

## POWELL, THOMAS, chartist

**Name:** Thomas Powell  
**Parent:** Richard Powell  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** chartist  
**Area of activity:** Anti Establishment; Politics, Government and Political Movements  
**Author:** David Williams

Born at Newtown, the son of Richard Powell (the father died, an old man, in 1835). His mother is said to have been related to the **Blayney** family of Gregynog. (His date of birth has not been ascertained.) He was apprenticed to an ironmonger in Shrewsbury and later had employment in London. In 1832 he purchased an ironmongery business in Welshpool.

It is probable that Powell had come into contact with radical thinkers in London, and he was an early supporter of the efforts of the Birmingham Political Union to spread their principles in mid-Wales. On Christmas Day, 1838, he spoke at a demonstration at the Caer-sws workhouse, urging the people to contribute to the 'national rent' towards the expenses of the Chartist Convention and condemning recourse to physical force. In April 1839, his friend, Henry Hetherington, celebrated for his struggle for the freedom of the press, was sent by the Convention on a mission to mid-Wales, and on 9 April, both men spoke at Newtown, proceeding later to Llanidloes, to Rhayader, and back to Welshpool.

Rioting broke out at Llanidloes on 30 April. Powell hastened there and harangued the rioters, urging them to abstain from violence. He rescued Armishaw, the Welshpool policeman, who had been badly injured, and assisted him to return home. Powell was arrested at Welshpool on Sunday evening, 5 May, by the police-officer of Newtown, and taken to Montgomery goal. There he remained until 29 June, for strong efforts were made to resist his bail, which was fixed at £300 on his own security with two sureties of £150. His bondsmen were Dr. Edward Johnes of Garthmyl (father of **Arthur James Johnes**), and Watson, a London bookseller. That the former was a magistrate was a fact which the *Salopian Journal* thought should be brought to the attention of the lord chancellor.

Powell was tried before Mr. Justice Patteson at the Welshpool assizes, on 18 July, for having used seditious language at Newtown on 9 April. He was represented by W. Yardley, instructed by **Hugh Williams** (1796 - 1874). In the course of the trial the judge ruled that the Chartist convention was an illegal assembly. One witness, only, testified to the use of the seditious language specified, and he was the clerk to the under-sheriff who was conducting the prosecution, the clerk himself having been active in opposing Powell's bail. Several persons, however, testified to the general tenour of Powell's speech, but others denied that he had used the words attributed to him. The jury found him guilty of sedition, but with a recommendation to mercy. Powell was sentenced to imprisonment for one year in Montgomery gaol, to give security to the extent of £400, with two sureties of £100, for his good behaviour for five years and to remain in prison until these were forthcoming. He was, however, released on 18 July 1840, without finding sureties.

Powell then became shopman to Hetherington in London, and figured in Hetherington's trial in 1841 for the sale of literature which was considered to be blasphemous. **Hugh Williams** advanced money for Powell to buy Hetherington's business, whereupon Hetherington repaid **Williams** and went penniless into Court, so that his goods could not be distrained upon in the event of a fine. Hetherington was sentenced by chief justice Denham to no more than six weeks' detention in a debtor's prison, a sentence which contributed to the prevention of further prosecutions for blasphemy.

Powell was afterwards active in colonial projects, and organised a party to emigrate to South America, but this proved a failure. He settled in Trinidad and is said to have married a coloured woman. The date of his death has not been ascertained.

### Author

**Emeritus Professor David Williams**, (1900 - 1978)

### Sources

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