

## The Rebellious Preacher

### *Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25.*

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

It is a cold wintry evening and small flakes of snow are being blown around the cobbled streets of 18<sup>th</sup> century Newcastle. Your bones are aching from the long hours of hard work you have put in at your shift down a mine recently opened near to the River Tyne. You shiver with the cold and turn up the collar of your old coat, the only one you own. Life seems to be one long struggle; against the narrow seams you have to work in and dig out, against the grinding poverty which drags you down day in, day out, month in month out and against the powerful families who run the commercial life and the politics of Tyneside.



18<sup>th</sup> century church meeting – from googlepictures

You get to the end of the uneven cobbled street and almost fall as you slip on a patch of ice. Part of you decides it isn't worth it and you turn to go home, back to the warm fire waiting for you there. And yet you don't. You have heard about this new preacher who puts into words what is in your heart. He speaks the truth, he tells it like it is. He talks of the Bible and uses it to rail against the injustices you face every day. He promotes a vision of a new society, one that is fair and where working people will get what they deserve. And he makes people laugh. Two small flakes of snow fly into your eyes and sting them, but they are not enough to stop you. You trudge on, head down, back bent, but with a quiet determination.

Soon you see it. The meeting house, where inside, the preacher Rev. James Murray stands waiting.

1. How do you feel about walking through the cold streets of 18<sup>th</sup> century Newcastle?
2. What is your life like?
3. What does Rev. James Murray preach about?
4. Why do you want to hear Murray?

### Time for a Change

Perhaps I should just go home  
The cold hard snow stings my face  
But something drives me on all the same  
I have to get to the place

I've heard so many times  
About the man who tells the truth  
Preaching about the injustice around you  
And backs it up with proof

Down along the hard cobbled streets  
Slipping in the icy gloom  
Looking for the lights of the Meeting House  
Looking for the meeting room

Finally you see the lights on ahead  
And, as through the window you stare  
You see a man standing ready  
The Reverend James Murray is waiting there

1. What do you think is driving the writer on through the bad weather to get to the meeting?
2. Who was the Reverend James Murray?

## The context

When the Rev James Murray was preaching in Newcastle in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, society in NE England was very unfairly run. Nearly all of the money and all the political power was in the hands of a few families in the region. Only a very small number of men could vote and the government in London only really cared about the rich people. It was still to be a long time before NE England would be run as a democracy

However, this was also the time of the Enlightenment, when new ideas were spreading through the western world, leading to the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. These ideas came to Tyneside too. Rev James Murray used the Bible to speak out against the powerful and wealthy and the unfair way in which they ruled the region and the country. The artist Thomas Bewick used his great artistic skills to highlight the suffering of ordinary people near to where he lived, just west of Newcastle. The activist Thomas Spence, who grew up by the banks of the Tyne, wrote many pamphlets and came up with a plan for a fairer ownership of land, which so worried the powers of the time that he was mentioned in parliament and even went to jail.

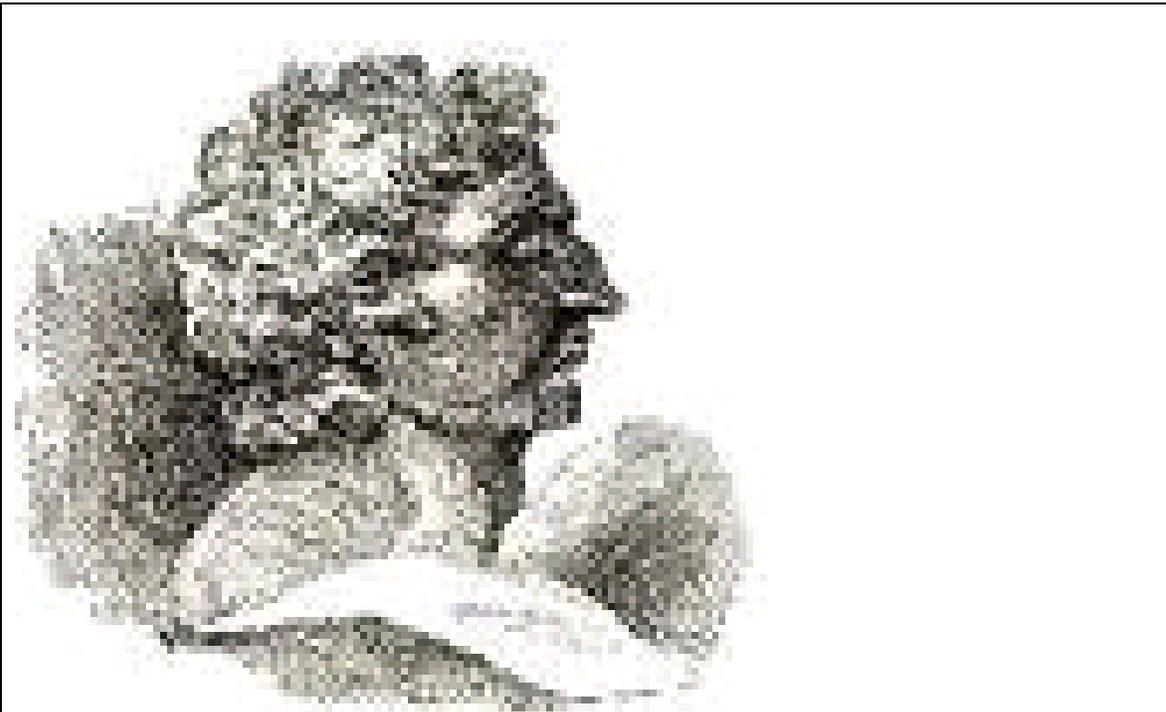
### Key words:

Democracy – Where people can choose their rulers

Preacher – somebody who spoke the word of God and preached from the Bible

Society – a collection of people such as a city, region or nation

1. Who were the three main characters in Newcastle who spoke out for human rights in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What particular skills did they bring to the struggle?
3. How do you think you might have felt as a working person in Newcastle at the time if you heard about what these men were doing?



Thomas Spence (picture from google pictures)

## **Responding**

### **Group response**

Your group will need to tell the rest of the year group about James Murray speaking in Newcastle in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Choose one or two people to write and present a 30 second TV news report.

- On one piece of BIG paper write newspaper headlines for your issue.

## Individual responses

Across the world people are still fighting for their democratic rights. Look at the two pictures below. What is happening in each picture?



Protests in Tehran, Iran, in June 2009



Protests in Rangoon, Burma, in September 2007

Choose one of the following ways of explaining how we can help

Draw out a story board for a short documentary film about this issue

- Design a poster showing how people in North-east Egnland fought for their rights and won – and how we can help others to do the same now. – look at the information from Amnesty International and Burma Campaign UK.
- Write a role play for an interview between yourself and member of James Murray's congregation.
- Write a letter to a friend about going to a meeting, hearing James Murray and talking about your aspirations
- Find out about human rights' in other countries and think about what we should do to help people there. Try the following websites:

[www.Amnesty.org](http://www.Amnesty.org) [www.burmacampaign.org.uk](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk) [www.Amnesty.org.uk](http://www.Amnesty.org.uk)