

AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

THOMAS FYSHE PALMER

Letters and papers, 1794-1862

Reel M391

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Mansfield Road
Oxford OX1 3TD**

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Thomas Fyshe Palmer (1747-1802) was born in Bedfordshire and was educated at Eton and Queen's College, Cambridge. He was ordained in 1771 but became dissatisfied with Anglican doctrines and in 1883 became a Unitarian minister. He preached in Dundee and other Scottish towns. He became acquainted with Joseph Priestley and other Birmingham radicals and was closely associated with a Dundee group, 'The Friends of Liberty'. In 1793 he was tried at Perth for assisting to print and distribute a pamphlet on parliamentary reform written by a Dundee weaver. He was convicted of seditious practices and sentenced to seven years transportation. At about the same time, the political reformers Thomas Muir, William Skirving, Joseph Gerrald and Maurice Margarot were tried and convicted in Edinburgh and transported to New South Wales. They were known as 'the Scottish Martyrs'.

Palmer, Skirving and Margarot sailed on the transport *Surprize*, which arrived in Sydney in October 1794. Palmer's account of the ill-treatment that he suffered on this voyage was published in London in 1797. In the colony he enjoyed a large measure of freedom and was able to engage in a trading concern with two free settlers, John Boston and James Ellis. They built a vessel, the *Martha*, which sailed to Norfolk Island and the islands of Bass Strait. Palmer was a close friend of George Bass and took a strong interest in maritime exploration. In 1801, after his sentence had expired, Palmer sailed for England on a decrepit vessel that had been bought by Boston and Ellis. Weakened by the privations, dangers and long delays that he experienced on this voyage, Palmer died on the Spanish island of Guam.

William Shepherd (1768-1847) was the Unitarian minister and schoolmaster at the Gateacre Chapel in Liverpool from 1791 until his death. He was a leader of the reform movement in Liverpool and was closely associated with many reformers, such as William Roscoe, William Rathbone, Gilbert Wakefield, Lord Brougham, Thomas Fyshe Palmer and the Unitarian minister Jeremiah Joyce. After Joyce died in 1816, Shepherd adopted his daughter, Hannah Joyce. Hannah, who was to marry William Ridyard, was responsible for assembling and sorting the manuscripts and papers of Shepherd. The collection, which was eventually presented to Manchester College, includes many of her own papers.

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Shepherd MS, Volume 10

Select:

1. Hannah Ridyard. Manuscript copy, abridged, of 'Account of the late Mr Thomas Fyshe Palmer', *Monthly Magazine*, February 1804, pp 83-85, with a note added on the legality of the sentence passed on Palmer.
2. Palmer (*Surprize*) to ?, 23 April 1794: his last letter from the northern hemisphere; illness; the damp and unwholesome prison; thanks for *Cambridge Intelligencer*; imminent departure. (copy)
3. Palmer (Sydney) to ?, 16 Sept. 1795: packet of letters given to surgeon John White; defence of Palmer's character against most atrocious accusations; depletion of stores in colony; fine climate; colony might immediately support itself if cattle were imported and military monopoly ended; novelty of flora; natural resources; cost to Government of maintaining a den of thieves; arrival of HMS *Providence*. (extract)
4. Palmer (Sydney) to ?, 23 April 1796: his drastic change of circumstances in three years; personal attacks by the monopoly of officers; Joseph Gerrald the victim of ministerial malignity and medical neglect, with exception of George Bass; escape of Thomas Muir; no contact with Maurice Margarot. (copy)
5. Palmer to [Rev. Theophilus Lyndesay], 16 Sept. 1796: distressing condition of so many of his countrymen; Palmer requires nothing but newspapers and reviews; climatic extremes in colony. (copy)
6. Palmer to ?, 22 Nov. 1796: lack of letters. (fragment)
7. Palmer to Rev. Jeremiah Joyce, 5 May 1796: political persecution extends to Britain's remotest connections; John Boston and James Ellis; death of Joseph Gerrald; his great virtues and talents; arrival of parcels; wishes to acquire copy of James Hutton's *Theory of the earth*; sends opinion of G. Bass on Gerrald's death; neglect by surgeon William Balmain.

Attached: Copy of inscription on brass plate on Gerrald's tomb.

8. Notes written by Hannah Ridyard in 1862 quoting from memory a passage in the last letter of Joseph Gerrald before leaving England. The notes refer to the misappropriation by Sir James McIntosh of a letter from Gerrald to Dr Samuel Parr and of money intended to assist Gerrald in his exile.