THE 2nd MARQUIS of ROCKINGHAM

&

THE AMERICAN COLONIES

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Introduction

The official guide to Wentworth Woodhouse, published in 2013, told us that the owner of Wentworth Woodhouse in the late 18th century, Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquis of Rockingham, was 'a committed Whig' who was Prime Minister of Great Britain in the 1760s and again in the 1780s. Further, "His contributions to British affairs of state are marred by his association with the loss of the American colonies during his time as Prime Minister".

There was a little more to it than this!

Rockingham was indeed leader of the most important section of the Whig Party for almost twenty years, at a time when British politics were turned upside down by the accession of George III and the American Revolution; but he was only briefly Prime Minister. For most of the time, he was in opposition to George III's governments. While in office between 1765 and 1766 he repealed the Stamp Act (which had provoked serious unrest in the 13 American Colonies) and consistently argued in favour of reconciliation with the Americans, but he failed to persuade a majority of the House of Commons to his way of thinking. As a result, there was a long and bloody war. He took office again in 1782, on condition that George III recognise American independence, but died before the terms for peace could be negotiated.

Rockingham was therefore the champion of a lost cause. We are left wondering what would have happened, if he had continued to hold office during the late 1760s, or if he had lived longer. Would he have been able to avoid war with the Americans altogether, or negotiate a different peace treaty? Could the Thirteen

Colonies have been kept within the British Empire? These are among the most interesting of counterfactual questions.

I
In Government

The pecking order of British aristocracy is Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, Baron, and Wentworth Woodhouse - or Wentworth House as it was called in the 18th century - has been home to two Earls of Strafford, two Marquisses of Rockingham, and seven Earls Fitzwilliam; but, if you stand in front of the East Front of the House, you are really looking at the home of the 2nd Marquis of Rockingham, pretty much as it was in 1760, when George III became King of Great Britain, Ireland, and an Empire which included the 13 American colonies, as well as of Canada (including Nova Scotia and Quebec, captured from the French in 1759).

The well known writer on agriculture and economics, Arthur Young (1741-1820), described the House and Park as 'one of the most exquisite spots in the world', and as 'in every respect one of the finest places in the kingdom'. He complimented the 2nd Marquis both for the part he had played in building the place, and for his taste:

> Nature has certainly done much at Wentworth, but art has heightened, decorated and improved all her touches; in such attempts no slight genius is requisite.

The reader of these words might not realise that "Wentworth Woodhouse was a political and economic powerhouse, and Rockingham's associates – who included Edmund Burke, Charles James Fox and the Duke of Portland – did much to forge modern Britain and champion political values still relevant today."[1] Not only was Wentworth House the biggest in England, it was also a seat of power, since for most of his career as a politician, the 2nd Marquis of Rockingham controlled the representation of Yorkshire in the House of Commons, and was Lord Lieutenant of the West Riding, which meant that he controlled the militia.

Rockingham was brought up in Yorkshire, but he was educated at Westminster School and at Cambridge University, and visited Italy during his Grand Tour of Europe in the late 1740s. While there, he pursued an interest in the classics – Ancient Greek & Latin, Greek and Roman history and mythology - and Palladian architecture and sculpture; and he started to collect statues, books, medals and miniatures. For centuries, a classical education was considered an absolute necessity for a gentleman, while an understanding of classical principles of building

[1] Cruickshank.

and design is still essential to an understanding of Wentworth Woodhouse and its Park.

While on the Grand Tour, Rockingham visited Florence, Siena, Rome[2], Lucca Naples, Turin, Milan, Bologna, Venice and Mount Vesuvius, and showed an interest in geology and vulcanology. He also met King George II of Great Britain in Hanover, the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa in Vienna, and King Frederick II of Prussia in Prussia. If travel broadens the mind, we can truly say that his mind was expanded, at a young and impressionable age. Ironically, when he returned to England, his father advised him to avoid 'vicious pleasures [which] ever destroy the Bodily Constitution and choke the Intellectual Spirit'; but the advice came too late, since we know that he had been treated for venereal disease whilst in Padua, though both the diagnosis and the circumstances remain obscure.[3]

In 1750 Rockingham inherited his father's estates, in Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Ireland, together with houses at Wentworth, Malton, Higham Ferrers, Newmarket and London, and Ireland.[4] There was a party in Wentworth Park to celebrate the occasion, when 10,000 guests attended and around 3,000 were admitted to the House. At that time there were 54 full-time staff there, though this increased to 88 by 1767.[5]

Rockingham's name is closely associated with that of his secretary Edmund Burke's, who justified his master's politics in terms of a new definition of 'party'. Previously, the word had been almost synonymous with 'faction'; but Burke defined it as 'a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed,'[6] which is pretty much how we see things today.

Rockingham was much more than just an idle aristocrat. In 1752, he opened a coal mine at Elsecar.[7] This was the same year in which he married Mary Bright – who was also involved in politics (like the more famous Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire); and his successors in the late 18th and early 19th centuries became famous for their involvement in agriculture and industry, canals, turnpike roads and railways, as well as for their interest in politics, and generosity to charitable causes.

Rockingham was both rich[8] and powerful. In his day the landed aristocracy basically controlled Parliament, including the House of Commons, partly because of

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[2] Where he witnessed the annual Curse Against the Heretic; and noted the decline of Jacobitism.

[3] The disease may account for the fact that his marriage, though said to be happy, was childless, and for his early death at the age of 52 Bloy, 32 & Appendix 2.

[4] Rockingham owned 4 Grosvenor Square (now the Italian Embassy) and rented a house in Wimbledon: *The Georgian Group Journal*, vol XIV, 2004: *The Marquis of Rockingham's House at Wimbledon*, Elspeth Veale.

[5] At that time, the Wentworth estates covered 14,206 acres, and Wentworth Park 1,784, while the Irish estates comprised 54,000! - Bloy, 5. For the party (and what was consumed, see Bloy, 36. This included 110 dishes of beef, 55 of mutton, 70 of veal, 40 of chicken and 104 of pork): Bloy, 38.

[6] Owen, 283.

[7] Bloy, 102.

[8] His income was about £40,000 a year in 1750: Bloy, 5.

their ownership of 'rotten boroughs' and partly through its connections with, and influence over, the local gentry. The country had been ruled by the Whigs ever since George I of Hanover came to the throne in 1715, despite two brief and unsuccessful Jacobite risings in 1715 and 1745.

When we speak about 18th century British politics, there is a great danger of thinking about it in terms of the modern system, where the Prime Minister has to be the leader of the largest party in the House of Commons and there are generally only two parties which matter. Neither of these two features of the modern scene was present in Rockingham's time. In truth, he was only ever the leader of his own group of Whigs, and his two governments were coalitions. The figures for the House of Commons in 1767 are revealing

Rockingham 'Whigs'	67 MPs
'King's Friends'	73
Bute's followers	43
Chatham's followers	72
'Tories'	73

In the General Elections of 1768 and 1774, Rockingham's party increased its representation in the Commons to 89 and then around 100; but in 1780, this fell to 60 MPs, no doubt as a result of the polarisation of opinion during the American War of Independence, when many rallied to the government side out of simple patriotism.[9]

The East Front of Wentworth Woodhouse (begun by the 1st Marquis rather than the second) is a classic piece of Palladian architecture; but also a political statement:

> If a house dominated the land, exuded power, voters would be impressed and – more to the point – if huge and vote-winning entertainments were to be given, the house had to be big to accommodate guests and to provide sleeping quarters for those who had travelled far – and their servants. It's now hard to estimate, but it's reasonable to assume that an event like this could result in two or three hundred people sleeping within the house for a night or two.[10]

What was the political situation in the 13 Colonies? Edmund Burke (later made famous as the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*) was the 2nd Marquis's Private Secretary between 1765 and 1782. As such he made two speeches on America, the *Speech on American Taxation* of 1774, and the *Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies* of 1775. In the second of these he spoke of the 'remarkable growth' of the American colonies since 1700, in terms of population, trade and wealth. (The first American Census of 1791 recorded some 4,000,000

[9] Bloy, Chapter 6.
[10] Cruickshank.

people. The population of England and Wales in 1801 was 9,000,000.) Burke thought that we now had to take the Americans seriously, whereas in 1700 they 'served for little more than to amuse [us] with stories of savage men, and uncouth manners'.[11]

More importantly, Burke wrote that: "the fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English Colonies probably than in any other people of the earth." He gave six reasons for this phenomenon, including (1) English descent; (2) longstanding government by popular assemblies; (3) the strong Dissenting tradition in the northern colonies; (4) the slave-owning mentality in the South (which made the whites value their liberty all the more!); (5) education; (6) the remoteness of the Colonies from Westminster and London.

II
The Dispute with George III, 1760-5

As Lord Macaulay's schoolboy used to know (and schoolboys in my day were still taught) 1759 was the 'year of victories', in India and in Canada, which established the first British Empire, courtesy of the heroic efforts of Pitt the Elder, General Wolfe and Clive of India. In that year, the young Marquis of Rockingham already occupied a leading position in Yorkshire, and an important one in national politics; but in 1760 George II died and was succeeded by his grandson George III, who wanted to change the old way of doing things, by breaking the Whig stranglehold on office. As a result, or so the Whigs came to think, the influence of the Crown increased.[12] Or, as Dan Cruickshank summarised it recently:

> The 2nd Marquis perceived in George III a wayward and autocratic propensity that threatened, if fanned by the power-eager Tories, a slide back towards a form of arbitrary monarchy largely ungoverned by parliamentary democracy.

George III appointed his friend and mentor Lord Bute as Prime Minister, and the old Whigs left office or were dismissed. As for Rockingham resigned his post of Lord of the Bedchamber; and in turn George III removed him from his offices of

[11] Interestingly, we know that Rockingham kept deer from America in the menagerie at Wentworth,

[12] Owen, 228. This is the view expressed in Albemarle's commentary on the correspondence he reproduced in his Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham (1852).

Lord Lieutenant of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Lord Lieutenant of the City and County of York, and Vice-Admiral of the North.[13]

The King's view of the position was quite different from that taken by the Whigs. He thought that, under George II, there had been 'a wicked cornering of power' by the King's ministers, and he was fully entitled to resume his traditional power to choose his own ministers. Who was right? As Owen pointed out, there were in fact two views, and ultimately two schools of historiography: the 'Whig' view which originated with Rockingham and Burke, and passed via Lord Macaulay to Erskine May and the two Trevelyans (George Otto and George Macaulay) to Herbert Butterfield and W.R.Fryer; and the 'Tory' view, which was handed down via Adolphus, Croker, and Albert von Ruville, to Lewis Namier, Richard Pares and Romney Sedgwick.[14]

George III has had a particularly bad press in America, where he is generally regarded as a tyrant; but at the time there was little difference of opinion in the U.K. between the King and the majority of MPs at Westminster. They thought that it was the first duty of the colonists to obey the wishes of Her Majesty's ministers; but there were two areas where there was a significant number of Colonists who were not prepared to comply. These related to American expansion to the West of the Appalachian Mountains and the British 'Proclamation Line'; and to the right of the Westminster Parliament to regulate American trade and to tax the Thirteen Colonies (when they had traditionally been allowed to raise their own taxes).

The Seven Years' War of 1756-63 had created a large deficit in the British budget, which any Government would have tried to reduce; and in 1765 the administration headed by George Grenville introduced a Stamp Act, imposing a tax on all documents in the Thirteen Colonies, including newspapers, which was designed to make the Americans pay for their own defence. This produced immediate resistance in America, and the famous rallying cry of 'no taxation without representation' was raised. (It should of course be noted that there were no Americans at Westminster, other than those few who sat for British constituencies).

The Marquis of Rockingham had a number of ways of keeping in touch with American affairs. He was a sociable man who knew many landowners, but also manufacturers involved in the woollen, iron and coal trades in the West Riding of Yorkshire, as well as merchants in the ports and industrial areas of England who traded with the Colonies;[15] and he also got to know several prominent Americans, in particular three who are worth noting:

(1) John Wentworth of New Hampshire, who was the nephew of Benning Wentworth (Governor of that Province between 1741 and 1766). He had

[13] Rockingham became Lord Lieutenant again between 1765 and 1782. In her PhD thesis, Dr Bloy gives an account of his involvement in the suppression of the food riots of 1756 and 1766, in recruiting and the Militia Act of 1757, in the prosecution of offenders guilty of coining and clipping in Halifax.

[14] Owen, 278.

[15] Wilderson, p 76

travelled to England in 1763 to represent his father's interests in the timber industry and was appointed agent for the Province in 1765. In 1764, John Wentworth went to the races at Newmarket, and started placing some bets. The Marquis (who was also a betting man) noticed this; and two men found (for the first time) that they were related, though distantly. They became friends and started a correspondence which lasted for many years.[16]

(2) Barlow Trecothick had been brought up in Massachusetts but settled in London, where he became a merchant and an M.P. for the City. Trecothick wrote to Rockingham about the Stamp Act, was invited to dinner, and the two worked closely together thereafter. Edmund Burke thought that the joint letter which they wrote to merchants trading in the Americas was 'the principal instrument in the happy repeal' which resulted.[17]

(3) Benjamin Franklin, traditionally one of the Founding Fathers of the USA although he was never President spent the best part of twenty years in England, in the 1750s-70s, and represented Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, and Georgia, at Whitehall. In his *Journal*, the American Jonathan Williams recorded that Franklin visited Wentworth Woodhouse at the end of May 1771: 'The next day they changed carriages at Wakefield, stopped for a tour of the Marquis of Rockingham's country estate, and arrived that evening in Sheffield'.[18] In his *Autobiography*, Franklin mentions that he visited an ironworks in Rotherham at this time, possibly Samuel Walkers at Masbrough:[19] "In the afternoon [we went] to inspect the ironworks and manufacture of tin-plate at nearby Rotherham to visit an ironworks where we saw them melting the iron ore and casting pots etc., which is performed as in America. The labourers received 14d per day, their work was extremely hard and in summer time must have been very disagreeable".

Did Franklin see the Marquis, when he visited Wentworth estate? We cannot be sure. He may have done; but he was a polymath and an inventor, as well as a politician, and the journey he made to the North of England in May 1771 seems to have been undertaken with a view to seeing the results of the Industrial Revolution, rather than for any political purpose.

Thus Rockingham was in touch with the Americans, and was aware of their interests; but his stance on the American issue was always a conservative one. He was no rebel, or republican; and he did not want any fundamental change in the

[16] Wilderson, p 56.
[17] Wilderson, p 74.
[18] Journal of Jonathan Williams: see www.founders.archives.gov; and Papers of B.F., William Willcox, New Haven and London, Yale 1974, pp 113-116.
[19] Isaacson, p 253; *Autobiography*, p 68.

relationship between Britain and the Colonies. But he did predict that the Stamp Act would prove to be a mistake; and he played a large part in its repeal.

III
The First Rockingham Administration, 1765-6

In his ground-breaking work on *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1930), Sir Lewis Namier wrote that "Men went into politics to make a figure; and no more dreamt of a seat in Parliament in order to benefit humanity than a child dreams of a birthday cake in order that others may eat it." However, Rockingham was one of the richest men in Britain, and really didn't need the financial rewards of office. In addition, he had a seat in the House of Lords from 1751 and did not need to stand for election to the House of Commons thereafter.

Rockingham was Prime Minister for a year between July 1765 and July 1766 and, according to Paul Langford 'there is not the least substance in the traditional view that Rockingham and his friends came to power pledged to repeal the Stamp Act', the repeal is what he is now most famous for.

The Stamp Act of 1765, enacted by the previous administration, had met with almost universal condemnation in America. In New York it was re-printed and sold in the streets as 'England's folly and America's ruin.' In Philadelphia the guns of royal artillery pieces were spiked. In Boston the flags of the vessels in harbour were flown at half-mast. The American 'Sons of Liberty' used public demonstrations, boycotts, violence, and threats of violence, to ensure that the British tax laws were unenforceable. The most important result was that a Stamp Act Congress in New York City in October 1765 decided on a non-importation agreement - the first step in creating unity between the Thirteen Colonies. The Stamp Act was also unpopular in Britain, for economic reasons. Whether it really led to an economic recession, there were certainly many who believed that it did.

Although most of his income derived from land, Rockingham was intensely interested in trade, and in particular trade with the Americas;[20] but, in order to reach a more informed decision as to how to proceed, he commissioned a report from his friend John Wentworth on American affairs, including in particular, the effects of the Stamp Act on trade. Paul Wilderson has summarised the result:

> John Wentworth recognized that the greatest problem in New England, and in almost all of the other colonies, was a shortage of circulating currency. It was also clear to him that the imposition of a direct tax such as that called for by the stamp tax and the three-pence molasses duty of 1764, if rigorously

[20] Bloy, 391.

> enforced, would "consume every shilling of specie in New England within two years, and will be as effectual in draining them as if it was annihilated…. With all their money gone, colonists would be forced to develop their own manufacturing and would not be able to produce goods for much less than twice the cost of buying them in Britain…. The merchants and manufacturers of England would certainly feel the dire effects of the loss of so valuable a market." [Finally} Wentworth told the marquis of Rockingham that the Stamp Act should be repealed.

Rockingham's government accepted the advice. The matter was debated very intensively by Parliament, but the Rockingham Whigs had the better of the argument, especially because they assembled an impressive amount of evidence in support of it. In particular, John Wentworth, Barlow Trecothick and Benjamin Franklin were lined up to give evidence to the House of Commons, though in the event only Trecothick and Franklin did so.[21] BarlowTrecothick, the leader of the London Merchants, estimated the value of the export trade of Great Britain with the American colonies at £3,000,000 per annum, and the debt owing to London, Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester merchants at the time of his examination at £4,450,000. He pointed specifically to the Stamp Act as a cause of the debt; and predicted that the interference with trade would ultimately result in chronic unemployment and starvation in Britain.

Rockingham and his associates were very successful in managing Parliament, and in organising petitions in favour of repealing the Stamp Act: 26 petitions were sent to the House of Commons, including 15 from textile areas, 5 from the ports and 6 from areas which were home to the metal industries.[22] The repeal of the Stamp Act was duly carried by 275 votes to 167, though it is important to note that many MPs were vigorously opposed to repeal, indeed they regarded it as surrendering to armed force; and Rockingham was only able to achieve repeal by enacting a Declaratory Act at the same time, stating that Westminster reserved the right to legislate for the Colonies in all matters. In Rockingham's view, this right should never be used; but the Declaratory Act nevertheless undid part of the good work which the repeal achieved, in terms of bringing about a true reconciliation between Britiain and America.

Rockingham lost office almost immediately, but not before he had chance to appoint John Wentworth as Governor of New Hampshire and Surveyor General of His Majesty's Forests in North America, positions which Wentworth continued to hold until 1775. Before leaving England to take up his new posts, John Wentworth spent some time in Yorkshire, but at Bretton Hall, rather than Wentworth Woodhouse.[23] In passing we may note that there it was recorded in the Visitor's

[21] Wilderson pp 67, 77.

[22] Watson. Bloy, 396-8.

[23] Wilderson, p 83. Bretton Hall belonged to yet another branch of the prolific Wentworth family.

Book that in 1773 a Mr Green, from Boston in New England visited Wentworth Woodhouse and he was described as 'that married Governor Wentworth'. This would appear to be a curious reference is the marriage of Governor John Wentworth to his cousin Frances Deering Atkinson in New Hampshire in 1769 - something which provoked some scandal at the time, firstly because it took place within three weeks of Frances's first husband's death, and secondly because it was rumoured that she and John Wentworth had been having an affair for some time before that.

The repeal of the Stamp Act did not succeed in its objective of restoring harmony with the Americans; but it was popular on both sides of the Atlantic for a time, because it did restore economic prosperity. According to Albemarle, the editor of the Marquis's correspondence, a deputation of London merchants waited upon Rockingham when he set out for Wentworth after losing office in 1766, and presented him with an address, in which they expressed their gratitude. On his entry into York, he was attended by nearly two hundred gentlemen; and on the next day an address was presented to him by the magistrates and merchants of Leeds. Similar events took place in York, Halifax, Kingston, Hull, and Wakefield.

We should also note that, according to Dr Bloy, the repeal of the Stamp Act was intended to be merely the first stage of a programme which might have set Anglo-American relations, and imperial affairs in general, on an entirely new course: she considers it possible that '[Rockingham's] plan would probably have formed a secure and lasting foundation for continued Anglo-American friendship within the colonial context.'[24]

As it turned out, of course, the Whigs entered a long period of Opposition in 1766, during which they convinced themselves that they had been 'double-crossed over the Stamp Act'. They constructed a theory that George III had never really supported their leader as Prime Minister, and had instead presided over a parallel Cabinet, composed of the King's friends and cronies, while constantly looking for an opportunity to oust the Whigs from the seat of power. They were quite wrong about this; but the myth of the double-cross was one of the foundations on which Rockingham and Burke built support, and indeed gave the very idea of 'party' a respectability which it had not previously enjoyed.[25]

Nevertheless, in America, the repeal of the Stamp Act was the basis of Rockingham's enduring popularity with some Loyalists, at least in some areas. Rockingham County in Virginia was formed in 1778. Rockingham City, the county seat of Richmond County, North Carolina, was named in 1784, while Rockingham County in the same province was formed in 1785. In New Hampshire, Governor John Wentworth created several new counties in 1769 - named after Rockingham himself, Grafton (after one of the secretaries of state in his administration), Hillsborough (after a Secretary of State in the administration which followed, and Strafford (possibly after Rockingham's cousin, the 2nd Earl of the 2nd creation (though

[24] Bloy, 405. See also her very favourable summary at pp 443-4.

[25] *The Eighteenth Century*, 284.

he had been Catholic, Tory and a Jacobite!). In addition, Wentworth House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was named after Governor John Wentworth; and Francestown and Deering, towns in Hillsborough County, were named after the latter's new wife.[26]

Dr Bloy noted that there were other expressions of gratitude by prominent Americans, including Moses Franks and James de Lancy of New York, who both pronounced Rockingham as a 'friend to America.' (She also notes that de Lancy was in any event a friend of the Marquis's. Both loved racing and in 1773 de Lancy begged Rockingham to send him a decent jockey to ride the horses he had bought from the Wentworth Stud!)[27]

IV
The American War of Independence, 1776-1783

The Rockingham Whigs stayed out of office until 1782. The Marquis reckoned there were about 170 MPs who were sympathetic to his point of view; but he could never quite 'pull off' a return to government; and indeed his Whigs now became known as the *enfants perdus* – the lost children – of politics. They fought the General Elections of 1768, 1774 and 1780; but did not improve their position materially; but it must be stressed that they were not like a modern political party. They were not a modern political party, with reliable registers and party discipline in Parliament; and they had no real 'programme' in the modern sense.. Even Rockingham's followers thought it was still wrong in principle to form a 'General Opposition', dedicated to imposing its will on the King on every issue. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Rockingham Whigs took a very different view of the 'American Question' from that taken by the King and (for example) Lord North (who was Prime Minister between 1770 and 17782).

Rockingham was in the fortunate position of not needing the rewards of office; and he was able to endure the long absence from power; but it demoralized some of the Whigs, who even thought of giving up politics altogether. At one point Burke considered an offer to put the affairs of the East India Company in order. On the other hand, Rockingham maintained his interest in racing. In the late 1760s, he wrote from Wentworth:

> Since I came home I found so much real private business and so much amusement in riding about inspecting, farming, and other occupations that I

[26] Wilderson, p 122. New Hampshire had been 'too niggardly to commission a statue or portrait' of Rockingham; and the naming of the counties was very much the work of the Governor.
[27] Bloy, 411.

own I took up such an indolence of mind that I dreaded to write on political matter. Indeed for the last ten days I have had company constantly with me…. I am to set out for York Races tomorrow…"

1776 is famous as the year of the Declaration of Independence; but it was also the year when Rockingham arranged for the very first St Leger to be run, in Doncaster. The race became one of the five Classics in England, eventually rivalling the Derby in terms of popularity.

Meanwhile, what of America? After Rockingham lost office in 1766, Pitt the Elder became Prime Minister again (as Earl of Chatham) but it was Charles Townsend as Chancellor of the Exchequer who now made a second attempt to tax the American Colonists, this time by means of customs duties. These were resisted, as the Stamp Act been; and the majority were repealed, but in a third and final attempt to make the Americans come to heel, Lord North's government enacted the Tea Act of 1773, which provoked the Boston Tea Party in Massachusetts. That in turn led to the Coercive (or 'Intolerable') Acts; clashes between British troops and colonial militias; a Royal Proclamation in August 1775 that America was 'in a state of open and avowed rebellion'; and the Declaration of Independence on 4 July the following year. Meanwhile a second Continental Congress had been convened to co-ordinate the activities of the 13 Colonies.

Rockingham's 'line' in relation to the American question after he lost office was put by his secretary Edmund Burke, in his *Present State of the Nation* (1768). Burke argued that the implied right to legislate for the Colonies, set out in the Declaratory Act of 1766, should be used prudently, for the good of the empire, and not exercised in such a way as to vex the Colonists. But, when the Americans responded by 'boycotting' British goods and officials, and even engaging in armed resistance, neither Burke nor Rockingham could approve. On the other hand, the Marquis's friend Admiral Keppel at first refused a much-coveted command in the Royal Navy because it would involve fighting the Colonists; and his fellow Yorkshireman, Thomas Earl of Effingham, responded to the Boston Tea Party by building Boston Castle in Rotherham - and decreed that 'no tea should ever be drunk' there. More importantly, he resigned his commission in the Army rather than fight the Colonists.[28] In America this was commemorated by the naming of a galley and later a frigate (the USS *Effingham*) in 1777, as well as in the names of Effingham, New Hampshire, and Effingham Counties in Georgia and Illinois. At home, these acts made the Rockingham Whigs deeply unpopular with a large section of the political nation.

The Declaration of Independence contains a long list of 'abuses and usurpations, designed to bring the colonies back under despotic rule'. The

[28] *The Lord Effingham and the American Colonies*, Hilda Endbring Feldhake, 1976, Effingham, Illinois, archive.org, which reproduces his letter of resignation and details of the speech he made in the House of Lords, justifying his action.

'Indictment of the royal government' included the complaint that George III had 'excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages(!) whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.' It concluded that 'A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.' The Americans also complained about the behaviour of the British Parliament: "Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. They have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity."

Ironically, the reputation of the Rockingham Whigs had taken a hit in Britain, when fighting broke out, since war initially popular with some. 'The merchants,' wrote Burke, 'begin to snuff the cadaverous haut gout of lucrative war: the freighting business never was so lively, on account of the prodigious taking up for transport service; great orders for provisions of all kinds, new clothing for the troops, put life into the woollen manufactures.' Meanwhile, the country gentlemen were deluded by the ministerial assurance that American taxation would relieve them of part of the land-tax, and many people were pleased at the prospect of transferring a portion of their burdens to other shoulders. The fighting itself led to a polarisation of opinion, with some British officers expressing extreme views about the Rebels, while Dr Johnson expressed a common British view that the Americans were hypocrites, when he asked "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty amongst the drivers of negroes?"[29] Lastly, many British MPs blamed the Marquis of Rockingham and his friends for the crisis, taking the view that they had been guilty of appeasement when they repealed the Stamp Act, and this had encouraged the Americans to further aggression.

In his *Speech on Conciliation* in 1775 Burke had revealed the depth of hostility towards the Colonists in Britain, when he referred to two solutions to the problem which were being talked about in Westminster at that time. One was for the British to abolish slavery in the southern colonies. Burke rejected this idea out of hand and his reasons seems curious today: "Slaves are often much attached to their masters. A general wild offer of liberty would not always be accepted. History furnishes few instances of it." The second solution proposed by some British politicians was to stop the Americans from spreading out of the Thirteen Colonies and into the West. Burke's view of this is also interesting. He thought it would achieve the opposite of what it set out to do:

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[29] For example, Major Henry Blunt: 'These people, mostly of them originally Scotch or Irish, have united in marriage with French, Germans and Dutch and from them have sprung the high-spirited race that boast so much of British Blood and British Liberty, and have the folly and impudence to talk of *chastising* Great Britain'; Earl Percy: The people here are a set of sly, artful, hypocritical rascals, cruel, and cowards. I must own I cannot but despise them completely.' See Mark Urban, 10, 15.

> Many of the people in the back settlements are already little attached to particular situations. Already they have topped the Appalachian Mountains. From thence they behold before them an immense plain, one vast, rich, level meadow; a square of five hundred miles. Over this they would wander without a possibility of restraint; they would change their manners with the habits of their life; would soon forget a government by which they were disowned; would become hordes of English Tartars; and, pouring down upon your unfortified frontiers a fierce and irresistible cavalry.

In fact, the War with the Americans went badly enough. Early in 1778, France signed a treaty of alliance with the United States and Spain and the Dutch Republic joined in on the American side, while Britain remained friendless. This is not the place to include details of the fighting; but it is important to make the point that in 1779 there was a real danger that Britain herself would be invaded; and as Lord Lieutenant and commander of the West Riding militia, Rockingham was actively involved in defending Hull against the attack of the American privateer John Paul Jones. (He deployed several cannon there, made in Walker's forges in Rotherham).[30]

The only victory scored by the Whigs in the late 1770s was a legal one. In 1778 Rockingham's friend and associate Admiral Keppel was tried for desertion after the battle of Ushant. Rockingham suspected that the prosecution was politically motivated. The trial was held in Portsmouth and Rockingham took a house there, where Keppel lived, and this became a temporary H.Q. for the Whigs. The Admiral's acquittal was the occasion for a national celebration; and Rockingham determined to erect a column, with a gigantic figure of Keppel on top, on the horizon of Wentworth Park. The column was built, but without the figure. It can still be seen, though no longer ascended.

Meanwhile, as Governor of the province of New Hampshire, John Wentworth continued to offer advice to Rockingham, though he was now at daggers drawn with the New Hampshire Assembly. He remained a Loyalist, but feared that the British government looked increasingly oppressive to the majority of Colonists. He therefore thought it was a mistake for the British to deploy troops in support of the civil authorities; but, at the same time, he courted unpopularity by trying to bolster royal authority - for example by issuing a proclamation against harbouring soldiers who had deserted from the British Army; and by fostering the Anglican Church in America.

At the same time Wentworth knew full well that the Marquis was interested in other things apart from politics. He collected flora and fauna and sent samples to Rockingham, including some maple syrup, and a pair of mooses, while his wife

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[30] Bloy's thesis, chapter 4; Guest, *Historic Notices of Rotherham*, 674. For a full account by Rockingham himself, see his letter to his wife of 23 September 1779 at pp 381-3, volume I, of Albemarle's *Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham,* (Richard Bentley, London 1852, Elibron Classics) 2007.

Frances sent some wild birds to the Marchioness. (It would appear from Dr Bloy's thesis that at least one moose was kept at Grosvenor Square in London, rather than in Wentworth Park, where one would have thought there was more room).[31]

Eventually, the activities of the republicans in New England forced John Wentworth to flee to Nova Scotia in Canada in 1775; and, in 1778, he came to England, where he once again came under Rockingham's patronage, as he had in the early 1760s. After the Marquis's death, in 1784, he returned to Canada, becoming Surveyor General of the King's Woods there and, in 1791, Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia.[32]

V

The Second Rockingham Administration of 1782

After Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington in October 1781, the House of Commons voted to end the American War, Lord Shelburne negotiated a transfer of power, and Rockingham saw the King. His policy was not to accept office unless George III agreed to his choice of ministers and his choice of policies, including no veto on the independence of the Colonies, and some measure of 'economic' (rather than radical) parliamentary reform. Historians disagree as to whether the King really agreed to these terms; but, at any rate, Rockingham became Prime Minister. However, his new Cabinet was equally divided between his own supporters and Shelburne's, while the final member was a royal observer whose first loyalty was to George III, rather than to any politician. So the administration was built on shaky foundations. In addition, Rockingham died after only fourteen weeks in office; and this makes it difficult to assess his place in history. Notably, the Treaties of Paris, by which Britain recognised the independence of the American states and returned Florida to Spain, were signed in 1782 and 1783, after his death. We are left to wonder about what would have happened if Rockingham had lived longer, or been a more skilful politician. Would there ever have been a USA? Would the Colonists have settled for less than full independence, if the British negotiators had taken a harder line? Or was it inevitable that the colonies would go their own way, given that 'dominion status' within the Empire was as yet unheard of?

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[31] Wilderson, pp 201-2; Bloy, 83 (for the moose).

[32] It is widely believed that Sir John's wife Frances became the mistress of Prince William, later King William IV (1830-37). Frances died in Sunninghill, Surrey, in 1813. The couple had a son, born in Rockingham County, N.H. in 1775, called Charles Mary Wentworth(!) after the 2nd Marquis and his Marchioness. He died without issue in England in 1844, leaving 'portraits and rings of the late Marquis of Rockingham' to his relatives Earl Fitzwilliam and Viscount Milton. Her story is told in *The Governor's Lady*, by Thomas Raddall (1992).

No-one doubts that on a personal level, Rockingham was a likeable and sociable man, who had the ability to 'get' on, even with those who disagreed with him; and he was also generous - responding favourably, for example, to many requests for financial assistance from dispossessed Loyalists in America;[33] but contemporaries were divided as to Rockingham's abilities and achievements as a politician, often on party lines. Horace Walpole, who had always deprecated the Marquis, now wrote that he "triumphed without the shadow of compromise of any sort [and] deserves all praise and all support." The obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* stated that Rockingham had been brought down in 1766 by 'the system of the Earl of Bute'; and that his death had 'deprived the country of his services just when their consequence and value was beginning to be felt'; but the truth is that Rockingham was loved by the Whigs and hated by the Tories. For an example of the intense hostility felt by some, one has only to consider Gillray's vicious cartoon of May 21 1782, entitled *Evacuation before Resignation*.

Historians have also been divided. Rockingham's modern American biographer, Ross J.S.Hoffman wrote this in 1973:

> [The] Rockingham administration was flawed from the start by the long-enduring jealousies of Rockinghamites and Chathamites, weakened by lack of royal confidence, facing the same Parliament which had so reluctantly withdrawn its support from North, and facing too the prospect of having to do many disagreeable and unpopular things in the liquidation of an unsuccessful war.

On the other hand, Dr Bloy argued in 1986 that Rockingham was a chronic invalid for much of his career; and that he at least held the Whig party together, so that lived to fight another day, while so far as America was concerned, he never ceased to argue for reconciliation during the 1770s, when this was not a popular view, and it was not in his own interest to refuse office (though it was offered to him on at least one critical occasion). In 1989 Paul Langford wrote that Rockingham had changed the course of history, by forcing the King to agree to independence for the American Colonies, granting legislative independence to the Irish Parliament in Dublin, and enacting various measures of 'economical reform' in Westminster.[34]

J.B.Owen wrote that, at least in the mid 1760s, Rockingham was

> A shockingly poor speaker, an inept politician, dedicated more to the race-track than the Cabinet board [who] originally had no clear ideas of importance on any political issue.

[33] Bloy, 442.

[34] Bloy, especially p 432b. See also her article *In Spite of Medical Help, The Puzzle of an 18th Century Prime Minister's Illness*, Medical History, 1990, 34, 178-184; Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People'*, New Oxford History of England, Oxford 1989.

On the charge of ineptitude, Rockingham's first Cabinet in 1765 was said to be 'a mere lute-string administration, pretty summer wear which will never survive the winter', while Owen accused him of putting himself in a minority in his own Cabinet in 1782; but the same historian also showed that the way in which ministers were appointed in the 18th century differed markedly from what happens now. In those days, the monarch had a real choice of Prime Minister (and was not confined by convention to the leader of the largest party in the Commons); but he also chose the other ministers too; and Rockingham's biggest problem was that George III preferred Shelburne, and his associates, to Rockingham and his. Moreover, Rockingham was the leader of a political party, before the idea of 'party' became respectable, and at a time when the parties, such as they were, were not tightly organised, and there were no Whips. Indeed, he did not even know how many MPs could be relied on to follow his line on even the most important issues.[35]

From the British point of view, Rockingham is also accused of being half-hearted about parliamentary reform; and it is true that he disliked John Wilkes's brand of Radicalism, just as he opposed the Yorkshire reformer Christopher Wyvill; but this was because he was a Whig of the 'old school', who believed in reducing the alleged power of the Crown in the House of House of Commons, rather than in changing the distribution of seats, or extending the franchise. He was neither a Radical, nor a democrat (indeed 'democracy' remained a dirty word in Britain as late as 1884).[36]

From the American point of view, it is said that Rockingham's support for the American cause was only half-hearted; but this again ignores the realities of British politics. At all times prior to 1782, George III, and the majority of the House of Commons, took the view that the Americans should do as they were told; and on the other hand should not (and could not) expect to elect MPs to the Westminster House of Commons. Rockingham himself was opposed to independence for the American colonies until such time as it became inevitable, because of military defeat. He agreed with George III that in theory, the Americans owed the monarchy a duty of obedience. He simply took the view that it was best to refrain from imposing new taxes. If this is regarded as being 'half-hearted', then he is guilty as charged; but - to repeat the point - he was a Whig, not a Radical.

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[35] Butterfield pointed out that in 1767, Rockingham thought he could rely on 121 MPs, whilst the Duke of Newcastle put the figure at 101. The two lists have only 77 names in common: Butterfield, *George III and the Historians*, Cassell, 1957, 270.

[36] The Rev. Christopher Wyvill headed the Yorkshire Association and took part in the petitioning movement of 1778-9, which advocated more regular elections than the Septennial Act provided for, and other alterations to the Constitution. It failed for lack of sufficiently wide support. Rockingham's policy of economical reform was embodied in, for example, the Civil Establishment Act of 1782, which reduced the amount voted by Parliament for the Civil List. The Rockingham Whigs thought that George III used this to buy votes in the House of Commons: Owen, 225, 237.

Over 50 years ago, G.H.Guttridge summarised the problem which American resistance presented to British politicians in the 1760s and '70s. Rockingham's party sympathised with the Americans, when it came to the question of taxes, direct and indirect; but they also believed in the supremacy of the Westminster Parliament. However, the Americans had grown used, over many years, to governing themselves, and resented interference by Westminster. Eventually, coercive measures led them to reject the sovereignty of the British Parliament altogether, along with that of the Crown. Accordingly, it is doubtful if the Marquis would have been able to achieve any different outcome, even if he had enjoyed better health, and lived longer. The American problem was insoluble.

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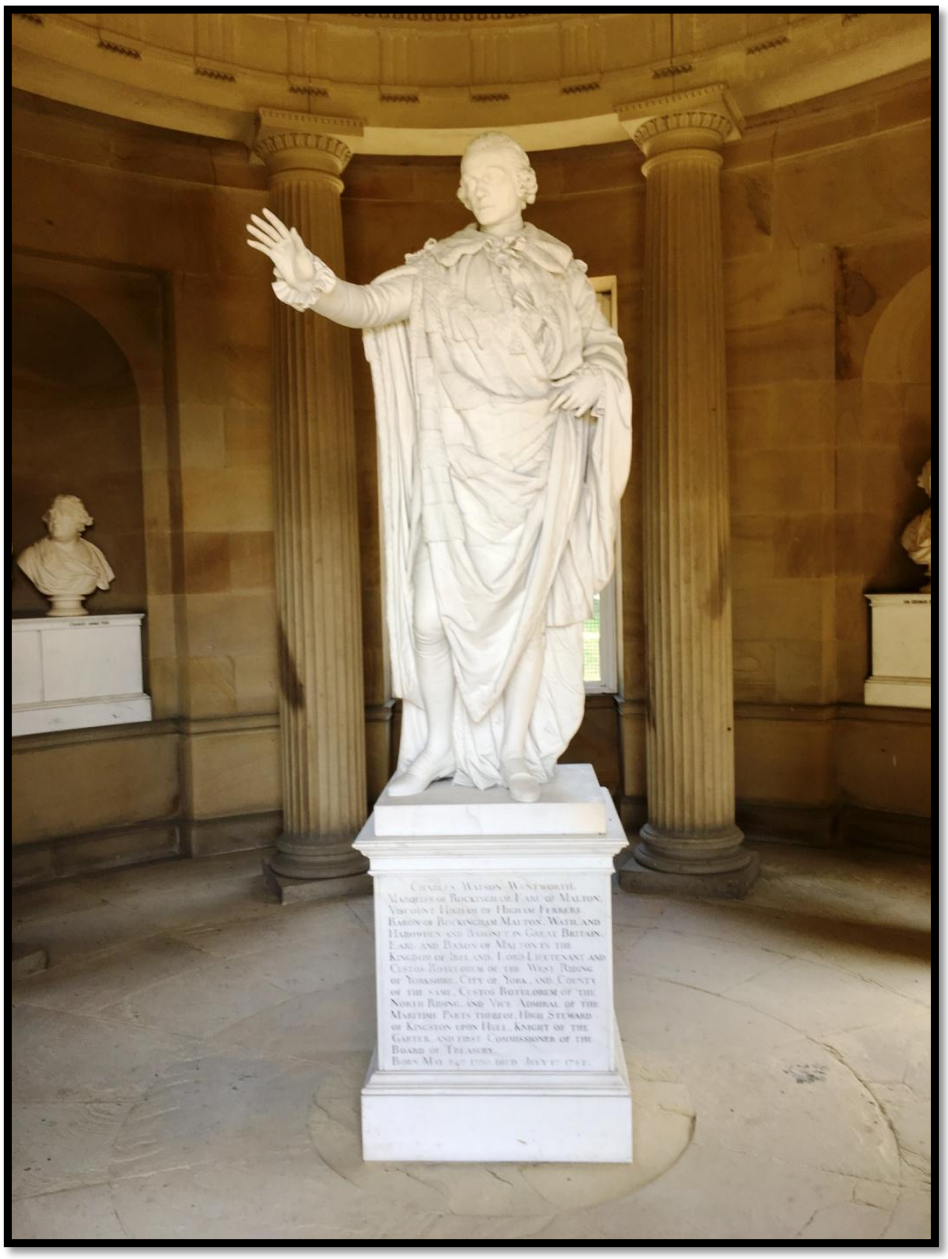
The Rockingham Monument in Wentworth Park (1)



The Rockingham Monument in Wentworth Park (2)

Gillray's *Evacuation Before Resignation*, 1782