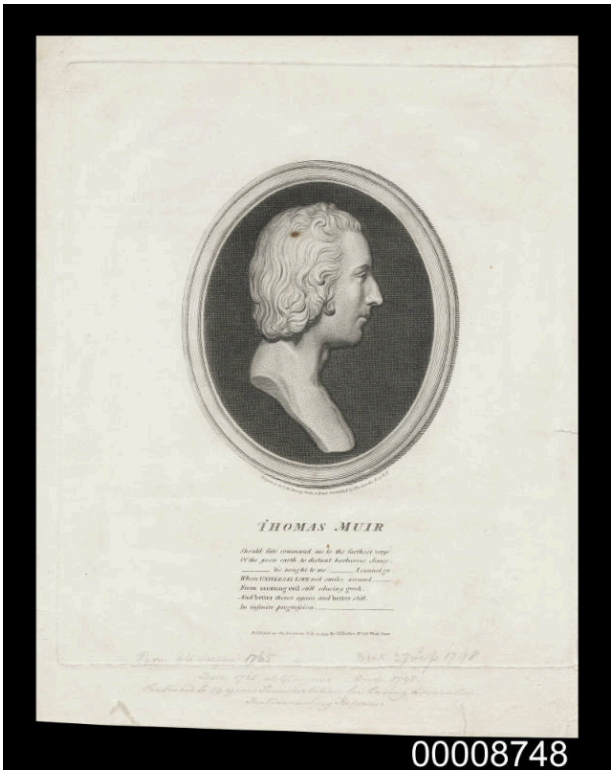


Basic Detail Report



00008748

Title
Thomas Muir

Date
1795

Primary Maker
J S Jordan

Medium
Ink on paper

Dimensions
Overall: 254 x 201 mm

Name
Engraving

History

The lawyer and political reformer Thomas Muir was born on 24 August 1765 in Scotland, the son of a Glasgow merchant, and completed his studies at the University of Edinburgh in 1787. Although Scotland at the end of the 18th century was both economically and culturally sound, it was politically stagnant. The French Revolution began to stir discussions of the rights of man, and Muir became heavily involved as an advocate of parliamentary and constitutional reform. A reformers' convention was held in Edinburgh in October 1792, and Thomas Muir was appointed vice-president. At another convention in December that year, Muir read an inflammatory address from the United Irishmen of Dublin, and allegedly distributed seditious pamphlets. He was arrested for sedition in January 1793, and was released on bail. Failing to appear for his trial he was declared and outlaw, and attempted to escape to the United States but was arrested. He was finally trialled at Edinburgh on 23 August 1793 and was found guilty of sedition. He received a severe sentence of 14 years transportation. The injustice of the sentence not only evoked a public clamour in the Commons, but also in France and in the United States. Along with fellow reformers Thomas Palmer, William Skirving and Maurice Margarot, Muir sailed on the transport SURPRIZE, arriving in Sydney in October 1794. When Joseph Gerrald was later transported, the group became known as the Scottish Martyrs. As a political prisoner Muir was not as constrained as most convicts - he bought a small farm of several acres on Sydney Harbor (the area today known as Kirribilli) where he lived. When the American trade ship OTTER of Boston arrived at Sydney in early 1796 Muir convinced the ship's Captain Ebenezer Dorr to give him as passage to the Unites States. Dorr agreed under the condition that Muir would have to reach the OTTER on his own. The night before the ship was to sail for north-west America, Muir and two of his servants used a compass and sailed in his small fishing boat to meet the OTTER in a

prearranged location. Unknown to Muir, the OTTER was not able to leave port until the next day, forcing the men to sleep in the boat over night. Miraculously, the OTTER spotted the boat despite drifting from their course in the night. Other variations on Muir's escape state that there were no complications -the three men simply pushed out to sea in the evening in a small boat and were picked up the very next day. The OTTER departed on the 18 February, and after a safe passage across the Pacific, Muir learnt that HMS PROVIDENCE was nearby. He transferred to the Spanish schooner SUTIL under the command of Don Jose Tovar, for fear of being recaptured by the British. In July 1796 the SUTIL reached Monterey, Spanish California, and after a two week stop, Muir continued on the SUTIL to San Blas, and then by land to Vera Cruz where he arrived in October. In November he was sent by warship to Havana - a risky operation because Spain had declared war on Britain only a month earlier. There he was imprisoned and placed on the frigate NINFA bound for Spain until the ship was intercepted and attacked by the British - as a result of which Muir was severely wounded and lost an eye. A blessing in disguise, the British did not identify him and he was sent to a Spanish hospital on shore. Months later he was released, and in December 1797 arrived in Paris. After a brief period of public attention, Thomas Muir died in poverty and obscurity on 26 January at Chantilly 1799, in outer Paris.