

A MAJOR DISCOVERY OF MALTHUS MANUSCRIPTS

John Pullen

A substantial collection of Malthus manuscripts has recently been discovered at Ryde (Isle of Wight), in the home of Robert Malthus (1881-1972), the great-grandson of Malthus' brother. Discoveries of other Malthus documents, notably his travel diaries, had been made at Ryde in the early 1960s in response to the enquiries of G.F. McCleary and Patricia James, but this new material was apparently overlooked by Robert Malthus at that time.

The new material includes:*

- (a) the originals of 25 letters from Malthus to his parents, 17 letters to Malthus from his father, and 3 letters from Richard Graves (Malthus' first teacher) to Malthus' father concerning Malthus' progress at school.

These originals had been seen by James Bonar, and brief extracts had been published in the second edition of Bonar's Malthus and His Work, 1924. Typescript copies of these letters were made by Bonar and deposited by Bonar's descendants in the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1956, but these typescript copies, like the originals, had also, until recently, been overlooked.

The rest of the collection -- as described in (c), (d), (e) below -- apparently was not seen by Bonar and has never been seen by any Malthus researcher.

- (b) 17 letters to and from close members of the Malthus family.
- (c) Letters to and from later members of the Malthus family, including some who had emigrated to Ceylon and New Zealand, and old deeds and documents.

* A summary of the contents has been kindly provided by Maggs Bros. Ltd, London; the details remain confidential.

- (d) 25 letters to Malthus from friends and colleagues. Those include a reply by Samuel Whitbread to Malthus, A Letter to Samuel Whitbread, 1807; a letter from Parnell on the Irish tithe system; 6 letters from the mathematician Bewick Bridge in 1822 advising Malthus on the correct method of calculating rates of population growth; and one from E.D. Clarke on the theological implications of the last two chapters of the first edition of Malthus' Essay on Population.
- (e) Of greatest interest to historians of economic thought are the items catalogued as "letters, drafts and manuscripts by Thomas Robert Malthus". They contain four sermons; the earliest, of 16 pages, dated 19 July 1789, was probably the first he preached at Okewood Chapel after his appointment as curate on 8 June 1789; the latest of 24 pages was delivered at the East India College on Good Friday 1827, and shows that at the age of 61 he still carried on his ministerial work. The content of the sermons might shed some light on the orthodoxy of his theological views. These manuscripts also contain a 5-page essay on colonies (c.1800); 77 pages of lectures on history; a 28-page draft essay on the Bullion Report; 35 pages of notes and calculations (c.1816) on the price of gold and exchange rates; sundry smaller notes on bullion, public debt, population, currency, taxation; draft letters to various correspondents on value, labour, emigration, gold prices, and the accumulation of wealth; 3 letters (17 pages) to Ricardo concerning the third edition of Ricardo's Principles (they are in another hand, and may or may not have been composed by Malthus); his wife's journal (42 pages) of their 1826 Scottish tour; and a 1825 letter to his wife inscribed "Not to be opened till after my death".

Negotiations are under way for the sale of these manuscripts, and it is hoped that they will soon become available for research and publication.