

# **John Stockdale, London Bookseller and Publisher of Adams and Jefferson**

By Eric Stockdale

John Stockdale (1750-1814) was a bookseller and publisher, with his own shop on Piccadilly in London's fashionable West End, from 1780 to 1814. He was extremely fortunate in that he had learned his trade from John Almon (1737-1805), who "published a good many more titles by Americans and about the American controversy than any other London bookseller".<sup>1</sup> Although Almon passed his business over to John Debrett in 1780, Stockdale was able to take his former employer's place as the leading provider of American materials in England. When the Treaty of Paris formally ended the Revolutionary War in 1783, Stockdale immediately began a fairly close relationship with John Adams and his son, John Quincy, which in turn led to his having significant dealings with Thomas Jefferson.<sup>2</sup>

Stockdale in due course sold books to all three of those future Presidents of the United States. What is clear from his remaining correspondence is that he was regularly prepared to go himself, or to send an employee to rival shops to try and find books that were on his customers' wish lists. Stockdale also published works by his three distinguished customers, the most important of which was Jefferson's only book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. There was an additional third prong to his relationship with them all. In the case of John Adams and his son, he was their host when they paid their first visit to England in the last two months of 1783: they occupied rooms in his home over the bookshop. Jefferson visited the shop during his seven-week visit to London in 1786 but chose to

stay in accommodation in nearby Golden Square. However, he acted conscientiously as a kind of talent scout for Stockdale in Paris, looking out for and buying children's books for him so that he could consider re-publishing them in London. This proved to be a very useful service and helped Stockdale to specialise also in children's books.

The present paper looks first at the London bookselling scene of which Stockdale was a part and then at his links with Adams and Jefferson.

### Stockdale Opens his Bookshop in 1780

The London book trade had first developed close to St. Paul's Cathedral, and particularly in its Churchyard and Paternoster Row. It had then gradually spread westwards through Holborn, but mainly up Fleet Street and the Strand until it reached Piccadilly in the new West End. John Almon opened his shop in the latter street after receiving the encouragement of Earl Temple, a leading Whig politician. In his memoirs, in which he referred to himself in the third person, Almon stated: "Accordingly at Michaelmas 1763 he took a private house in Piccadilly, opposite to Burlington House, the lower part of which he converted into a shop for books and stationery. Lord Temple was better than his promise, for he not only quitted his bookseller and stationer, but engaged many of his friends to do the same in favour of Mr. Almon."<sup>3</sup>

By 1766 Almon was well enough known to figure in the splendid poem by Henry Dell, another bookseller in the capital, who managed in it to refer to a hundred local colleagues in the trade:

Almon of late has got himself a name,  
But 'tis to W-s and P-t he owes his fame.<sup>4</sup>

John Wilkes and William Pitt the Elder were the leading opposition politicians whose names had been barely disguised. In May 1767 Almon published the first of seventy-one monthly issues of his *Political Register*. By October 3 he was able to write to Wilkes: “The *Political Register* succeeds beyond my most sanguine expectations. It is become the fashionable political publication of the times. All parties buy it, and the public approve it.”<sup>5</sup>

At the end of 1764 Benjamin Franklin returned to London for his longest stay, one that was to last until 1775, and went back to his former lodgings in Craven Street, a short walk from Almon’s new shop in Piccadilly. Verner Crane drew attention to the fact that Franklin sponsored some important pamphlets in London relating to the administration’s dispute with the American colonies, and that Almon was involved in their sale. “In January 1766, [William] Strahan printed to his order the first and second editions of Daniel Dulany’s celebrated tract, *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies*; and in February the first English edition of John Dickinson’s *The Late Regulations respecting the British Colonies*. Both were published by John Almon, who was becoming a specialist in American tracts. It was Almon who brought out in 1768 the first London edition of Dickinson’s more famous work, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*.”<sup>6</sup>

In November 1774 Franklin encouraged Almon to publish Arthur Lee’s important anonymous pamphlet, *Appeal to the Justice and Interests of the People of Great Britain in the Present Dispute with America*. It is worth noting that Lee, like Dulany, Dickinson and Franklin’s son, William, had all studied law at the Middle Temple, the London Inn of Court favored by students from the colonies, especially those from South Carolina.<sup>7</sup>

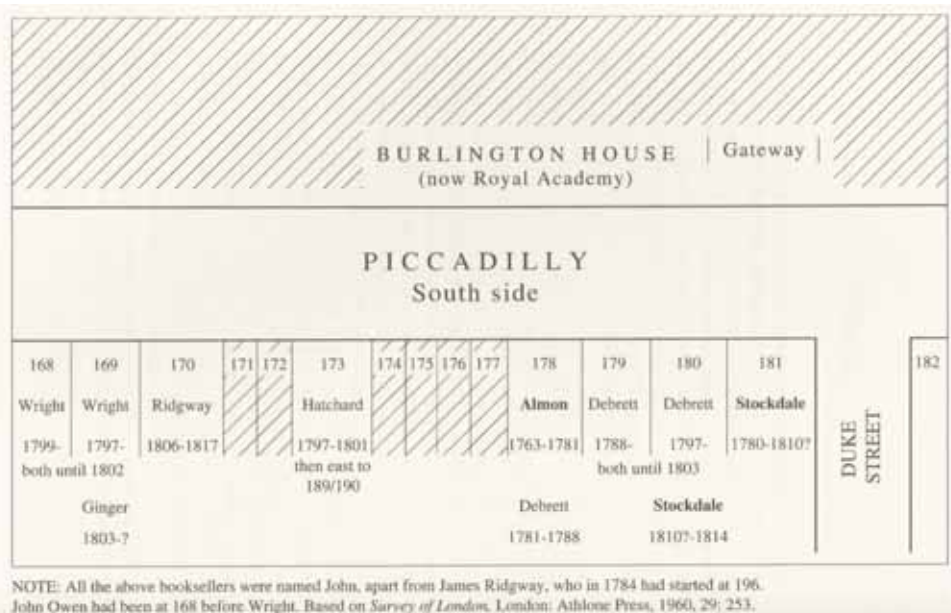
In 1774 Almon also took the bold step of publishing the first regular reports of the proceedings of Parliament, *The Parliamentary Register*. They were later continued by John Debrett and then John Stockdale, ultimately bearing the name of Hansard, the parliamentary printer. In the following year Almon started a monthly magazine called *The Remembrancer, or Impartial Repository of Public Events*, which concentrated on the American dispute and still remains a useful source for historians. The first issue reprinted the letters written by John Adams to the *Boston Gazette* with the pen-name Novanglus.

It was in about 1774 that Almon employed Stockdale as his porter or shopman. The young man, then 24 or so, may have been illiterate at the time, but was clearly bright enough to learn, not only to read and write, but also how to run a bookselling and publishing business. Almon was much more interested in meeting politicians and in writing political pamphlets and articles than in running his shop, and may have made the mistake of entrusting too much of the day-to-day business to his assistant, whom he later accused of cheating him. There must have been many occasions when Almon was out of the shop and when customers became increasingly used to dealing with his shopman, who possibly decided to give himself a pay rise by pocketing some of the takings as a reward for his extra responsibilities. Somehow or other Stockdale managed to save enough money to open his own shop after some six years with Almon. Unlike many booksellers starting up in America, he did not need to incur the cost of acquiring a printing press and type, as London had many skilled printers with competitive pricing.

As a leading opposition publisher and friend of Temple and Wilkes, Almon clashed with the administration on several occasions and found himself in court more than once. The fact that he was the main provider of pro-enemy literature during a war, cannot have endeared him to the authorities. By 1780 he decided that he had had enough of

journalism, bookselling and publishing, but he had no wish to pass his business over to Stockdale. In his advertisement Almon claimed: “Want of health is the only reason of the present occupier wishing to retire, therefore ready money is not wanted for the stock, good will &c., but good security will be expected.”<sup>8</sup> However, fear of imprisonment for offending the government was probably the principal reason.

In his memoirs Almon stated why he had not passed his business over to any of his employees. He claimed that he had been “duped, betrayed, plundered and abused” by unworthy servants – in the plural. Stockdale, who started out on his own in 1780, three doors along from Almon’s shop, at some stage also offended his own wife’s brother, James Ridgway, who set up as a rival in Piccadilly in 1784. Ridgway at once published an attack on him in his *Intrepid Magazine*, complete with a cartoon of Stockdale by the great Thomas Rowlandson. The attached map of a section of Piccadilly, which the writer prepared for his book on Almon and Stockdale, shows the location of their shops, as well as those of Debrett, Ridgway and others.



Debrett succeeded in acquiring some of Almon's pro-opposition business, but Stockdale managed to pick up his former employer's American line, despite the fact that before long he was undertaking work for the government, a matter alluded to in the Rowlandson cartoon, which referred to him as "The King's New Friend". No new business can succeed without a share of good luck. Stockdale had the good fortune to impress a barrister of the Middle Temple, who had decided to earn a living as an author and poet rather than as a lawyer. Thomas Day (1748-1789) was a strong supporter of the colonists' cause but also one of the first outspoken opponents of slavery. At the Middle Temple, before the war, he had befriended a young law student from South Carolina, John Laurens, who shared his views on both topics. His father, Henry Laurens, was a leading Charleston merchant, who had spent a considerable time in London as such, and who was to serve as the President of the Continental Congress in 1777 and 1778, as successor to John Hancock.

Day, who probably knew Stockdale from his time in Almon's shop, wrote an important three-volume didactic book for children, *History of Sandford and Merton*, and decided to give it to Stockdale to publish, with one volume every three years, starting in 1783. That work, which went into many editions, was to be the foundation of the bookseller's specialist line in such works.

In 1780 Henry Laurens was dispatched by Congress to the Netherlands to seek assistance for the United States, but he was captured by the Royal Navy, charged with "Treason at Philadelphia" and incarcerated in the Tower of London for fifteen months. At the outset of the war he had tried to persuade his son John to continue with his studies at the Middle Temple, but the young man had insisted on returning to America in 1777, when he became one of General Washington's closest aides. When General Lord

Cornwallis sued for surrender terms at Yorktown in October 1781, Washington instructed John Laurens, the former law student, to negotiate them on his behalf. Shortly after the news of Yorktown reached London, Henry Laurens was released on bail and then appointed one of the United States Peace Commissioners, together with Franklin, Adams and John Jay.

Laurens' health had suffered considerably during his time in the Tower. On his release he was befriended by his son's friends from the Middle Temple, notably Thomas Day, who acted as his unofficial secretary. It is likely that at a later stage Day mentioned that Stockdale, by then his bookseller and friend, had some spare rooms available above the bookshop. As a result, before he eventually returned to America in June 1784, Laurens stayed with Stockdale and his family on at least four occasions. It is not often that lodgers or tenants have a kind word to say for their host, but Laurens' last extant letter to Stockdale, dated April 20, 1787, included the words: "I feel a pleasure from having occasion to write to my good old landlord."<sup>9</sup>

Laurens was one of the richest men in America before his wartime losses, while Adams was always obliged to be careful with his allowances. On December 6, 1782, Adams noted in his diary in Paris, with obvious irritation: "Mr. Laurens' apartments at the hotel de York are better than mine at the hotel du Roi, on Carousel. Yet he gives but twelve louis and I am obliged to give eighteen." He doubtless recalled that occasion in the following year, when Laurens seems to have mentioned that he had found some very reasonably priced and convenient accommodation above Stockdale's bookshop in Piccadilly. The thought of having such accommodation must have appealed to the book-loving Adams as much as the traditional candy-store to a child.

Adams already knew about the shop. On May 13, 1780, shortly after Stockdale had opened his own business, Thomas Digges, one of his American contacts in London, had written to Adams, requesting him to omit his name from any communication. “Only mark the letter thus, X, on the seal part, and put it under a cover directed to Mr. Stockdale, Bookseller, Piccadilly, London.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, in January 1781 Stockdale had published Adams’ abridged version of Thomas Pownall’s *Memorial Addressed to the Sovereigns of Europe*. Pownall was a pro-colonist former governor of Massachusetts, who was to call on Adams when he eventually stayed with Stockdale.<sup>11</sup> Edmund Jenings, another of Adams’ American contacts in Europe, wrote to him on January 31, 1781, disclaiming any credit for the choice of Stockdale as the publisher of the new version, but making a point of praising “his integrity, principles and knowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Adams Stays with Stockdale

After signing the Peace Treaty in Paris on September 3, 1783, John Adams was at last able to make his first visit to the country of his forebears, bringing the sixteen-year-old John Quincy with him. Adams had been very ill in Paris and had been advised to go to England to recoup his health, with the help of the healing waters of the spa at Bath.<sup>13</sup> They arrived in London on October 26 and checked in at a hotel in the Adelphi, a new development very close to Franklin’s former lodgings in Craven Street. Adams decided to leave after three days, complaining in his diary: “I am obliged here to give thirteen shillings a day for a parlor, a bedchamber and another bedchamber over it for my son, without any dining-room or ante-chamber. This is dearer than my lodgings at the hotel du Roi in Paris.” Unfortunately, after the next day’s entry there is an eight months’ gap in

the diary that John Adams kept, so we are reduced to other sources for information about his two months in England.

On February 17, 1812, Adams wrote an account of his stay for the *Boston Patriot*. “I was not long at the Adelphi, but soon removed to private lodgings, which by the way were ten times more public, and took apartments at Mr. Stockdale’s, in Piccadilly, where Mr. Laurens had lately lodged before me. Here I had the opportunity of learning, for Debrett was at the next door, the state of the current literature of London. I will not enlarge upon this subject at present, if ever. I found it exactly similar to what I had seen in Paris. The newspapers, the magazines, the reviews, the daily pamphlets, were all in the hands of hirelings, men of no character.” The reason that he found Stockdale’s shop “ten times more public” was that bookshops like his were regarded as meeting places, where one could look at new books and pamphlets, and discuss their contents, plus the latest political developments, both with other customers and with the bookseller.

By November 9 Adams had settled in and wrote two letters to his wife. In one he reported: “My son and I have been here this fortnight and have been very civilly and obligingly treated by some private gentlemen. (*But this Government?*) It is a fine country; but it is undone by prosperity.” In the other he wrote: “I have met with an agreeable reception here, as agreeable as I wish. In short I have been received here exactly as I wished to be.”<sup>14</sup> On November 29 Adams wrote to J.G. Holtzhey in Amsterdam, that since his arrival in London, a number of gentlemen had “expressed a desire to have the medal struck by you in commemoration of the connection between your country and mine.” He asked for three of each sort to be sent to Stockdale, adding: “The sooner they arrive here the better – I fancy Mr. Stockdale would be able to sell a great number of them here.”<sup>15</sup> Adams had appreciated that the bookshop, as was customary, sold items

other than books and pamphlets, for example, stationery. During his stay in Piccadilly Adams probably discussed with his host the republication of his Novanglus letters, which Almon had earlier reprinted in his *Remembrancer*.

His health improved soon after their arrival in London, so Adams and his son had a busy time in the city attending the theatre, dining with friends and sightseeing. Adams only went to Bath at Christmas, but he had no sooner reached the spa than he was obliged to return to the capital and sail to the Netherlands to deal with a financial crisis there. He left London on January 3, 1784. On January 20 a parcel arrived at the bookshop for Adams from relatives of his wife, who lived in Devon. The tone of Stockdale's immediate letter and of the reply from his recently departed lodger, gives an indication of the good relationship of the two men. The bookseller reported the arrival of the medals from Amsterdam and continued: "I this day received a basket sealed up and directed for you. As I suspected it was some sort of game I resolved, in the presence of Dr. John Jebb, to commit an act of felony and broke the seals, with an intent for Dr. Jebb to seal it up again with his seal, should it prove to be anything else. But as it appeared to be two fine hares unaccompanied with any letter, I took the liberty to offer one to Dr. Jebb in your name, which he very politely refused, desiring me at the same time to remember him to you in the strongest terms. I am now in the distressed situation of being obliged to eat (with the assistance of my little family) both the hares. We shall do ourselves the pleasure after dinner of drinking your, your son's and family's good health in a glass of fine old Madeira which I had from a *friend*." The letter continued with some political and humorous news.

Adams replied on January 31: "Your favour of the 20<sup>th</sup> was sent me last night and put me in a fit of good humour which continues to this moment. The hares were well

disposed of and I hope they gave pleasure to the little family – you could not have offered one of them more properly than to Dr. Jebb, for whom I have the highest esteem, as one of the best citizens of the little Commonwealth of the just upon Earth. If I did not know that the burthen of the State lies so heavily upon your shoulders I would invite you to take a trip to The Hague...” Adams added, “and drink a glass of finer old Madeira than you had from your friend,” but then crossed out those words from his draft. He clearly did not want to give the impression that he had given his landlord a cheap bottle before his departure. He concluded with the friendly words: “It will ever give me pleasure to know of your welfare and to receive a spice of the politics of the day.”<sup>16</sup>

Jefferson wrote many letters to Stockdale ordering books, but Adams clearly did not need to write while staying over the shop; or when he could send John Quincy in with an order; or once he lived in the first official residence in nearby Grosvenor Square and could drop in himself in the years 1785 to 1788. Abigail Adams and her daughter Nabby arrived in London in July 1784, but John Quincy had come over to meet them as early as May. On June 6 Adams wrote to his son from The Hague: “You say nothing of our books at Stockdale’s, have you shipped them? And by whom? I am impatient to collect together here all the little things which belong to me, that I too may be in a condition to return home, upon occasion.” He followed that up with the instruction, “Get the books on their way at all events,” and with the advice that John Quincy should attend Parliament, enlisting the help of “Mr. Copley, Mr. West, Mr. Oswald or Mr. Stockdale.”<sup>17</sup>

Adams came back to London in August 1784 and was at last reunited with his wife and daughter, whom he at once took over to Paris, where Jefferson had just arrived. For the next nine months Jefferson spent a great deal of time with Adams: they must have

enjoyed talking about their various book purchases. Stockdale, it is clear, came into their conversation early on, for Jefferson soon made contact with him.

### The Jefferson-Stockdale Connection

Jefferson arrived in Paris on August 6, 1784 and on September 1 wrote his first letter to Stockdale. “I asked the favour of Mr. Franklin, who lately went from hence to London, to send me a book or two which you had published. As he will not have left London when you receive this, I will beg the favour of you to procure for me a copy of the small 12mo. Edition of Blackstone’s Commentaries, published I believe in Ireland. I would choose it unbound, because I can then have it bound into one or more volumes whichever may best suit me as a traveller. Mr. Franklin will be so good as to pay you for it; and should there still remain in his hands any balance of the small sum I troubled him with [£17.6.6 according to his account book], after he shall have had the articles he undertook to procure for me, I shall be glad if it is convenient for you to receive it, and answer any little calls I may have for things in your way while I am here.”<sup>18</sup>

Jefferson’s messenger was William Temple Franklin, Benjamin’s grandson, who had acted as secretary to the Peace Commissioners in Paris and had come to London to see his loyalist father, William, the ousted governor of New Jersey. He was the first of a number of such messengers, who jointly had played a significant role in the war, including four colonels: William Stephens Smith (who was later Adams’ unsatisfactory son-in-law), John Trumbull, David Humphreys and David S. Franks. Once Adams had arrived in London as the first United States minister in May 1785, Jefferson also relied on him.<sup>19</sup> On June 2 he wrote to Adams about wine and publications, suggesting: “Either retain the money in your hands or put it into Stockdale’s as most convenient. Can you

take the trouble of ordering me the two best of the London papers (that is to say one of each party) and by any channel which will save me postage and the search of government?" Visiting Stockdale's shop was no hardship for Adams: apart from any other reason, until he rented a house in Grosvenor Square, he stayed with his family at the Bath Hotel, also on Piccadilly. On June 22 Jefferson added that the Duke of Dorset, the British minister in Paris, who had been helpful to Adams before his departure from that city, had given him leave to use his London address for the onward transmission of papers. Jefferson asked: "Will Mr. Stockdale undertake to have these papers sent regularly, or is this out of the line of his business? Pray order me also any really good pamphlets which come out from time to time, which he will charge to me."<sup>20</sup>

Adams moved into the house in Grosvenor Square in July but still found time to write to Jefferson from there on July 18: "I shall go this morning to Stockdale to talk with him about sending you the news papers and pamphlets."<sup>21</sup>

Ten days later Jefferson wrote a letter to Stockdale, which was delivered by one of his Paris assistants, William Short. "I shall have occasions for books and pamphlets sometimes to be sent here and sometimes to America, which render a correspondent in London in your way convenient." He went on to suggest a method of payment and enclosed a list of classics that he wanted sent to James Madison, the president of his old college in Williamsburg, by ship from London to James or York river.<sup>22</sup> Stockdale assured Jefferson that all orders would be punctually executed and that he was in no hurry to be paid: once or twice a year would suffice.

Before coming to Europe, Jefferson had been asked by a number of friends if they might have a copy of the notes he had written up about Virginia in the summer of 1781, after fleeing from Monticello to avoid capture by Col. Tarleton's dreaded Legion. He had

inquired about the cost of having a private edition printed in America but had been put off by the high prices quoted. In Paris he learned that he could get the work done much more cheaply and so had two hundred copies printed in May 1785, without the name of the author. He distributed them among his friends, including Adams, who was about to set off to England as minister. Jefferson also authorised the publication of a French translation, which appeared in the following year and gave a clue as to the identity of the author: *Observations sur la Virginie, par Mr. J\*\*\*\**. He did not care for that translation and feared it might be translated back into English, so he began to think about having his own private edition reprinted as a public one.

On September 12, 1785, Abigail Adams wrote to John Quincy, who had gone home to study at Harvard: “Your old acquaintance Stockdale is bought up by the M[inistr]y and receives a pension of four hundred per year. It is said he is quite a different man from what he was when you knew him. Not a single paragraph can be published in favour of America, suppose it only six lines, under three or four guineas.”<sup>23</sup> That knowledge, which presumably was shared with both her husband and with Jefferson, does not seem to have deterred any American from dealing with Stockdale, as his United States contacts blossomed from that time.

In March and April 1786 Jefferson paid his seven-week visit to England and travelled around with Adams. A week before his colleague’s return to Paris, Adams noted in his dairy: “I walked to the booksellers, Stockdale, Cadell, Dilly, Almon.” He was mistaken in naming Almon, and was presumably referring to the shop by then run by Debrett, which may still have displayed a reference to the former owner. He did not mention that his visitor was with him, but it seems likely that he was. Jefferson certainly visited Stockdale’s shop at least once, for two letters and an entry in his account book confirm

that he did so. He may well have called in more than once as his lodgings in Golden Square were only a few minutes away. It is clear from what followed that at no time during Jefferson's visit did he and Stockdale discuss the publication of *Notes on the State of Virginia*.<sup>24</sup>

After returning to Paris, Jefferson wrote to the bookseller on July 24 with an order for books and suggesting that the weekly stagecoach to Paris should in future be used. His list included McIntosh, *Travels*, and added a request for a second copy for M. Fayette. The Marquis was to be disappointed, as Stockdale reported on August 8 that he could not find a second copy of McIntosh, as it was "entirely out of print." Then came the important passage: "I have had some thoughts of printing your work in England, which is highly spoke of except those parts that relate to our country, but I had some doubts whether it would sell sufficient to defray the expenses. At a convenient opportunity shall be glad to have your opinion on it."<sup>25</sup>

On September 13 Jefferson ordered more books but did not answer the request, so Stockdale reverted to the subject in his reply of November 20. "Some time past two French gentlemen called upon me, with a copy of your Minutes of Virginia, with a view to have it printed, but I informed them that I had some reason to believe that a new edition was coming out with corrections by the author, and Col. Smith informed me that a large map was engraving for the work."<sup>26</sup> I have some doubts whether it would pay the expenses, at the same time have a wish to publish it, with your name, as I am convinced it is a work of great merit. I have spoken to Mr. Adams and Col. Smith on the subject, who wish much to see the work published in England." In the same letter Stockdale made his first plea to his customer to help him obtain a book from Paris, namely, the new French translation by Arnaud Berquin of Thomas Day's *History of Sandford and Merton*. "I beg

pardon for the liberty taken, as I am very anxious for a copy (the original being my own publication), having no friend in Paris beside the Duke of Dorset, Mr. Stone his secretary, and yourself. Should there be any difficulty I think Mr. Stone will willingly convey it to me.”<sup>27</sup>

Jefferson had injured his right hand on September 18, when trying to impress the painter Maria Cosgrave with his agility or virility (or both) and she had broken his heart by leaving Paris on October 11. He also had some public duties to execute. In all the circumstances it was good of him to write to Stockdale on December 8 to announce that he had dispatched the first three parts of *Sandford et Merton*, adding: “A number comes out every month, and it will be nine months before the whole will be out. You shall receive them as they appear, and always by the diligence unless you would prefer any other channel of conveyance.” In thanking him, Stockdale asked him to obtain the first of a number of books for children written by Berquin, *L’Ami des Enfants*.<sup>28</sup>

The letter that Jefferson wrote on February 1, 1787, may well have been the most important one that Stockdale ever received. “You have two or three times proposed to me the printing my Notes on Virginia. I never did intend to have them made public, because they are little interesting to the rest of the world. But as a translation of them is coming out, I have concluded to let the original appear also. I have therefore corrected a copy, and made some additions. I have moreover had a map engraved, which is worth more than the book. If you will chuse to print the work I will send you the corrected copy and when it shall be nearly printed I will send you the plate of the map.” Jefferson was proud of the map as it was based on one that was partly the work of his father, Peter Jefferson, and as it covered a far larger area than Virginia alone.

Stockdale replied: “I shall be happy to receive your corrected copy, which shall be neatly and correctly printed and published according to your desire, without one tittle of alteration, though I know there is some bitter pills relative to our country. As I shall not be above three weeks in printing the work, it may not be amiss to send the plate at the same time. I intend to print 500 copies, which from the merit of the work and the advantage of your name, I hope will be sold, but all things are uncertain. In short, all that I wish is to be the publisher of your work and to be indemnified, without paying any regard to the profit.”<sup>29</sup>

There was no delay in the printing of the text, which was completed in March or April, but Jefferson had great difficulty in obtaining the return of the map plate from the engraver, so Stockdale did not receive it until July, together with a large order for books. In acknowledging its receipt on July 10, he pointed out that the delay was to the “detriment to the sale of the book, London now being nearly empty of book buyers”.<sup>30</sup> The delay is shown by the completed book itself, as Jefferson dated his Preface February 27, while Stockdale added to the map “Published as the Act directs, 13 July 1787...” Binding must have taken at least two further days.

Jefferson became increasingly exasperated with Stockdale after the publication date, as he would not return the plate until the following February, despite several requests. He also became dilatory in the execution of Jefferson’s orders for books, despite the fact that John Trumbull came into the shop and urged the bookseller to execute them. In June 1788 Jefferson wrote to Trumbull: “No news from Stockdale. I am done with him irrevocably.”<sup>31</sup> Trumbull was principally a painter, but he made inquiries in London about a reliable replacement for Stockdale. After he had reported back to Jefferson, the

dissatisfied book buyer decided to use Thomas Payne the Elder for his future book requirements from London.

John Adams had left London on March 30 at the end of his three years' mission. John Quincy Adams was to return to London both as a bridegroom and as a minister, but after March 1788 neither his father nor Jefferson ever visited the city again. We need to go back to the previous year and then to look briefly at John Adams' subsequent dealings with Stockdale once he was Vice-President.

#### John Stockdale as Publisher of both Adams

John Adams had a frustrating time in London: though making a number of British friends, he met with some hostility from the press and ministry, and failed to achieve any breakthrough. However, he had the time and energy to write – perhaps too speedily – his three-volume *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. The first volume, published by Charles Dilly in February 1787, arrived in Philadelphia in time to be read by some of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. The second and third followed in the same year and those two were also published by Stockdale, who may have suggested that course to the author when he was on one of his visits to the bookshop.<sup>32</sup> It is clear from their correspondence that Adams and members of his family called in from time to time and it is safe to guess that some of the many books that Adams quoted in his *Defence* came from that shop. The absence of letters ordering books can be explained by the fact that Adams probably enjoyed calling in on various shops in pursuit of yet more books. Zoltan Haraszti pointed out that in the *Defence* Adams quoted from some fifty sources; there is no way of knowing how many of those were obtained for him by Stockdale.<sup>33</sup>

There is some outside confirmation of the fact that Adams called regularly at Stockdale's shop – and that it was used as a meeting place. Herbert Croft, a lexicographer, knew that Adams shared his views on the importance of the English language. He wrote on February 5, 1788: “If Mr. Adams would condescend so far as to afford Mr. C. an opportunity of explaining the new dictionary, on which he is employed, of the language spoken in Great Britain and America, Mr. C. would be happy in the honour of waiting upon Mr. Adams or of meeting him any day at Mr. Stockdale's.”<sup>34</sup> After his return home Adams wrote to his English friend, Thomas Brand Hollis, on December 3: “I regret the loss of the booksellers' shops, and the society of the few men of letters that I knew in London.”<sup>35</sup>

Tom Paine shared one character trait with Adams: he always felt undervalued in the United States and so after the war returned to England. Before fleeing from there to France to avoid prosecution, he wrote his *Rights of Man*, Part 1, published in London in March 1791. John Beckley, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, decided to get the work published in America, and sent a copy to James Madison, who passed it on to Jefferson. In a covering letter to the printer, which he later claimed he had not intended for publication, Jefferson expressed his delight that “something was at length to be publicly said against the political heresies which have sprung up among us”. The American edition of Paine's book included a copy of Jefferson's letter; the heresies mentioned were widely assumed to be those of his government colleague, Vice-President Adams, who did not share Jefferson's enthusiasm for the French Revolution.

A series of eleven letters was published in the *Columbian Centinel* from June on, by a writer calling himself Publicola. The first one stated: “I confess, Sir, I am somewhat at a loss to determine what this very respectable gentleman means by *political heresies*. Does

he consider this pamphlet of Mr. Paine's as the canonical book of political scripture?" John Adams was thought by some to be writing the letters in his own defence, but the author was in fact his son John Quincy. The British government was delighted to find that an American author had expertly refuted Paine's dangerous assertions, and suggested to Stockdale that he should reprint the Publicola letters in book form. A short while earlier he had published an attack on Paine by George Chalmers, a senior civil servant using the pseudonym Francis Oldys: *The Life of Thomas Pain: The Author of the Rights of Men* [sic]. The omission of the 'e' from Paine's name was deliberate.

In January 1793 Stockdale published the Publicola letters with the title *An Answer to Pain's Rights of Man*, misspelling Paine's name again and wrongly showing John Adams as the author. The bookseller attempted to explain how the latter error had come about, writing to the Vice-President on March 16. "A copy was given to me by a gentleman high in government to print as your production with your name affixed, and I actually advertised it as such, but fortunately had information of its being written by your son and, of course, cancelled the title before a copy was seen by anyone except the printer and myself."<sup>36</sup> Stockdale was not frank about the speed of his correction: the copy of the book in the British Library and of that in the London Library, both show the father as the author rather than the son.

Adams answered on May 12: "My son's name is John Quincy Adams, which you know very well, so that by ushering the pamphlet into the world in the name of John Adams Esq. it might still pass for mine. I understand all this very well. Bookseller's policy! All I have to say is that I did not write Publicola nor any part of it; if you wish to know whether my son wrote it or not, you must write to him, who is a councillor-at-law

in Boston and, as he has been taught to read and write, is capable of corresponding with you concerning his own affairs.”<sup>37</sup>

Stockdale’s letter of March 16 had included a request relating to Adams’ *Defence*: “Your work on Government has never yet had fair play. I wish you would give me a corrected copy with any additions that you may have, and at the same time an order upon Mr. Copley for your picture to engrave a frontispiece. I would with pleasure risk any sum in bringing out an edition of the work, and that in a much more reputable style than the former.”

In the letter cited already, Adams, still chafing from the criticisms of his book, replied to the request: “My ‘work on Government’, as you are pleased to call it, has been so much neglected by Britons and so much insulted by Frenchmen, Irishmen and Americans, that it shall now either be consigned to everlasting oblivion or be transmitted to posterity exactly as it is. If you think you can make your fortune by printing it you are very welcome to do it, but without any corrections, additions or subtractions, except literary or grammatical ones. I don’t mean to insist that you should print again *capital* for *capitol* and all the other blunders of the press that a boy in the lowest form could correct.” The one alteration that he requested was that the title should be given in full as *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States against the Attack of Mr. Turgot in his letter to Dr. Price dated the twenty-second day of March 1778*. “This alteration,” he added, “will be a full answer to every sensible objection which I have ever read to the work. It is not and never was intended for a general Defence of the American Constitutions. It is a Defence on the point on which they were attacked, and that only.” Adams seems to have felt that the terms of his letter were rather harsh, for he ended it

warmly: “My kind regards to Mrs. Stockdale and believe me to be, your hearty well-wisher and humble servant.”

On March 3, 1794, Stockdale sent Adams a copy of his new edition, which included the John Singleton Copley portrait as a frontispiece. Hall’s engraving of the portrait was so good that it became “the source of many that followed and is a well-executed and faithful likeness.”<sup>38</sup> Stockdale enclosed six extra copies of the engraving, “for any of your absent children.”

Unless John Quincy called in at the shop during one of his later visits to London (which included two unusually happy years as minister), that transaction marked the end of the Adams-Stockdale link. After dispensing with Stockdale’s services, Jefferson received reports about his publisher’s views from his, and formerly Washington’s faithful aide, David Humphreys. In August 1790 President Washington and Secretary of State Jefferson sent Humphreys, who was on his way to Lisbon as the first United States minister, on a secret visit to London, with instructions to assess the risk of the danger of a war between Great Britain and Spain over the Nootka Sound dispute. From his days as Jefferson’s secretary in Paris, Humphreys knew the value of the London bookshops as sources of information. He called in once again on the Piccadilly shop and reported to Jefferson: “The business of the Cabinet has at least been conducted with great secrecy, during the course of the whole affair. Stockdale, the political bookseller, however informed me today, that he had just been assured by a person very high in office, that no war would happen.”

In September 1807, some twenty years after his first visit to his shop and five years before the War of 1812, Humphreys called on Stockdale again, finding him unusually hawkish. He reported to President Jefferson: “You may be surprised to learn that such

independent characters as your old friend Stockdale, and many others, look forward to a war with us as an almost inevitable event not very much to be deprecated, at least as much less so than the loss of the smallest of their naval rights.’<sup>39</sup>

Although Stockdale was not important to Adams or Jefferson, he was certainly of considerable use to them both, quite apart from his role as a supplier of books. The visit of Adams to London in 1783 would have been less happy without his opportunity to live with a family over a well-placed bookshop; while Jefferson, for all his justifiable irritation with Stockdale’s delays, must have been grateful to have his only book properly published at last. Stockdale certainly benefited considerably from the links, mainly because both statesmen helped him to prove that he was Almon’s undoubted successor as the principal supplier of American materials, but also because Jefferson additionally helped him to become a recognised specialist in children’s books and works of a geographical nature. The main lasting benefit of the links of the London bookseller with the future second, third and sixth Presidents of the United States, is that their correspondence still gives us a good picture of an eighteenth-century London political bookseller at work, as well as a glimpse of the shrewd use made of such an outlet by astute politicians.

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<sup>1</sup> Butterfield, L.H., ‘The American Interests of the Firm of E. and C. Dilly’, *Papers Bib. Soc. of America*, 1951, 45:293.

<sup>2</sup> For Almon and Stockdale generally, see, Stockdale, Eric, *’Tis Treason, My Good Man! Four Revolutionary Presidents and a Piccadilly Bookshop*, Oak Knoll Press and British Library, 2005. The first of the four referred to in the title was Henry Laurens, a former President of the Continental Congress.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of a late Eminent Bookseller*, 1790, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Belanger, Terry, ‘A Directory of the London Book Trade 1766’, *Publishing History*, 1:16, 1977. Belanger was unable to find any trace of Hopwood, the only other bookseller in Piccadilly mentioned by Dell.

<sup>5</sup> British Library, Add. MSS 30,868, f.157.

<sup>6</sup> Crane, Verner W., *Benjamin Franklin’s Letters to the Press 1758-1775*, U. of North Carolina P., 1950, xlix-li.

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<sup>7</sup> Of the twelve American members of the Middle Temple who signed either the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, seven were from South Carolina. See, generally, Stockdale, Eric, and Holland, Randy J., *Middle Temple Lawyers and the American Revolution*, Thomson West, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The advertisement appeared in Almon's *Courant* for June 5 and 6, 1780, together with news of the Gordon Riots.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Laurens Papers, South Carolina Hist. Soc.

<sup>10</sup> PJA 9:307.

<sup>11</sup> Almon had published Pownall's work anonymously shortly before retiring in 1780. Adams was greatly impressed by the work, but not by the author's writing skills. He accordingly wrote his own shorter version, with the title *A Translation of the Memorial...* See also, Lint, Gregg L., John Adams, Thomas Pownall and Peace in 1780.

<sup>12</sup> PJA 11:93.

<sup>13</sup> All four Peace Commissioners suffered from ill-health: Adams, Laurens and Jay all went to Bath for the water cure.

<sup>14</sup> AFC 5:264, 266.

<sup>15</sup> Adams Papers, reel 107.

<sup>16</sup> Adams Papers, reels 362, 107.

<sup>17</sup> AFC 5:338, 341.

<sup>18</sup> PTJ 15:615.

<sup>19</sup> Adams was appointed by Congress. The first U.S. minister to London appointed by President Washington was Thomas Pinckney, who only arrived in England in July 1792, four years after the departure of Adams. He had been a friend and fellow student of John Laurens at the Middle Temple, see, Stockdale and Holland, chs. 6 and 8.

<sup>20</sup> PTJ 8:172,247.

<sup>21</sup> PTJ 8:301. The United States embassy has been in different buildings in that Square ever since John Adams' initial choice, but it is soon to move to a more secure location.

<sup>22</sup> PTJ 8:322.

<sup>23</sup> AFC 6:360.

<sup>24</sup> During Jefferson's time in London he visited the British Museum with John and Abigail Adams, accompanied by their daughter Nabby and her future husband, Col. William Stephens Smith. When the writer was first researching the life of John Stockdale, the British Library was still housed in the British Museum and he was interested to see that the signed copy of his book, which Jefferson had given to the young colonel, was in its collection. He had probably sold it when one of his risky financial ventures failed.

<sup>25</sup> PTJ 10:165, 201.

<sup>26</sup> The private edition had not included any map.

<sup>27</sup> PTJ 10: 384, 545.

<sup>28</sup> PTJ 10:586, 617.

<sup>29</sup> PTJ 11:107, 143.

<sup>30</sup> PTJ 11:521, 576.

<sup>31</sup> PTJ 13:301.

<sup>32</sup> The book was re-published in Philadelphia in 1787 and in Boston in the following year by Edmund Freeman, "opposite the North Door of the State House". One of the men who put his name down on the subscription list was His Excellency John Hancock – presumably with a signature of normal size.

<sup>33</sup> Haraszti, Zoltan, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, Harvard U.P., 1952, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Adams Papers, reel 371.

<sup>35</sup> [Disney, John], *Memoirs of Thomas Brand-Hollis, Esq.* T.Gillet, 1808, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Adams Papers, reel 376.

<sup>37</sup> British Library, Add. MSS 24,329, f.2.

<sup>38</sup> Oliver, Andrew, *Portraits of John and Abigail Adams*, Harvard U.P., 1967, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Humphreys, Frank Landon, *Life and Times of David Humphreys*, Putnam, 1917, 2:22, 362. The English writer had better draw a veil over the unfortunate fire in Washington in 1814, which led to Jefferson selling his library to Congress so that it might replace some of the books lost in it.