churchyard cemetery of St. John the Baptist, even though the church structure itself had been demolished about two years before. At the time of his burial, however, the

Archives. The other sons born to Ann and Griffith Williams were George Augustus (c. 1770), Edward Sidney (November 1774), Josiah (February 1777), and Stephen (April 1781). None of the Williams’s sons was to attain manhood; the last, Gideon Washington, succumbed in September 1794.

⁵⁷ Burnby, *A Study of English Apothecaries*, ch. 5; Hunting, *A History of the Society of Apothecaries*, ch. 6; Matthews, *History of Pharmacy in Britain*, 264–86.

⁵⁸ St. John the Baptist, Parish Church Records, Burials, October 18, 1788, London Metropolitan Archives.

Image not available

Plate 6.2 Wapping Parish Church of St. John the Baptist, circa 1750.

Source: Courtesy of the Archives of the Port of London Authority

parish's communicants had the opportunity to worship at the nearby, almost completed, St. John the Evangelist.⁵⁹

Griffith Williams had the shortest life span of the five Britons surveyed in this study, and he had the least contact with the leaders of the American Revolution. Nonetheless, the efforts he expended as a "Friend to American Liberty" were, along with those mentioned in the other biographies, quite significant. Through them one can find a greater understanding of the multi-faceted dimensions of "The War for Independence." Within the past quarter century, scholars in America have examined the many ways in which the common man within the thirteen colonies responded to this momentous North American upheaval. Perhaps this work, which sought to examine the effects that the war in far-off America had on the "middling sort" in Britain, will have a similar result in the United Kingdom in the future.⁶⁰

All of these men studied in this volume, with the exception of the Reverend Robert Heath, openly supported "the glorious cause" of American independence, but even Heath, in bringing assistance to the American prisoners from a pious belief that it was "God's work," was actually indirectly benefitting American freedom. Of course, some of the Britons surveyed, such as William Hodgson and Reuben Harvey, had mixed motives for backing the rebels in North America. Yet, by understanding such middle-class Britons as these five men, fresh insights can be made concerning this conflict. It was a conflict which would have a dynamic impact on the subsequent history of the world. Hopefully, more studies along these lines will be made in future years.

⁵⁹ St. John the Baptist, Parish Church Records, Burials, March 29, 1792, London Metropolitan Archives. Data concerning St. John the Baptist and its successor, St. John the Evangelist, were furnished to the author by Ms. Deborah Stock, Research Assistant, Institute of United States Studies, University of London. The Will of Ann Williams, uncovered at the Family Records Centre in London, reveals that Griffith's widow continued to live in Wapping until her death in October 1823. Deborah Stock to author, November 28, 2003.

⁶⁰ In addition to the several works cited in the preface, which illustrate the recent focus by scholars in America on the attitudes and actions of middle- and lower-class colonists during the War of Independence, these two books by Edward A. Countryman also add to a broadened perspective: *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (1982), and *The American Revolution*, rev. edn (2003).

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