

## Some Of Sheffield's Past Campaigners

### James Montgomery (Worker's rights)

1771 - 1854

James Montgomery was known throughout Sheffield and the region for his lifetime campaign to improve the human rights of working people. He was born in Irvine, Scotland. When he was 12, he was sent to a boarding school near Leeds after his parents left Britain for missionary work in the West Indies.

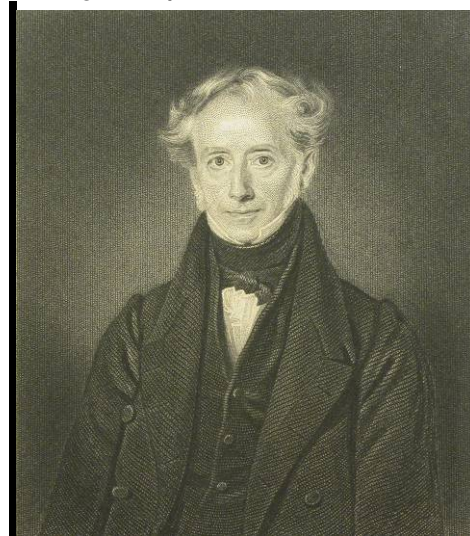
When he left school Montgomery worked as a shop assistant at Wath near Rotherham.

Montgomery as a young man.



by JR Smith (engraved by C Turner)

Montgomery as an older man.



In 1792, Montgomery became a clerk at the *Sheffield Register*, the town's main newspaper. The newspaper's offices were based at Hartshead, near where the Sheffield Star is presently located, in the centre of town.

Montgomery wrote articles and poems that condemned local government corruption and the war with France. He felt strongly that the war was an attack on the French worker's rights.

His actions were frowned upon by the authorities, as it was still illegal to criticise the government at this time.

He took over as editor of the *Sheffield Register* in 1794 and changed the name of the paper to *The Iris*. Many Sheffield people were inspired by the ideas that he wrote about in the paper and in September 1794, thousands of people gathered to demonstrate on West Street in Sheffield.

Montgomery was blamed for this incident and in January 1795, was found guilty of trying to stir up people against the king. He was fined £20, and sentenced to three months in York Castle prison.

After serving a second prison sentence in 1796, Montgomery became more careful about openly criticising the government. He continued to publish articles in *The Iris* to raise public awareness of human rights issues, particularly slavery and child labour.

In 1807, a group was established to campaign against the exploitation of children and improve the lives of Sheffield's chimney sweeps. For over thirty years the group published articles in *The Iris*, and held an annual dinner for the boys.

The practice of employing boys as chimney sweeps was finally banned in 1840.

In the 1820s and early 1830s, Montgomery was an active member of the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Society and when in 1834 the law was passed giving all slaves within the British Empire their freedom, Montgomery marked the occasion by publishing a book.

When slavery finally ended in the British Empire in 1838, Montgomery and campaigners like him continued to call for an end to slavery in other countries.