

## Historical background

The French Revolution took place in 1789 and the King was overthrown. Britain and France were at war when William Blake went to live in Felpham in 1800. There was a peace treaty made in 1802, but that was soon broken by the French. In May 1803 Dragoons [soldiers] were stationed in Felpham to stop Napoleon's forces landing if they tried to cross the channel in flat boats. Local men also joined the volunteer militia forces which were responsible for fighting the French if they arrived. There was a real fear that there would be a French invasion in the Summer of 1803.

At the time Felpham was a very small village with between 25 and 30 houses. The best known resident was William Hayley. He was a very popular poet and writer at the time and lived in Turret House. It was about midnight on 18 September 1800 when William Blake and his wife, Catherine, arrived from London in Felpham. William Hayley employed Blake to engrave some pictures for a book which he was writing and also got him to paint some portrait heads for his library. Blake soon became part of Hayley's circle of friends and acquaintances.

## The Charges against William Blake.

On Monday 15 August 1803 John Scofield, a private in the 1st Dragoon Guards, swore before John Quantock, a Justice of the Peace in Chichester, that on Friday 12 August William Blake had assaulted him and uttered words of sedition.

Scofield stated that he had tried to leave the garden peacefully, but that Blake had pushed him out and down the road and that Blake had then followed him and twice taken him by the collar while Scofield himself made no resistance. Scofield also stated that Blake had said that if Napoleon invaded he would win easily and that Blake had damned the King and said that all soldiers were slaves.

### SCOFIELD'S INFORMATION AND COMPLAINT 15 AUGUST 1803

The Information and Complaint of John Scofield, a Private Soldier in His Majesty's First Regiment of Dragoons, taken upon his Oath, this 15th Day of August, 1803, before me One of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, in and for the County aforesaid.

*Who saith that on the twelfth Day of this Instant, August, at the Parish of Felpham, in the County afore-said, one Blake, a Miniature Painter, and now residing in the said Parish of Felpham, did utter the following seditious expressions, viz, that we (meaning the People of England) were like a Parcel of Children, that they would play with themselves till they got scalded and burnt, that the French knew our Strength very well, and if Bonaparte should come he would be master of Europe in an Hour's Time, that England might depend upon it, that when he set his Foot on English Ground that every Englishman would have his choice, whether to have his Throat cut, or to join the French, & that he was a strong Man, and would certainly begin to cut Throats, and the strongest Man must conquer that he damned the King of England his Country, & his Subjects, that his Soldiers were all bound for Slaves, and all the Poor People in general that his Wife then came up, and said to him, this is nothing to you at present, but that the King of England would run himself so far into the Fire, that he might get himself out again, & altho she was but a Woman, she would fight as long as she had a drop of*

*Blood in her to which the Blake said, my Dear, you would not fight against France she replied no, I would for Bonaparte as long as I am able that the said - Blake, then addressing himself to this Informant, said, tho' you are one of the King's Subjects, I have told what I have said before greater People than you, and that this Informant was sent by his Captain to Esquire Hayley to hear what he had to say, & to go and tell them that his Wife then told her said Husband to turn this Informant out of the Garden that this Informant thereupon turned round to go peacably out, when the said - Blake pushed this Deponant out of the Garden into the Road down which he followed this Informant, & twice took this Informant by the Collar without this Informant's making any Resistance, & at the same Time the said Blake damned the King, and said [his deleted.] the Soldiers were all Slaves -*

*John Scofield*

### **Blake wrote down what was effectively his defence in August 1803.**

Blake's Memorandum in Refutation of the Information and Complaint of John Scolfield, a private Soldier, &c.

*The Soldier has been heard to say repeatedly, that he did not know how the Quarrel began, which he would not say if such seditious words were spoken.*

*Mrs. Haynes Evidences, that she saw me turn him down the Road, & all the while we were at the Stable Door, and that not one word of charge against me was uttered, either relating to Sedition or any thing else; all he did was swearing and threatening.*

*Mr. Hosier heard him say that he would be revenged, and would have me hanged if he could: He spoke this the Day after my turning him out of the Garden. Hosier says he is ready to give Evidence of this, if necessary.*

*The Soldier's Comrade swore before the Magistrates, while I was present, that he heard me utter seditious words, at the Stable Door, and in particular, said, that he heard me D\_\_n the K\_\_g. Now I have all the Persons who were present at the Stable Door to witness that no Word relating to Seditious Subjects was uttered, either by one party or the other, and they are ready, on their Oaths, to say that I did not utter such Words.*

*Mrs. Haynes says very sensibly, that she never heard People quarrel, but they always charged each other with the Offence, and repeated it to those around, therefore as the Soldier charged not me with Seditious Words at that Time, neither did his Comrade, the whole Charge must have been fabricated in the Stable afterwards. If we prove the Comrade perjured who swore that he heard me D\_\_n the K\_\_g, I believe the whole Charge falls to the Ground.*

*Mr. Cosens, owner of the Mill at Felpham, was passing by in the Road, and saw me and the Soldier and William standing near each other; he heard nothing, but says we certainly were not quarrelling.*

*The whole Distance that William could be at any Time of the Conversation between me and the Soldier (supposing such Conversation to have existed) is only 12 Yards, & W[illiam] says that he was backwards and forwards in the Garden. It was a still Day, there was no Wind stirring. William says on his Oath, that the first Words that he heard me speak to the Soldier were ordering him out of the*

*Garden; the truth is, I did not speak to the Soldier till then, & my ordering him out of the Garden was occasioned by his saying something that I thought insulting.*

*The Time that I & the Soldier were together in the Garden was not sufficient for me to have uttered the Things that he alledged.*

*The Soldier said to Mrs. Grinder, that it would be right to have my House searched, as I might have plans of the Country which I intended to send to the Enemy; he called me a Military Painter; I suppose [he deleted.] mistaking the Words Miniature Painter, which he might have heard me called. I think that this proves, his having come into the Garden with some bad Intention, or at least with a prejudiced Mind.*

*It is necessary to learn the Names of all that were present at the Stable Door, that we may not have any Witnesses brought against us, that were not there. All the Persons present at the Stable Door were, Mrs. Grinder and her Daughter, all the Time; Mrs. Haynes & her Daughter all the Time; Mr. Grinder, part of the Time; Mr. Hayley's Gardener part of the Time. Mrs. Haynes was present from my turning him out at my Gate, all the rest of the Time. What passed in the Garden, there is no Person but William & the Soldier, & myself can know.*

*There was not any body in Grinder's Tap-room, but an Old Man, named Jones, who (Mrs. Grinder says) did not come out. He is the same Man who lately hurt his Hand, & wears it in a sling.*

*The Soldier after he and his Comrade came together into the Tap-room, threatened to knock William's Eyes out (this was his often repeated Threat to me and to my Wife) because W refused to go with him to Chichester, and swear against me. William said that he would not take a false Oath, for that he heard me say nothing of the Kind (i.e. Seditious) Mr. Grinder then reproved the Soldier for threatening William, and Mr. Grinder said, that W should not go, because of those Threats, especially as he was sure that no seditious Words were spoken.*

*William's timidity in giving his Evidence before the Magistrates, and his fear of uttering a Falsehood upon Oath, proves him to be an honest Man, & is to me an host of Strength. I am certain that if I had not turned the Soldier out of my Garden, I never should have been free from his Impertinence & Intrusion.*

*Mr. Hayley's Gardener came past at the Time of the Contention at the Stable Door, & going to the Comrade said to him, Is your Comrade drunk? a Proof that he thought the Soldier abusive, & in an Intoxication of Mind.*

*If such a Perjury as this can take effect, any Villain in future may come & drag me and my Wife out of our House, & beat us in the Garden, or use us as he please, or is able, & afterwards go and swear our Lives away. Is it not in the Power of any Thief who enters a Man's Dwelling, & robs him, or misuses his Wife or Children, to go & swear as this Man has sworn.*

**On 16 August 1803 Blake wrote a letter to his friend Thomas Butts in which he explained what had happened.**

*I am at Present in a Bustle to defend myself against a very unwarrantable warrant from a Justice of Peace in Chichester, which was taken out against me by a Private in Captain Leathes's troop of 1st or Royal Dragoons, for an assault & Seditious words. The wretched Man has terribly Perjur'd himself, as has his Comrade; for, as to Sedition, not one Word relating to the King or Government was spoken by either him or me. His Enmity arises from my having turned him out of my Garden, into which he was invited as an assistant by a Gardener at work therein, without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him, as politely as was possible, to go out of the Garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the Garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threatened to knock out my Eyes, with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person; it affronted my foolish Pride. I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me till I had got him out; there I intended to have left him, but he, turning about, put himself into a Posture of Defiance, threatening & swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate, & putting aside his blows, took him again by the Elbows, & keeping his back to me, pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me, & raging & cursing, which drew out several neighbours; at length, when I had got him to where he was Quarter 'd, which was very quickly done, we were met at the Gate by the Master of the house, The Fox Inn (who is the proprietor of my Cottage), & his wife & Daughter & the Man's Comrade & several other people. My Landlord compelled the Soldiers to go in doors, after many abusive threats against me & my wife from the two Soldiers; but not one word of threat on account of Sedition was uttered at that time. This method of Revenge was Planned between them after they had got together into the Stable. This is the whole outline. I have for witnesses: The Gardener, who is Hostler at the Fox & who Evidences that, to his knowledge, no word of the remotest tendency to Government or Sedition was utter'd: Our next door Neighbour, a Miller's wife, who saw me turn him before me down the road, & saw & heard all that happened at the Gate of the Inn, who Evidences that no Expression of threatening on account of Sedition was utter'd in the heat of their fury by either the Dragoons; this was the woman's own remark, & does high honour to her good sense, as she observes that, whenever a quarrel happens, the offence is always repeated. The Landlord of the Inn & His Wife & daughter will Evidence the Same, & will evidently prove the Comrade perjurd, who swore that he heard me, while at the Gate, utter Seditious words & D the K, without which perjury I could not have been committed; & I had no witness with me before the Justices who could combat his assertion, as the Gardener remain'd in my Garden all the while, & he was the only person I thought necessary to take with me. I have been before a Bench of Justices at Chichester this morning; but they, as the Lawyer who wrote down the Accusation told me in private, are compelled by the Military to suffer a prosecution to be entered into: altho' they must know, & it is manifest, that the whole is a Fabricated Perjury. I have been forced to find Bail Mr Hayley was kind enough to come forwards, & Mr Seagrave, Printer at Chichester; Mr H. in £100, & Mr S. in £50; & myself am bound in £100 for my appearance at the Quarter Sessions, which is after Michaelmass. So I shall have the satisfaction to see my friends in Town before this Contemptible business comes on. I say Contemptible, for it must be manifest to every one that the whole accusation is a wilful Perjury. Thus, you see, my dear Friend, that I cannot leave this place without some adventure; it has struck a consternation thro' all the Villages round.*

*Every Man is now afraid of speaking to, or looking at, a Soldier; for the peaceable Villagers have always been forward in expressing their kindness for us, & they express their sorrow at our departure*

*as soon as they hear of it. Every one here is my Evidence for Peace & Good Neighbourhood; & yet; such is the present state of things, this foolish accusation must be tried in Public. Well, I am content, I murmur not & doubt not that I shall receive Justice, & am only sorry for the trouble & expense. I have heard that my Accuser is a disgraced Sergeant; his name is John Scholfield; perhaps it will be in your power to learn somewhat about the Man. I am very ignorant of what I am requesting of you; I only suggest what I know you will be kind enough to Excuse if you can learn nothing about him, & what, I as well know, if it is possible, you will be kind enough to do in this matter.*

*Sincerely & Affectionately Yours,*

*William Blake*

## **The Trial of William Blake**

### **Key dates**

10 May 1803	War with France began again
Friday 12 August 1803	Incident in the garden of Blake's cottage, Felpham.
Monday 15 August 1803	The soldier, Private Scofield, swore his testimony in Chichester.
Tuesday 16 August 1803	Blake gave his testimony in Chichester. Blake granted bail. Blake's letter to Butts explaining what had happened.
Wednesday 11 January 1804	Trial of William Blake in Chichester.

### **People who Blake said witnessed the incident at his cottage in Felpham**

#### **Mr Grinder**

Mr Grinder was landlord of the Fox Inn and owned the cottage which William Blake rented. Scofield was quartered at the Fox Inn. He was probably George Grinder, who was born in the early 1750s, and had married Grace Roke in 1776. Their daughter, Emily, was living with them in Felpham, when William Blake was there.

#### **Mr Hosier**

Mr Hosier heard the soldier say that he would be revenged. He was probably the John Hosier, born in about 1765, who had married Sarah Kelsey in 1763. They had three children living with them in Felpham at the time.

#### **Mr Cosens**

The owner of the mill. There were two mills in Felpham in 1803. The Black Mill, which was at Snoak's Corner in Felpham Road and White Mill which was off the end of Clyde Road and had only been built

in 1800. William Cosens and James Cosens both lived in Felpham and it is not clear which one of them owned the mill (or which mill it was).

### **Mrs Haynes**

With her daughter, she was within line of sight of all that happened. It is possible that she was Martha Haines, the wife of William Haines. She had a daughter, Jane Haines, who was baptised in South Bersted in 1784 (as well as four other children).

### **William the ostler**

Every Inn had to look after the horses of its visitors and that was the job of the ostler. It has not been possible to identify who this William was.

### **Other people involved**

**Charles Lennox, the Third Duke of Richmond and Gordon.** He was the most important landowner in the area and was chairman of the Bench of Magistrates for the Quarter Sessions held on 10 and 11 January 1804 in Chichester. William Hayley and John Marsh knew many members of the Duke's family. His niece, Lady Bathurst, who lived at Lavant House and his nephew, Colonel George Lennox and his wife, were part of the local social scene. William Blake also knew all these people well and probably taught some of Lady Bathurst's children to draw.

**William Hayley** (1745-1820) was an extremely popular poet. He had lived at Eartham (in a house which is currently Great Ballard School), but moved to Felpham in about 1800. The sculptor and artist introduced Blake to Hayley. Blake was Hayley's protégé and, initially, Blake was dependant on Hayley for work. Hayley supported Blake financially and put up £100 as bail in August 1803 so that Blake did not have to remain in prison. Hayley also paid for Samuel Rose to defend Blake in the trial.

**John Quantock** (1740-1820) was a Justice of the Peace in Chichester. Scofield, Cock and William Blake swore their testimonies before him. Quantock was one of the bench of magistrates at Blake's trial. Before he lived in Chichester, Quantock had been in the Dragoon Guards. Quantock's memorial is in Chichester Cathedral.

**George Hulton** (1778-1814) was the Captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoon Guards who vouched that Scofield and Cock would appear at the Quarter Sessions in Chichester. He fought in the Peninsula War in Portugal between 1809 and 1812 and died of natural causes in Tauste, Spain in 1814.

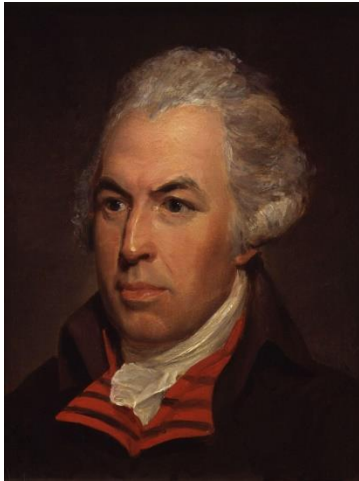
**Samuel Rose** (1767 – died 20 December 1804) was a successful advocate and friend of William Hayley's friend, the poet William Cowper. Rose was educated in Glasgow and a barrister at Lincoln's Inn. Rose defended Blake and made such a good job of it that the Duke of Richmond personally congratulated him.

**William Youatt** (1776-1847) was a veterinary surgeon and non-conformist minister at the Baffins Lane Baptist Chapel. He wrote down Rose's speech at the trial in shorthand.

## **The Jury**

Only men aged between 21 and 70 could serve on a jury. In addition, there was a property qualification which meant that men had to own or rent land or houses worth more than £10 a year. This meant that no labourers could be on a jury.

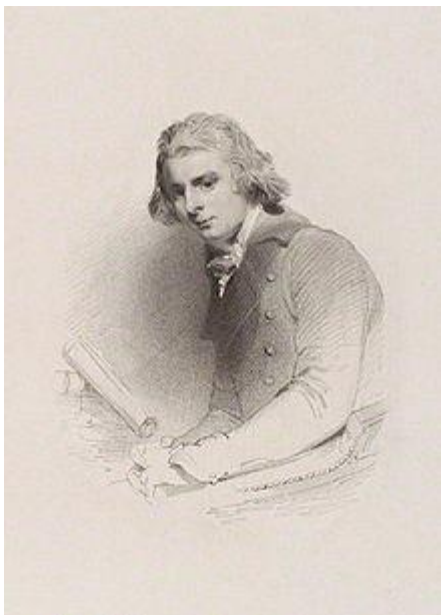
There had been a lot of opposition in Chichester to the troops stationed in the area because it was thought that their number had driven up the price of bread and led to other shortages. The presence of the troops was also believed to have caused increased drunkenness, fighting and a general deterioration in behaviour.



William Hayley



William Blake



Samuel Rose



William Youatt