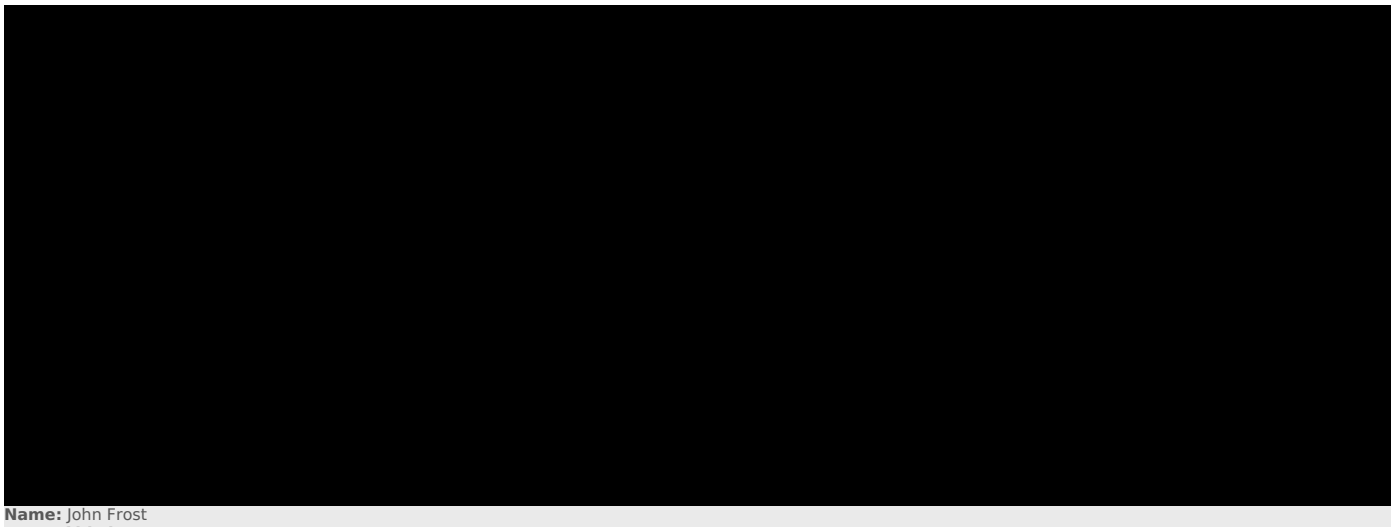
FROST, JOHN (1784 - 1877), Chartist



Name: John Frost
Date of birth: 1784
Date of death: 1877
Spouse: Mary Frost
Parent: Sarah Frost
Parent: John Frost
Gender: Male
Occupation: Chartist
Area of activity: Activism; Offenders; Anti Establishment; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: David Williams

Born 25 May 1784, son of John and Sarah Frost, Royal Oak Inn, Newport, Monmouth. Apprenticed to his grandfather as a bootmaker, he later became a draper's assistant in Bristol and London. He opened in business on his own in Newport about 1806, and, on 24 October 1812, married Mary Geach, a widow. Because of a family quarrel about the will of his wife's uncle he fell foul of Thomas Prothero, town clerk of Newport (grandfather of Rowland Prothero, first baron Ernie), whom he attacked in a series of pamphlets in 1821 and 1822; as a result he was convicted of libel, having to pay £1,000 in damages and being sentenced, in February 1823, to six months' imprisonment.

After his release he prospered as a tradesman and took an active part in local politics, opposing both the Tory interests of the Tredegar family and the Whig domination of Prothero and his associates. He was elected town councillor on the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835, and became successively a magistrate, an improvement commissioner, a poor law guardian, and mayor of Newport.

His association with the Chartist movement began only in October 1838, but he was elected a delegate to the Chartist convention, and in March 1839 was removed from the magistracy. The arrest of Henry Vincent, the Chartist agitator, on 7 May 1839, and his confinement in Monmouth gaol, exacerbated the feelings of the Monmouthshire miners and iron workers. Moreover, the dissolution of the convention on September 14 (on Frost's casting vote as chairman) deprived the Chartists of their leader. Thus, despite Frost's counsels of moderation, the movement in Monmouthshire got out of hand, and at a secret meeting at the Coach and Horses Inn in Blackwood, on Friday, 2 November, it was decided to hold a great demonstration at Newport in the early hours of Monday morning, by three contingents of Chartists, one, led by Frost, to march from Blackwood, one under Zephaniah Williams from Ebbw Vale, and one from Pontypool under William Jones. The tempestuous night caused their plans to miscarry, and after a scuffle in front of the Westgate Hotel they were fired on by the troops who had been placed there some half an hour previously. Frost, Williams, and Jones were soon arrested and on 16 January 1840 were condemned to be hanged and quartered for treason, but the sentence was changed to one of transportation for life. Frost reached Van Diemen's Land on 30 June, but was sentenced to two years' hard labour because of a disparaging remark on lord John Russell, the colonial secretary. He was eventually indentured to a storekeeper, and on receiving a ticket of leave earned his living as a schoolmaster. Conditionally pardoned in July 1854, he immediately left for the United States. In May 1856 he was given an unconditional pardon. He returned home in July, and settled at Stapleton, near Bristol, where he lived until his death on 27 July 1877, in his ninety-third year.

Author

Emeritus Professor David Williams, (1900 - 1978)

Sources

David Williams, *John Frost, A Study in Chartism* (1939)

Further Reading

John Frost, *The horrors of convict life: two lectures* (London 1856)

Joseph Gurney and Thomas Gurney, *The trial of John Frost, for high treason under a special commission, held at Monmouth, in December 1839, and January 1840* (London 1840)

Wikipedia Article: John Frost

Images

J. Frost

W. Clerk, John Frost Esqr

William Read, John Frost

W. Clerk, The Welch Chartist Martyrs! Zephaniah Williams; John Frost; Jones, the watchmaker

James Thomson, William Derby, John Frost Esq. F.R.S.E. &c

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Tredegar Estate Records: Series Box 40: Papers relating to the Chartist uprising in Newport and its aftermath and to subsequent Chartist activities and industrial unrest

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