

# **The Risings: A prequel**

In the late eighteenth century new political philosophies were emerging. The most obvious examples were:

- In 1775 Americans launched a war for independence from Britain, based on the idea that government should exist only by the consent of the people.
- In 1789 The French Revolution began and revolutionaries adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

- In 1791 The political activist Thomas Paine published 'The Rights of Man' setting out the idea that government should support:
  - life,
  - liberty,
  - free speech,
  - freedom of conscience, and
  - civil rights.

In Scotland, people were becoming increasingly dissatisfied.

- Only 1% had the right to vote.
- The lairds had the right to choose the ministers of local churches.
- There was increased feeling that ordinary people should have both these rights.

1792 became a year of  
protest in Scotland

- The most prominent reformer was Thomas Muir from Glasgow.
- In the 1780s Thomas had campaigned for the rights of his local congregation to choose its own minister.





- Reformers began to set up associations, known as the 'Friends of the People', across Scotland to campaign for democratic voting rights.
- In 1793, Thomas set up Friends of the People Associations in Kirkintilloch and surrounding areas.

- Thomas was arrested and put on trial for sedition.
- Thomas's trial speech promoting democratic ideals became famous around the world.

# Extracts from Muir's speech

*'What then has been my crime?.....having dared to be ...a strenuous and active advocate for an equal representation of the People, in the House of the People'*

*'I have devoted myself to the cause of the People. It is a good cause. It shall ultimately prevail. It shall finally triumph'.*

- Thomas was sentenced to 14 years transportation to Australia.
- He escaped from there but died in 1799 from injuries he suffered on his long journey back to Europe.

- By the end of the century Reformers had set up a new body, the 'United Scotsmen'.
- The Government clamped down and the organisation disappeared.
- Radicals lost heart for a time.....