

DR RICHARD PRICE, D.D. F.R.S.

‘IT IS JUST TO CLAIM JUSTICE’

# Richard Price and The American Revolution

- ▶ In the years leading up to the American Revolution, Price became increasingly concerned over issues of civil liberty and religious freedom
- ▶ The advent of the Revolution in America gave him the opportunity to express these concerns in a pamphlet which, at the same time, powerfully supported the American cause

# His American Friends

- ▶ Price corresponded with a large number of Americans throughout the War of Independence. This involved some risk to Price who feared tampering with his mail, house searches and possible arrest. However, this did not stop him consorting with Americans arrested in London as possible spies and traitors, nor did it deter him from trying to aid American prisoners in Britain
- ▶ At one point Price was assigned a code number (176) by American correspondents in order to disguise his identity

# No Taxation without Representation

- ▶ Dr Franklin was a frequent visitor. It is said that when in 1774 the duty was placed on the tea imported into America it was Dr Price who wrote to the city of Boston suggesting “to throw the taxed tea into the sea, rather than submit to taxation without representation”
- ▶ During the ten years that followed the world was affected by the War in America (1775 to 1783)
- ▶ The citizens of London conferred the freedom of the city upon him in a gold box as a mark of gratitude for his services to liberty

# American War of Independence and French Revolution

- ▶ Price's defence of the American and French Revolutions made him a household name to the extent that when Yale University awarded honorary law degrees in 1781, one went to George Washington and the only other went to him
- ▶ He published 60,000 pamphlets of his work – 'Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America'. These sold out within days

# George Cadogan Morgan, F.R.S

- ▶ George Morgan, nephew of Dr Price and younger brother of William (Billy) was with his uncle in Newington Green and saw many of the most distinguished political characters of the Liberal party as well as the chief leaders of the American colonies
- ▶ Like his uncle he had become a Dissenting Minister and also gained a high reputation as a scientific writer, his best-known work being his “**Lectures on Electricity**” and, like his elder brother William, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society as was their uncle Richard

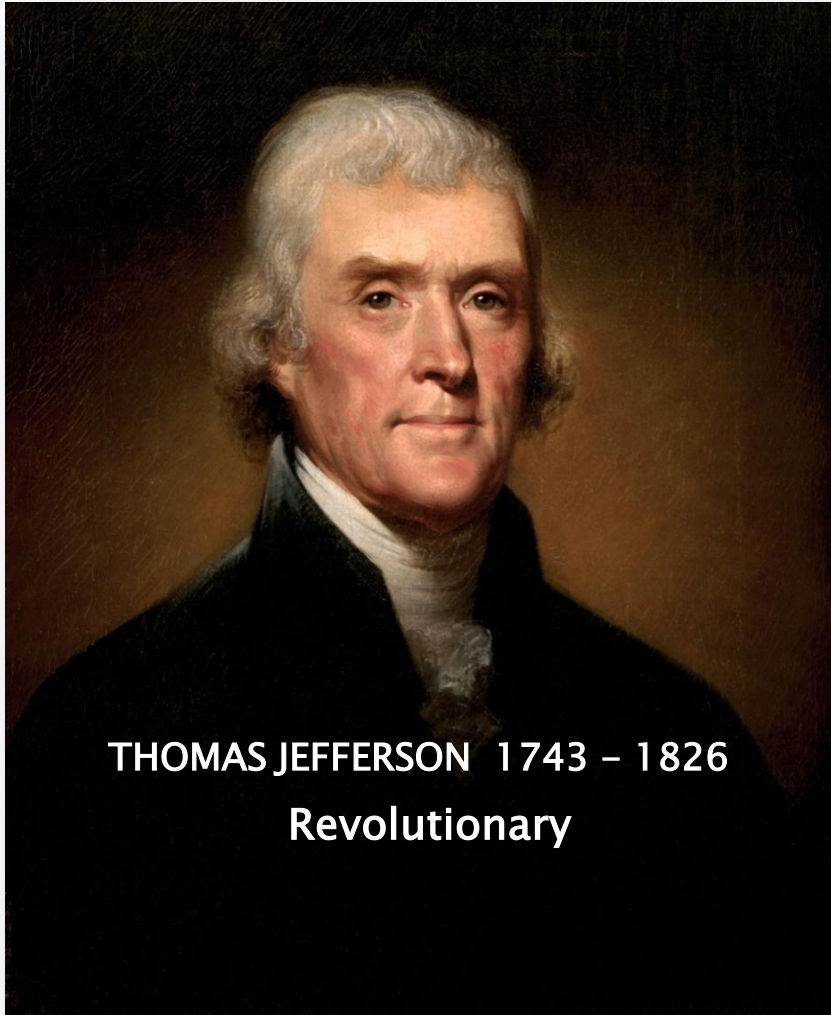
# Richard Price and the American Declaration of Independence 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776

- ▶ British versions of Price's pamphlet **Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty** reached America by April 1776. Jefferson began work on the Independence Declaration in mid June that year. John Adams was asked for a copy on 5 July and American editions of the pamphlet were being advertised in America from 10 July. Jefferson bought a copy on or before July 29<sup>th</sup> but likely saw a copy before hand

# Richard Price and the American Declaration of Independence 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776

- ▶ That Price's pamphlet was read by members of the Congress is certain but it is difficult to gauge what impact his work had on the Declaration itself
- ▶ Just as important was the impact of Price's pamphlet "Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World (1785)".
- ▶ This may well have influenced American constitutional makers and certainly caused controversy among them; particularly in relation to his ideas on property inequality and his opposition to slavery





THOMAS JEFFERSON 1743 – 1826  
Revolutionary

## Signatory of the American Declaration of Independence, Vice President to John Adams and America's Third President

Price knew Jefferson well. They began corresponding following publication of Price's **Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty**. Later Jefferson lived in Paris and described all the opening events of the French Revolution

in a series of letters to Price, Jefferson once declared to Price that: 'Everything you write is precious...' and 'every thing which comes from you [is] pleasing and instructive'

# Price Writing To The American Chauncy – 25<sup>TH</sup> February 1775

## Charles

- ▶ “For my part, were I in America I would go barefoot; I would cover myself with skins, and endure any inconveniences sooner than give up the vast stake now depending; and I should be encouraged in this knowing that my difficulties would be temporary, and that I was engaged in a last struggle for liberty, which perseverance would certainly crown with success. I speak with earnestness, because thoroughly convinced that the authority claimed by this country over the colonies is (as far as taxation and internal legislation are concerned) a despotism which would leave none of the rights of freemen; and because I consider America as a future Asylum for the friends of liberty here, which it would be a dreadful calamity to lose”

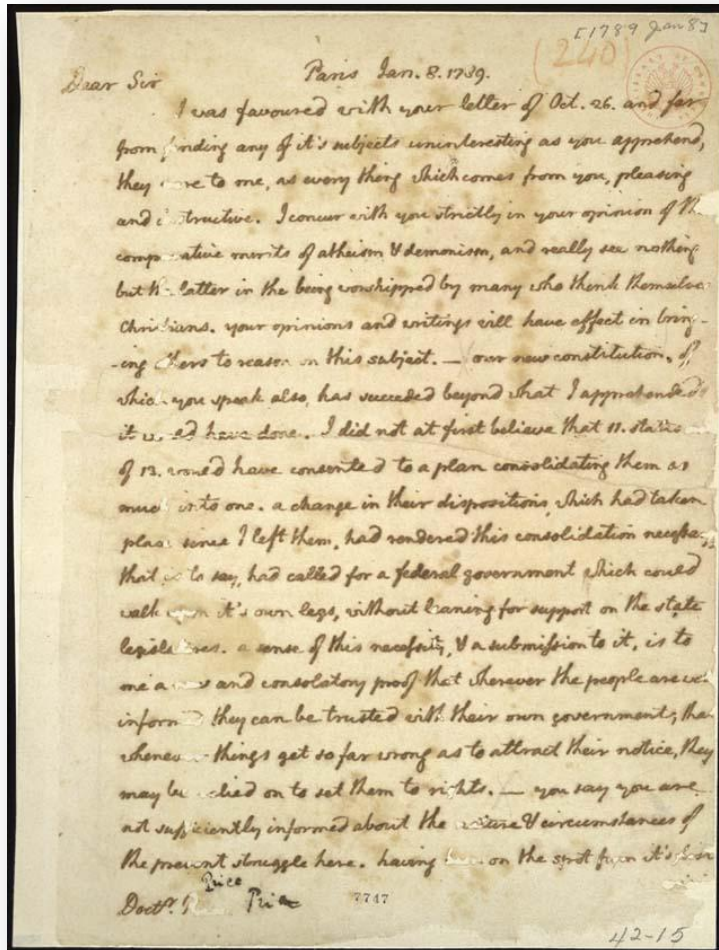
In 1794 Price's close friend Joseph Priestley sought refuge in America as would members of Price's extended family in 1805

# Dr Richard Price – And The French Revolution

- ▶ From 1786 Price became increasingly interested in events in France
- ▶ As he told Thomas Jefferson who was in Paris: “What is now passing in France is an object of my anxious attention” and whatever the outcome, if it is a “struggle for a free constitution of government and the recovery of their rights by the people I heartily wish it success”

## Thomas Jefferson to Richard Price: 8 January 1789

This marks the start of a series of letters in which Jefferson outlined for Price all the major events leading up to the 14 July Revolution in France



Dear Sir

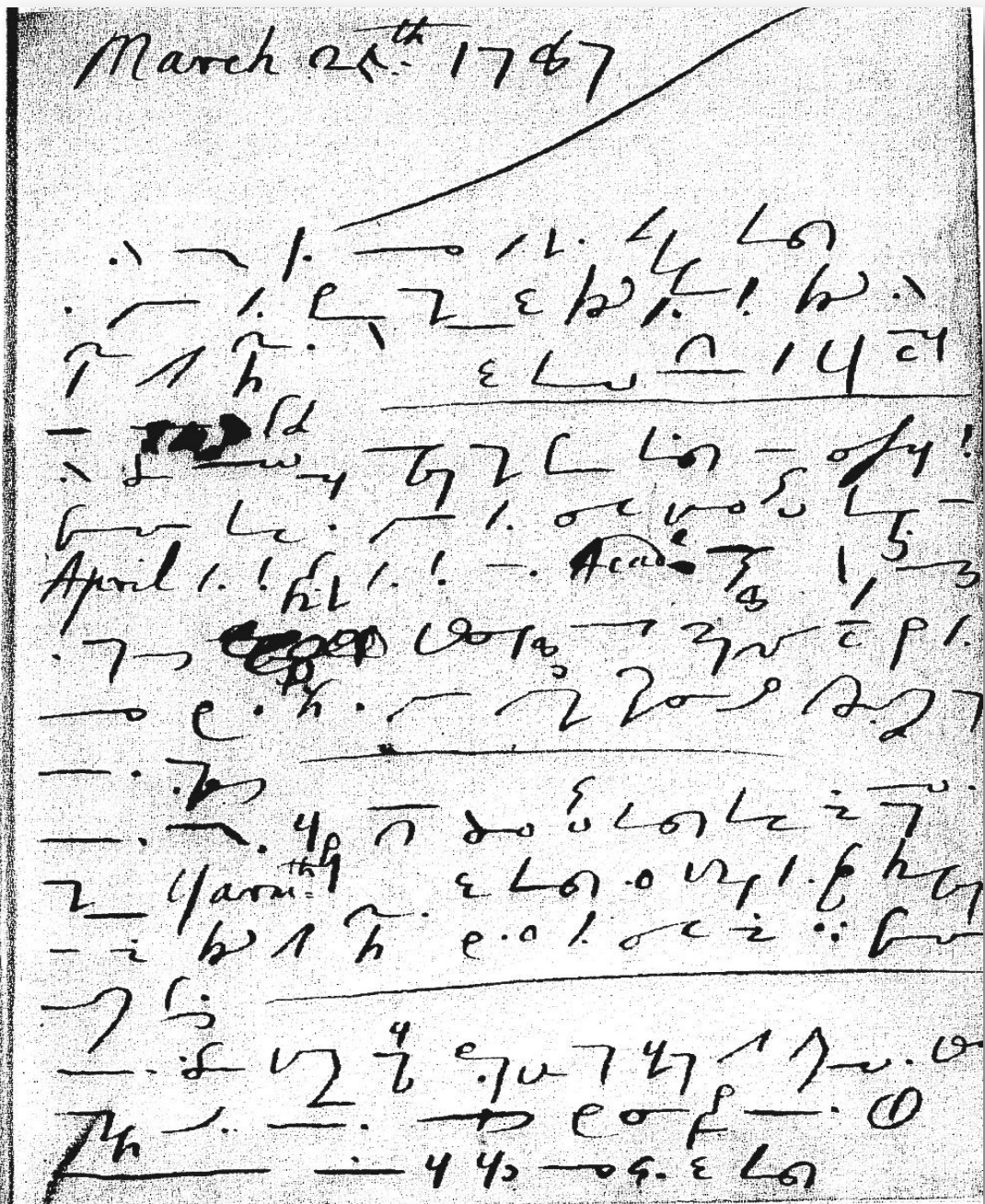
Paris Jan. 8. 1789

I was favoured with your letter of Oct. 26 and far from finding any of it's subjects uninteresting as you apprehend, they are to me, as everything which comes from you, pleasing and instructive

- You say you are not sufficiently informed about the nature and circumstances of the present struggle here. Having been on the spot from its first origin and watched its movements as an uninterested spectator, with no other bias than a love of mankind I will give you my ideas of it

In his private shorthand journal (begun in March 1787 as he moved to a new home in Hackney) Price notes on 14 June 1789 that his nephew George Cadogan Morgan (originally from Bridgend and the son of Price's sister Sarah) is leaving for a trip to Switzerland

In July George found himself in Paris as the Revolution began and he described events both for his uncle and family at home in a series of letters (see below)



Paris, July 13th, 89.

4 o'clock in the morning

The accounts you will hear of this last night's tumults in Paris have induced me to be thus early in my assurances of our safety —

The distress, the confusion, the destroying madness of the scene I have just witness'd have actually equal'd those of a town taken by storm —

They have far exceeded any ideas I could have form'd of insurrection in its violence and of popular rage in its extravagance

met with artificial Caves and Rocks — but their Residence ill became them, they appear'd in circumstances in which Nature never places them, and in what is impossible that any thing but the monstrous folly of man should ever bring them. — We saw attempts likewise to make gurgling streams, by increasing the declivity of the water, and by placing pebbles in the Bed, But the neighbouring meadow, and a quiet meadow stream which runs close to the Babbling silently proclaim its absurdity — In short in the grounds I saw nothing but the Mangling hands of art, Stone walls, cropp'd Hedges, Similitations of Nature without attending to Circumstances, and a profusion of wealth without doing the least respect to the Interests of Him who squanders it. The House is little different from all other great Mans ion Houses, — It is divided into Rooms immensely large, and dazling with gold, and the most glaring Colours. It contains a Cabinet of Natural Curiosities most excellently Arrang'd by Bonnaud one of the first Naturalists in France, who happen'd to be at Chantilly at the same time and who was very communicative indeed. — My Head, my Legs, my Eyes, and my very heart ach'd at length with fatigue. we saw a vast deal, and left unseer a vast deal more. we returned to the Inn and immediately sett off for Paris where we now are in health and safety — an Account of what I have seen here and a long letter to my uncle I will send by the earliest opportunity

Paris July 13<sup>th</sup> 89. 4 o'clock in the Morning

The Accounts you will hear of this last nights tumults in Paris have induced me to be thus early in my assurances of our safety — The Distress, the Confusion, the Destroying madness of the scene I have just witness'd have actually equal'd those of a town taken

Dear Sir

Paris July 17. 1789.

When I wrote my letter of the 12<sup>th</sup>. I thought Mr. Morgan was returning to England. as I was mistaken in this, it has been oblig'd to wait another convenience. This offers by L<sup>d</sup>. Daer.

In this letter Jefferson outlines for Price the events in Paris on 14 July 1789. They include the fall of the Bastille:

“They then went to the Bastille...The Governor after hoisting the flag of truce and decoying a hundred or two within the outer drawbridge, hoisted the drawbridge and fired on them. The people without then forced the place, took and beheaded the Governor and Lt. Governor, and here completed arming themselves”

arms. the city committee resolved to supply 48,000 Prou-  
-sers. they asked arms at the invalids & being refused the  
people forced the place and got here a large supply of  
they then went to the Bastille and made the same  
-mised. The Governor after hoisting a flag of truce & decoying  
a hundred or two within the outer drawbridge, hoisted the  
drawbridge & fired on them. the people without then forced  
the place, took and beheaded the Governor & L<sup>t</sup>. Governor,  
and here completed arming themselves. the same day  
Dr Price. Ray

## Thomas Jefferson to Richard Price

### Paris 17 July 1789

Price's nephew George, and his travelling companions, witnessed the parade of bloody heads on pikes along the streets of Paris



“In the centre of the crowd we suddenly partook of the general sensation, for we then...perceived two bloody heads of the Marquis de Launay, Governor of the Bastille and of Monsieur Flesselles”

“I felt our situation becoming a very serious one”

Dr. Rigby, travelling companion of George Cadogan Morgan, Paris  
14 July 1789



## Richard Price letter to Thomas Jefferson, August 8th 1789

In this letter (first page shown here) Price welcomes the opening events of the French Revolution in euphoric terms. It is, he declares:

Dear Sir

The Beavers of this and of the parcel that accompanies it is a Gentleman who belongs to my congregation in this village and one of my nearest neighbours. The late accounts from Paris have so interested him as to determine him to visit it, and I hope he will find his journey agreeable to him.

I cannot express the gratitude & feel. to you for your letters by D. Dore, and for the kind attention with which you have honoured by the accounts you have sent me in your four letters of the origin, progress, and completion of one of the most important revolutions that have ever taken place in the world: A Revolution that must astonish Europe, that shakes the foundation of despotic power; and that probably will be the commencement of a general reformation in the government of the world which hitherto have been little better than usurpations on the rights of mankind, impediments to the progress of human improvement and contrivances for enabling a few grasping oppressors to oppress and enslave the rest of mankind: O glorious patriots! How has my heart been with them! and how ardently do I wish they may finish the great work they have begun in a manner that shall be most honourable to themselves

Hackney Aug 8 1789

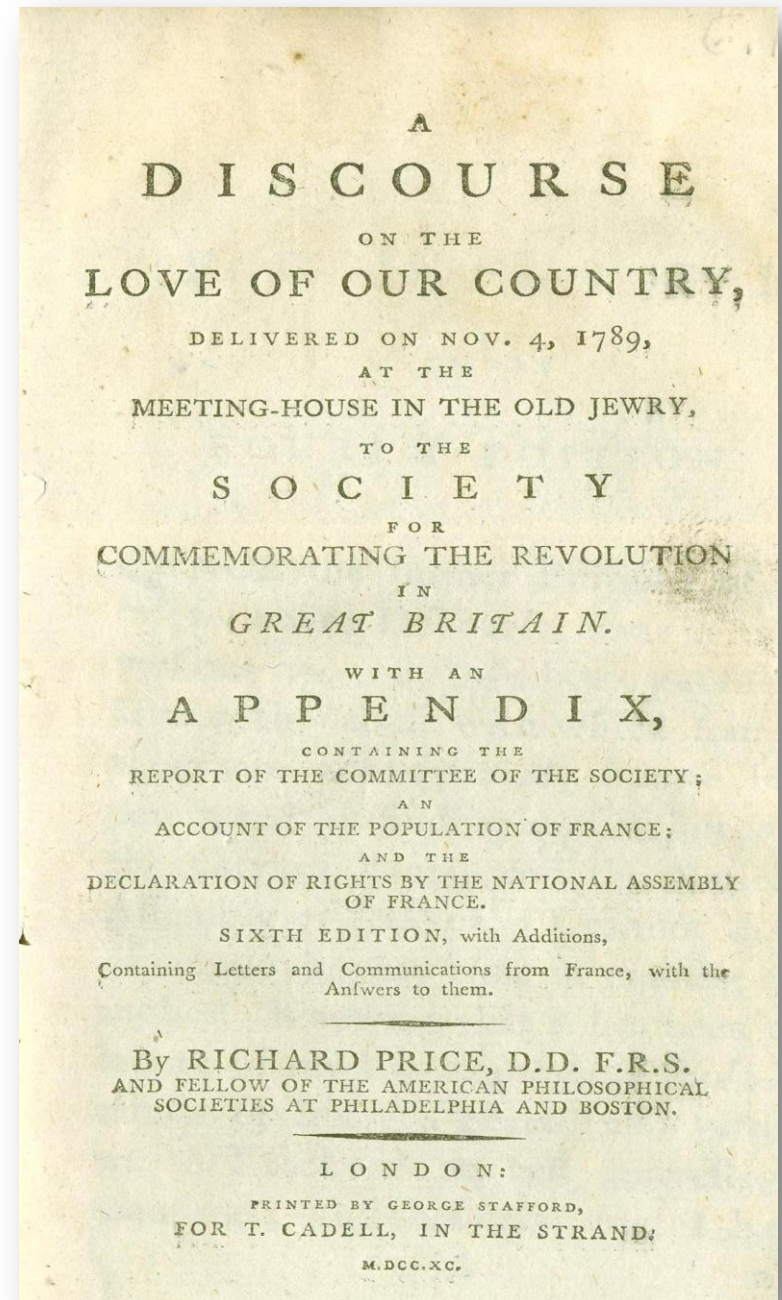
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“A Revolution that must astonish Europe; that shakes the foundation of despotic power; and that probably will be the commencement of a general reformation in the governments of the world which hitherto have been little better than usurpations on the rights of mankind, impediments to the progress of human improvement, and contrivances for enabling a few grandees to oppress and enslave the rest of mankind. Glorious Patriots! How has my heart been with them? And how ardently do I wish they may finish the great work in a manner that shall be most honourable to themselves and most beneficial to the world to which they are giving an example”

# A Discourse on the love of Our Country, 4 November 1789

This was a sermon delivered by Price in which he outlined many of the issues that had concerned him throughout his life. Including: religious freedom, civil liberty, political reform and the value of education. Then, in a famous last few paragraphs, he welcomed the opening events of the French Revolution

The sermon was given to the Revolution Society which met to celebrate the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in Britain. His celebration of events in France however caused considerable controversy. As events across the channel unfolded Price soon came to be seen by some as a dangerous radical and a revolutionary bent on 'cashiering kings'



# Price Journal Entry, 17 January 1790

“What an eventful period this is! I am thankful I have lived to see it...After sharing the benefits of one Revolution [1688], I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious. And now, methinks, I see the ardour for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs, the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience”

## Discourse on the Love of our Country. 1789

“The Revolution in France will for ever distinguish the last year and will form an epoch of the greatest importance in the history of human kind

It is an event wonderful and unparalleled. I am refreshed and animated whenever I turn my thoughts to it and I exult in the hope that possibly I may have contributed a little towards producing and confirming it”

- ▶ Tricolore Sash ribbon sent to the Richard Price family by the French Directory to honour his contribution to their cause



Sash held at St Fagan's Museum archive  
picture copyright Louvain Rees

# Mourning ring containing the hair of Benjamin Franklin & Richard Price



Ring held at St Fagan's Museum archive  
picture copyright Louvain Rees

# Edmund Burke MP 1729 – 1797



Incensed by Price's "wicked principles" and support of France, Burke published in 1790 his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in opposition to Price. Thus was instigated what has since been called the great *Revolution Controversy*, which rages to this day

Burke's *Reflections* together with the advent of the Terror in France, the clamping down on reform at home in Britain and the advent of the British imperial adventure of the nineteenth century (Price had passionately opposed all imperial ambitions) led to the eclipse of Price's reputation. Yet, despite this, it is the causes championed by Price that lie at the heart of our society today

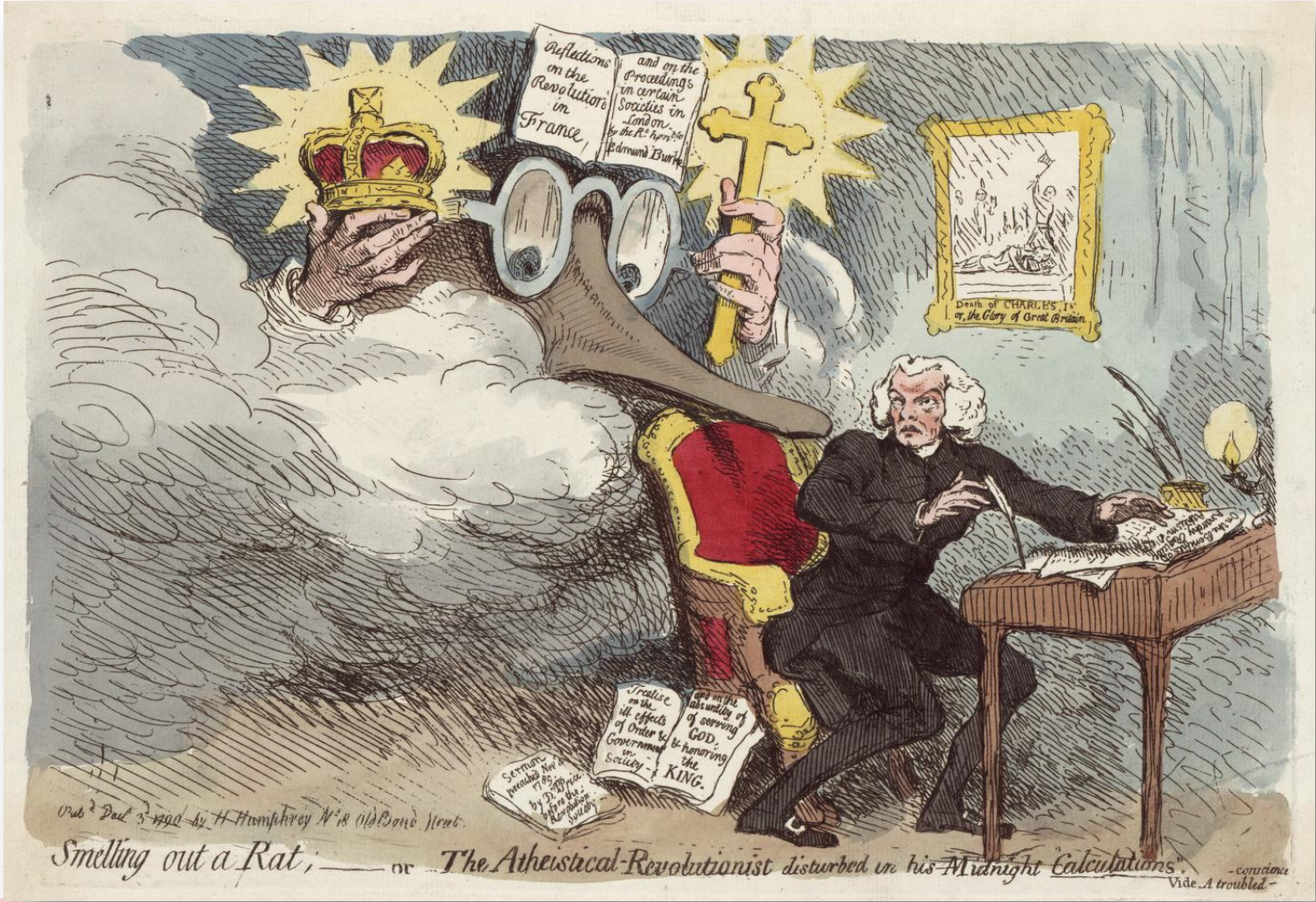
# Dr Richard Price – His Legacy

- ▶ Immediately in the wake of Price's death, satirical cartoons and poems about him appeared as Britain became ever more opposed to the French Revolution and to the political reforms he had long advocated





In this cartoon **'Smelling Out a Rat'** Edmund Burke appears behind Price as the champion of Church and state. Price is linked via the painting on the wall, and through his various writings scattered around, to the regicides who executed Charles I



# Tale of a Tub

“Every Man has his Price”



*Tale of a Tub.  
"Every Man has his PRICE!" Sir R. Walpole.*

*Published as the Act directs, by Bentley & C<sup>o</sup>, Jan<sup>y</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> 1791.*

# Dr Richard Price – His Influence on the Modern World

- ▶ Richard Price is not as well-known as he should be for his contribution to the foundations of the modern world
- ▶ Without Price's works on mathematics which founded Actuarial Science we would not have had a stable and reliable Insurance Industry that enabled the underwriting of the great engineering advances over the following two hundred and fifty years and continues to this day
- ▶ Everything from the Titanic to the Space Shuttle, from Macro-economics to Life Pensions are based on the probability theory of Richard Price. Even the cutting edge modern science of creating Artificial Intelligence also relies on the work of this eighteenth century polymath