

# Immanuel Kant and Hull

2024 is the tercentenary of the birth of the most important German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, one of the great thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Why are we celebrating this event in Hull?

It is because his closest friends were two Hull-born merchants, Joseph Green and Robert Motherby.

**Immanuel Kant** was born at the Baltic city port of Königsberg, then in Prussia, on 22 April 1724, the son of a master harness maker. His mother to whom he was devoted died when Immanuel was only thirteen. Thanks to a Protestant pastor, who recognised Kant's talent, he had the opportunity to attend the best school in the town.

In 1740 he went on to study philosophy, natural sciences and mathematics at Königsberg's university. In his free time, he enjoyed playing billiards and cards for money with some success.

After his father's death in 1746 he left university and found work as a tutor some distance from his hometown, to provide for some of his younger siblings.



Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) by Gottlieb Doebler 1791 (East Prussian State Museum, Lüneburg)



Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781)

On returning to Königsberg in 1754, Kant never lived elsewhere. He became a lecturer and later Professor of Philosophy at the university, establishing his position as the most influential philosopher of the age with the publication in 1781 of *Critique of Pure Reason* followed by *Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788.

'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law.'

Kant's famous 'categorical imperative' [unconditional command] that appears in his *Critique of Practical Reason*.

Further important works by Kant are *Critique of Judgement* (1790), *Religion within the Boundary of Mere Reason* (1793), which became subject to censorship, and *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), which inspired the UN Charter. Although politically Kant believed in reforms rather than in revolutions, he welcomed the French Revolution.

Bronze figure of Immanuel Kant by Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857) (East Prussian State Museum, Lüneburg)



Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)

'What can I know?

What should I do?

For what may I hope'

The three most important question we can ask. (Kant)