

THE VIRGINIA TRADE OF THE FIRM OF
SPARLING AND BOLDEN, OF LIVERPOOL,
1788-99

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I THE LETTER BOOK

THE Letter Book, now in Liverpool Central Public Library, is the last of a series of correspondence copy books of the firm of John Sparling and William Bolden of Liverpool; one third of it is unused. It was preserved in the family of Miss F. M. Brown of Birkenhead, and it is not known what connection her family might have had with the firm.

It contains over 700 letters, 163 of which were addressed to the firm of John Lawrence and Co., of Norfolk, Virginia, in which Sparling and Bolden were partners. A much smaller number, 27, were addressed to the firm of Sparling, Lawrence and Co., of Suffolk, Virginia; the manager of this concern, holding a quarter share of the business, was George Sparling, a younger brother of John. John Lawrence was supposed to be in control of both Virginia firms. The other letters in the Letter Book were addressed mostly to the suppliers of goods exported to Virginia, to the London correspondents of Sparling and Bolden, and to other merchants with whom they had business; 39 letters were addressed to Virginia men other than the partners. The greatest number of letters, apart from those to John Lawrence, were sent to Sargent, Chambers and Co., the chief London agents of Sparling and Bolden, and 39 went to John Sowerby and Co., of London, their chief insurance brokers.

George Sparling died in 1791, after which the Suffolk business was closed down. In 1793, William Bolden decided to retire; the decision was announced by Sparling and Bolden as follows:

To John Lawrence, 22 July 1793.

"[Owing to the effects of war on the financial situation] it would be very pleasing to us to have as many remittances made as you can as shortly as possible, and particularly as our W[illiam] B[olden] has determined to retire from all business whatever at the end of this year, for his state of health has been so very indifferent for these two years past, occasioned chiefly by a nervous complaint which he is fearful will be difficult to remove unless by changing the scene of life he has

been so long accustomed to, which the medical people he has consulted advises him to do, as they think there's a probability of his health being in some measure restored by it. His nerves have been so weak for a long time by past that very little writing, reading or hurry of business of any kind, affects him so much, as to make it very unpleasant to him to give proper attention to the last."⁽¹⁾

On 20 September, John Sparling, writing "for self and W.B.", added a postscript, stating that Bolden had "been at Blackpool these three weeks by past", but little else was written relating to his health. The correspondence with John Lawrence thereafter was concerned with the realisation of the assets of the firm in Virginia, and on 10 October 1797 Lawrence was told to close down the business as soon as possible. After about 1795, therefore, the number of letters in each year begins to decline and there are few letters in 1798 and 1799.

II THE PARTNERS AND THEIR EARLY BUSINESS CAREER UNTIL 1775

The families of Sparling and Bolden both originated near Lancaster, in the eighteenth century a small port with a considerable trade to the West Indies. John Sparling was born at Bolton-le-Sands in 1731, the son of a yeoman. It was not uncommon for young men of such stock to go into seafaring or into trade, and one of his uncles, John, was a mariner, as perhaps was William; of these, John Sparling was recorded as a freeman of Lancaster in 1733-4, as a mariner, and the will of William Sparling of H.M.S. *Hampton Court*, proved in 1749, mentioned this John Sparling, his sister Elizabeth and his brother-in-law John Johnson as executors. But the rest of the family, including some of the brothers of John Sparling of Liverpool, were concerned with country pursuits, and were entered when freemen of Lancaster as yeoman, tanner or skinner. But how John Sparling the merchant came to be connected with trade in Liverpool instead of in Lancaster is unknown.

The Bolden family took its name from the farm of Boldens in Ellel, just south of Lancaster, and the early eighteenth-century members of the family were tanners there. The compilation of the family tree is complicated by the fact that the name was frequently written as Baldwin, the name of William's father, also William, being written so when he was recorded as freeman of Lancaster in 1717-18, and in the Lancaster Parish

⁽¹⁾ Spelling and capitalisation in the manuscript have been modernised, and most abbreviations expanded. Some punctuation has been added, and occasionally long sentences (such as the above) have been broken up, to make the sense clear.

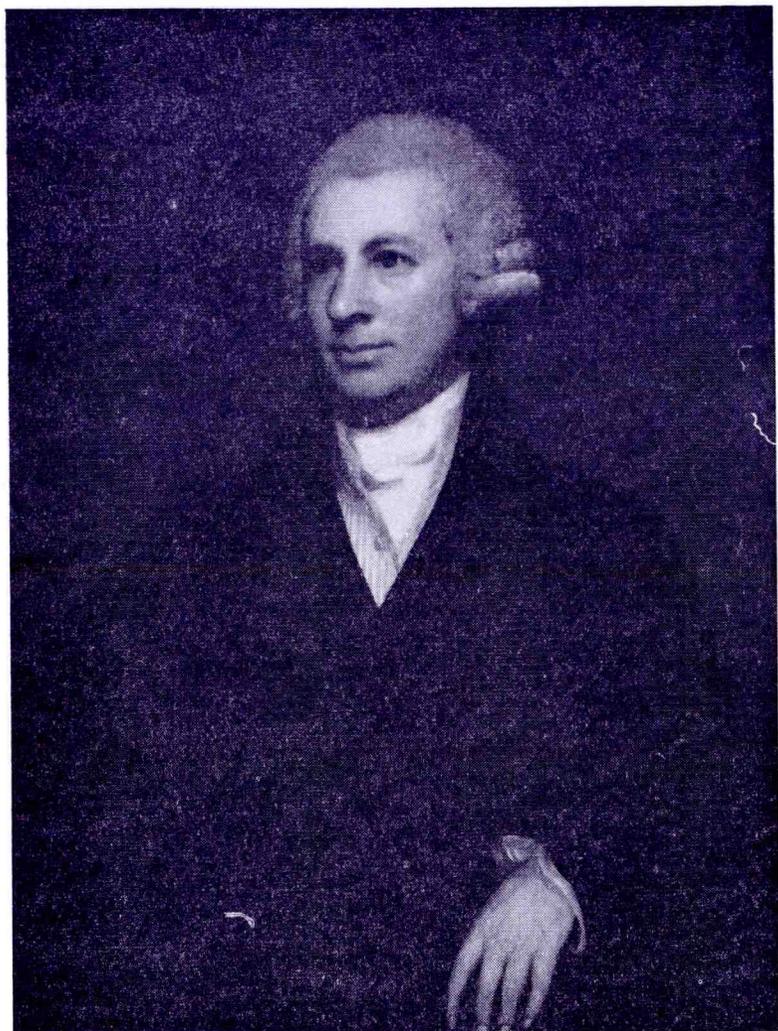


Plate 14.

JOHN SPARLING, 1731-1800
(By Romney)

Register on his marriage, though he signed the marriage bond as Bolden. The family tradition, as recorded in Burke's *Landed Gentry*, is that William senior moved to Liverpool, but a Lancaster poll book of 1768 describes William "Baldwin", freeman of 1717-18, as then of Cockerham (the parish which includes Elle), husbandman, and "William Boulden of Cockerham" was buried there on 14 July 1774.⁽²⁾ No trace has been found in Liverpool freemen records of William senior, but when on 5 July 1769 William the merchant was admitted freeman the Liverpool Town Books then recorded that he claimed the status by "servitude", this showing that he had served an apprenticeship there. His brother Edward, freeman of Lancaster in 1761-2 (entered as Baldwin), was in Liverpool and described as a cooper by the time of the 1768 election at Lancaster. Letters of administration were taken out for his estate at Liverpool in 1770, John Sparling and William Bolden being bound with his widow.

How the partners came together in business is unknown, but they were together as merchants of Norfolk in Virginia by 5 February 1759, when Bolden registered the brigantine *Hannah* of 100 tons as owned by himself, Sparling and also Samuel Shaw, a merchant of Liverpool (a notable slave trader). These three were also part-owners of another *Hannah*, of 140 tons, registered by Shaw at Liverpool on 18 February 1764. Sparling and Bolden alone were part-owners of four other vessels registered in Virginia in 1761, 1762 and 1763, of 90, 120, 100, and 120 tons respectively; these, with the two *Hannahs*, are proved to have traded to Liverpool, by the entries made for them in the Liverpool Plantation Registers.⁽³⁾ Sparling and Bolden were also in 1762 part-owners with Thomas Newton and Co., of Norfolk, of a slaving sloop.⁽⁴⁾ This represents a considerable investment in shipping, and shows that the firm of Sparling and Bolden was already prosperous. The date of the return of John Sparling to Liverpool, after thirteen years in Virginia,⁽⁵⁾ is established by his purchase of the freedom of

⁽²⁾ Lancashire Record Office, Bishop's Transcripts for Cockerham parish.

⁽³⁾ The Virginia registrations were copied in the Liverpool Plantation Registers in January 1760, July 1761, August 1763, October 1763, and December 1764 respectively. The registers at Liverpool Custom House have been inspected by kind permission of H. M. Commissioners of Customs, and the Collector at Liverpool.

⁽⁴⁾ E. Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America*, Vol. III (1932), p. 149; cf. p. 232, for sale of a slave cargo by Sparling and Bolden.

⁽⁵⁾ See Sparling's evidence in 1785 to the Commissioners assessing the claims for war losses of American loyalists, Public Record Office, Audit Office papers, 12/54, f.359. I owe this reference to the Audit Office papers to the Virginia Colonial Records Project.

Liverpool for 50 guineas; he was admitted on 5 December 1764. A letter in reply to a claim for payment of a debt gives evidence of the change in the title of the Virginia business; Sparling and Bolden wrote:

To W. A. Bayley of Norfolk, 31 October 1788.

"Our concern in *Virginia* ended the 1st May 1765, and by our books as well as the accounts you've sent us, it appears that everything was settled and paid up to that time, when . . . Mr. John Lawrence [was] commencing a partner with us, under the firm of Bolden, Lawrence and Co."

Sparling had evidently returned to England permanently, for he also became a freeman of Lancaster in 1766-7, and in August 1766 married his first wife, Jane Green, of Slyne, near Lancaster, probably a member of a local yeoman family. Bolden presumably returned to Liverpool later. When he registered in Virginia the *Hope*, of 100 tons, on 29 October 1765 (copied in Liverpool in January 1769), he described himself as resident in Norfolk, and Sparling as resident in Liverpool. However, when Sparling registered the *Fanny*, of 100 tons, in Liverpool on 7 December 1767, both he and Bolden were described as being "of Liverpool".

Between the 1765 registration in Virginia, and 1773, there were 21 other registrations covering 15 vessels in which Sparling and Bolden had interests. Most of them were held in partnership with other merchants. One was James Greenhow, about whom little has been found in connection with Liverpool; but John Sparling's second marriage was to Elizabeth, daughter of John Greenhow, of Slyne. One group of co-owners was the firm of William Shepherd and Thomas Langton, of Kirkham, north-west of Preston, who were linen and twine manufacturers; after 1771, the firm included John Birley.⁽⁶⁾ Langton, Birley and Co. supplied Sparling and Bolden with exports to Virginia during the period covered by the Letter Book.

One of their vessels was the *Juba*, of 200 tons, registered in 1771, but on a voyage of 1774 a slave trader. The Letter

⁽⁶⁾ Other Liverpool owners were Edward Mason, Cornelius Bourne, William Orange, and Thomas and John Yates. See the Liverpool Plantation Registers: *Martha*, 100 tons, 4 August 1769; *Marcia*, 70 tons, 29 July 1771; another *Marcia*, 130 tons, 27 April 1773; *Juba*, 17 June 1771. There may have been other vessels so owned, since there is a gap in the registers between 1773 and 1779.

The date and the place of Sparling's second marriage have not been traced, but his eldest son, William, was born in 1777. See pp. 2-5, and family tree, in Mrs. E. F. Cunliffe, *Pages from the Life of John Sparling of Petton* (in Shropshire, grandson of John Sparling the merchant), (Edinburgh, 1904). A microfilm of the portions of the book with Liverpool interests is in the Liverpool Central Public Library, together with similar portions of Mrs. Cunliffe's other book, *Fifty Three Years of Sunshine, Storm and Rain*, (London, 1901). I am much indebted to Mrs. M. Cunliffe-Fraser for access to these two books.

Book has details of attempts to recover the proceeds of the sale of slaves in Jamaica, because only one of the three bills of exchange, each of £1,533 18s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., was actually paid. Ten shillings in the pound on the debt and interest on the unpaid sum was eventually accepted. A more important slaving connection was with the Liverpool family of Blundell, of whom Samuel Shaw, the partner with Sparling and Bolden in shipping in the early 1760s, was a relation by marriage. Jonathan Blundell held shares with Sparling and Bolden in four vessels, and his brother Bryan in three of these; also William Crosbie junior, another Blundell relation by marriage, held shares in three of these vessels. One of the vessels was called the *Bolden*, first registered in 1768, and another was the *Blundell*, registered in 1772. John Elworthy, master of the *Bolden*, and John Dawson, master of the *Blundell*, were part-owners of these vessels and of the *Friendship*, first registered in 1768. Sparling and Bolden were obviously well connected in Liverpool shipping circles. In addition to the vessels mentioned, they registered in their joint names another *Bolden* in 1767, and the *Betsey*, the *Sparling* and the *Nancy* between 1768 and 1773. Also Bolden registered in Virginia in 1766 the *Pearl*, with John Lawrence and two other Norfolk merchants as part-owners, and in 1773 John Lawrence registered the *Venus* in Virginia with Sparling and Bolden as partners.⁽⁷⁾

After Bolden's return to Liverpool, the firm in Virginia was left under the direction of John Lawrence; there were two branches, one at Norfolk under Lawrence, and one at Suffolk under George Sparling. The partners also held three quarters of the firm of John Holloway and Co., of Petersburg, Virginia; but no letters were addressed to this firm in the period of the Letter Book, and there are only a few references to uncollected debts owing to that firm, with no significant details.

The firm was obviously prosperous before the American War of Independence. Sparling could spare time for public office as one of the commissioners of the watch (they being among "the most substantial inhabitants of the town") who co-operated with the Recorder and the J.P.s of Liverpool, and also to

⁽⁷⁾ See letters to Langton, Birley and Co., 8 May 1790; to William Daggors of Jamaica, 11 August 1790, 20 February 1791, 16 October 1792; and to Sargent, Chambers and Co., of London, 26 September and 9 October 1791. See also Liverpool Plantation Registers: *Bolden*, 200 tons, 27 May 1767; *Bolden*, 130 tons, 14 January and 20 July 1768, 7 March 1770, 7 March 1772; *Greyhound*, 40 tons, 2 June 1767; *Friendship*, 70 tons, 5 December 1768, 16 May 1770, 13 April 1772; *Blundell*, 120 tons, 7 March 1772; *Betsey*, 120 tons, 25 August 1768, 13 August 1771, 12 March 1773; *Sparling*, 160 tons, 13 July 1772; *Nancy*, 16 June 1773. The register of *Pearl* was copied at Liverpool in September 1772 and that of *Venus* in July 1773.

serve as a member of Liverpool Corporation. It was in this period that he bought St. Domingo House, with its surrounding estate, in Everton, for £3,470. In 1771 he became a freeman of the African Company of merchants and regularly attended its meetings held yearly to elect the three representatives on the central committee in London; he missed only three meetings before 1788, attending his last in 1798, two years before his death.⁽⁸⁾ Bolden seems to have been much less prominent, though he was a member of a Liverpool Chamber of Commerce committee in 1775.⁽⁹⁾

III THE RESULTS OF THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The first and obvious result of the outbreak of war was that no debts in America owed to Sparling and Bolden, or to their Virginia partners, could be collected. For Virginia merchants in Britain this appears to have been more serious than for merchants dealing with other of the Thirteen Colonies. When British merchants trading with America before 1776 began to put pressure on the British government to negotiate with the United States government on the question, a list of claims was made out in 1791 with the debts in Virginia said to amount to £2,305,408; next was South Carolina, owing £687,953, Maryland with £517,455, and North Carolina with £379,344. The rest were all below £300,000.⁽¹⁰⁾

Sparling and Bolden and their partners in America submitted a number of claims under the names of their various firms: Sparling and Bolden, Bolden Lawrence and Co., John Lawrence and Co., and also John Holloway and Co. of Petersburg, in which Lawrence, Sparling and Bolden held a quarter share each. When a committee of American merchants was set up, Sparling and Bolden wrote on 23 December 1789 to Duncan Campbell, its chairman, that they were owed by residents in the United States before 1 January 1776 a sum of £1,588 15s. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., all good debts at that date, the sum stated not including interest since 1 January 1776, and not including the debts of partner-

⁽⁸⁾ See *Liverpool Vestry Books, 1681-1832*, Vol. I (1912), *passim*; Liverpool Town Books, *passim*, for his membership of the Corporation; R. Syers *History of Everton* (1830), for St. Domingo House; MS. Committee Book of the African Company of merchants trading from Liverpool, 1750-1820, in Liverpool Central Public Library. A summary of his career is in G. Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers* (1897), p. 93.

⁽⁹⁾ See R. Brooke, *Liverpool . . . During the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century* (1853), p. 232.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See S. F. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, revised edition, Yale University Press (1962), p. 140; Appendix IV deals with the position in American law of British creditors.

ships then carried on in America. To confirm the amounts owed to the Virginia partners, Lawrence was asked on 15 December 1789 to send the relevant details, including those for Sparling, Lawrence and Co. George Sparling replied first, because Sparling and Bolden were already questioning the profitability of the Suffolk concern, and had already demanded detailed accounts. They acknowledged George Sparling's letter on 20 March 1790, but without quoting a figure.

Lawrence's accounts were acknowledged only on 25 February 1792, after many reminders, but again give no figure: it is mentioned as "a very considerable sum" and Lawrence was asked to send attested copies of such accounts as were owed by men resident in Britain by 1792. In the letters the only figures which appear to relate to the debts owed in the United States are those given in a letter to Lawrence of 8 February 1790; after quoting the account current of Lawrence with Sparling and Bolden, showing £5,326 in their favour, the letter goes on to quote Lawrence's "old account" as showing £8,397 in their favour, and Bolden, Lawrence and Co.'s account as showing £13,861 in their favour. To judge from a similar reference on 29 July 1789, which does not give figures, these accounts were increased by interest added every year. On 12 July 1792 the accounts of Holloway and Co., of Petersburg, were acknowledged, and noted as being in Lawrence's opinion mostly bad; Sparling and Bolden thought, however, that they surely must have been good on 1 January 1776. Other letters refer to paper money held chiefly by George Sparling, apparently useless since the war, but it was considered that the amount it represented should be included among the debts due at the outbreak of war; however, no figure is stated.

The Letter Book gives only fragmentary evidence of the sort of debts owed. A letter to John Couper of Virginia on 6 July 1790 acknowledged a bill of exchange of £150 to the credit of Scott, Irwin and Couper, and the news that the balance of the account was to be paid after "so many years" was obviously received with some relief. But there are letters to Lawrence on 27 February 1797, quoting the debt still remaining as £535 10s. 7d., with interest to 1 January 1797 of £624, and on 10 October 1797, showing that part of the debt dated back to 1774; it is not clear whether this debt was ever paid. Robert Shedden and Sons, however, did pay; their bill for six barrels of pork delivered by John Lawrence on 14 September 1775, and a balance due on other accounts to Lawrence of £5 8s. 8d. at about the same time, was sent by Sparling and Bolden on 31 October 1796, and they wrote on 7 November to say they

had drawn on the firm, now in London, a bill for £18 2s. 11d. in sterling, at an exchange rate of 25 per cent for Virginia currency, as ruling in 1775. But Shedden and Sons refused to pay interest, though the debt had been outstanding for 21 years! From 1795, when the Jay Treaty was being negotiated and prospects of collecting debts in the United States seemed better, there are many references to problems of debt collecting either there or in Britain; Lawrence was reproved on 10 July 1795 for not having sent details of some of the debts to Liverpool seven years earlier, so that proceedings could have been started in Britain immediately.

The problem of collecting debts in the U.S.A. was complicated because war-time legislation in various states forbade any action by British subjects to recover debts. Since the Virginian planters and merchants owed so much to British merchants or their agents, they seem to have been reluctant to return to normal trading. In the first letter in the Letter Book to John Lawrence, on 28 January 1788, Sparling and Bolden wrote "We are anxious to hear what your Assembly has done about repealing the laws relative to the recovery of debts in your state due to British subjects". And in the next letter:

To John Lawrence, 11 March 1788.

"We are sorry to find your legislature have done nothing about repealing the laws relative to the recovery of British debts, notwithstanding most of the other American states have complied with the requisition of Congress respecting the same. Surely at this, the people of this country will not be so mad as [to] send any more of their property into your state or give one shilling credit to any person resident therein."

It was in view of this difficulty that, after receiving George Sparling's accounts early in 1790, Sparling and Bolden were so critical of his method of disposing of his British goods:

To John Lawrence, 15 March 1790.

"Indeed from the very long list of outstanding debts there [at Suffolk], it looks as if the chief part of the dry goods they [Sparling, Lawrence and Co.] sold was on credit, which we think a hazardous business as things are at present situated in the American states where we suppose no British subject can yet recover a debt by law."⁽¹⁾

When Virginia had repealed the laws about debts the difficulties were not ended:

To John Lawrence, 25 February 1792.

"[Lawrence is asked to send details of pre-war debts to be forwarded eventually to the British government] yet whether it will be of any significance or not we really cannot form the least judgement about at present. However there appears but little hopes of recovering anything on your side by your account and from the proceedings and continued delays of the Federal Court in your State."

⁽¹⁾ See below p. 144 for complaints about George Sparling's sales on credit.

The Court had to decide not only on payment of the original debt, but also on the question of interest; Maryland, according to a letter to Lawrence on 15 February 1791, had passed a law saying that pre-war debts should be paid without any interest charged for the period of hostilities. From the time the Virginia federal court made a decision, the tone of Sparling and Bolden's letters became more hostile to the citizens and government of the United States for allowing such prolonged delay:

To John Lawrence, 16 August 1793.

We find your Federal Court in June last determined unanimously that the inhabitants of your state should pay the old debts due from them to British subjects, but that the matter of interest thereon was left undecided till the Court in October next. . . [we] hope you'll now lose no time in endeavouring to recover every thing possible to be got, as don't see *any person whatever* has the least right to further indulgence, for it's very clear no one would ever pay a farthing of the old debts without being compelled by law to do it."

25 March 1794.

"We notice all you say . . . relative to the British *old debts*, which by [y]our account there seems but little prospect of much being ever recovered; therefore should that be the case, it shows pretty plainly that the laws of the country are a mere mockery, and neither honour or honesty [is] to be found amongst the inhabitants thereof in general and more particularly in your state."

3 October 1794.

"We observe all you say respecting old British debts in your state from which it appears there is little prospect of British creditors recovering anything there, or get any redress whatever, so the only chance there seems left for them obtaining justice is from our Government here interfering in the business. It is very strange so many people in this kingdom should send such immense quantities of goods on their own accounts or by orders from America as they have done this year, to a country where a grand jury at their principal court of justice there presented the payment of British debts to be a great grievance, which probably was very true in regard to many of themselves. However such kind of proceedings must ere long put an end to all law and government whatever in the country they are carried on, and dangerous civil commotions follow of course, especially when the executive power is too weak to enforce proper obedience to the laws, which last we think appears to be the case at present with the American government."

The final settlement of the problem was between governments. Jay's Treaty of 1795 provided for a joint commission to deal with the problem, but this broke down by 1797; a final convention was signed in 1802, whereby the U.S.A. government made a grant of £600,000 in total settlement, and left it to the British government to apportion the money to the merchants concerned. It was estimated that this would amount to about 2s. 6d. in the pound on the claimed figure of debts, and that four-fifths of these debts were due from Virginians.⁽¹²⁾

Another result of the war was that Sparling and Bolden lost property in the actual fighting and failed to gain compensation

⁽¹²⁾ See Bemis, *op. cit.*, and B. Perkins, *The First Rapprochement between England and the United States, 1795-1805*, Philadelphia University Press (1955) pp. 116-19, 138, *et seq.*

for it when claims by loyalists were submitted to the British government after the war. Bolden, in the absence of Sparling in Shropshire, wrote from Liverpool on 27 May 1789 to Waddingham Collins of London, apparently in reply to an offer from Collins to prosecute a further claim for compensation; Collins was offered 2½ per cent commission on any sums awarded. This letter, and another to him of 11 June 1789, give some information about these losses, but a more detailed statement is to be seen at the Public Record Office among papers concerning claims by American loyalists.⁽¹³⁾

On 9 and 10 November 1785 John Sparling was heard by commissioners and his documentary evidence examined. He claimed that when Norfolk was bombarded by Lord Dunmore's ships of war on 1 January 1776 goods, a share of a warehouse, and a sloop worth £250 in Virginia currency, were destroyed, the whole being worth in sterling £1,035 9s. 2½d.; fearing the worst, Lawrence had put the greater part of his goods on board a vessel which went with the British to Bermuda. The losses at Suffolk were incurred on 13 May 1779, when British troops burnt the town, and George Sparling's house, valued with its contents at £720 in Virginia currency, was also burnt, together with the warehouse containing 1,400 barrels of turpentine and 1,200 of tar, worth £1,650. A negro was also said to have been "taken and carried away" by the British and was valued at £115. The whole loss in sterling was claimed to be £2,160, later reduced to about £1,800 when an overcalculation of the value of the tar and turpentine was allowed for.

Bolden's letter of 27 May 1789 stated that the claim was refused because there was no proof that George Sparling and Lawrence were actually loyalists, as John Sparling in his evidence at the hearing asserted they were. Both men stayed in America during the war, and Lawrence, at least, had an opportunity to escape when Lord Dunmore left Virginia, since he sent a sloop load of goods⁽¹⁴⁾ with Dunmore's fleet. One witness said that Lawrence was "a member of a committee before whom he [the witness] was several times called, for having imported goods and was required to deliver them up but refused. It was a committee of the same nature as those in Massachusetts Bay." The next witness, Col. Jacob Ellegood, said he knew Lawrence as "a member of the committee, but says many more were the same who afterwards joined the King's troops", and he quoted a known rebel who had called Lawrence "the

⁽¹³⁾ A.O. 12/54, pp. 353-70.

⁽¹⁴⁾ These included the firm's books, not recovered from Bermuda till 1783 (letter to Collins, 11 June 1789).

damnedest Tory in the country". This witness was the most favourable, others calling Lawrence "not . . . a Tory", and "neutral"; but even Ellegood's evidence concluded with faint praise: "He was certainly a loyal man in his heart, but his commercial interests detained him" in Virginia during the war. John Sparling stated that he lived in retirement outside Norfolk and did no business. George Sparling, said one witness, married an American just after the war began, and even Ellegood could only say "Believes his principles were loyal, but he took no part for Government. As he staid in the Country he must either have taken Oaths or paid treble Taxes." Neither set of witnesses could show any reason why the destruction of property at Norfolk and Suffolk could be attributed to the fact that Lawrence and George Sparling were loyalists. The losses took place in conditions, as one witness said of Norfolk, when "all people's goods were destroyed, loyal and disloyal". From the evidence brought forward by the witnesses, it is hard to see how the commission could have found in favour of the claims.

Sparling and Bolden's business pre-occupations during the war are known only from entries in the Liverpool Plantation Registers and from information recorded by Gomer Williams in his *History of the Liverpool Privateers*. Unfortunately Williams does not make any distinction between a privateer deliberately sent out to "cruise" for prizes, and a normal trader which might take a prize as the occasion arose. Also his Appendix IV, "List of the principal Liverpool privateers . . . 1775-83" is incomplete, as is shown by the account in the text of prizes taken, and it can now be compared with the Plantation Register entries. The following tables summarise the information from the two sources:

SHIPS OWNED BY BOLDEN AND PARTNERS

	Evidence from Williams	Ownership given by	Tons
<i>Charming Kitty</i>	Cruising 1779, but not in Appendix IV.	Registers 21 March 1780. ⁽¹⁵⁾	100
<i>Bellona</i>	Cruising 1778-80.	Registers 29 December 1780. Appendix IV, "Bolden and Co."	150
<i>Friendship</i>	Liverpool to Jamaica 1779; not in Appendix IV.	Registers 21 July 1780.	250 140
<i>Comet</i>	No reference.	Registers 3 January 1781.	80

Bolden's partners in all four vessels included John Greenwood, William Crosbie junior, and Thomas Hodgson (but not Sparling). They shared the *Friendship* with one other partner, the *Bellona* with twelve others, and the *Comet* with three others.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The only Register Book available for the war period dates from 1779-84.

SHIPS OWNED BY SPARLING AND PARTNERS

	Evidence from Williams	Ownership given by	Tons
<i>Betsey</i>	Cruising 1779, but not in Appendix IV. Bound to New York when taken 1779.	Registers 12 March 1773, owned by Sparling and Bolden; 10 November 1779 when her prize ⁽¹⁶⁾ was sold by "John Sparling and Co."	120
<i>Brilliant</i>	Cruising 1778.	Registers 3 February 1781; Appendix IV "John Sparling"	150 600
<i>Mermaid</i>	Liverpool to Antigua 1783.	Registers 29 August 1782, when her prize was sold by John Sparling who bought it at a public sale. Appendix IV "John Sparling"	— 250
<i>Sparling</i> (two vessels of same name)	Voyages given as Liverpool to Jamaica 1777; to Philadelphia 1778; and to New York 1780 when taken.	Appendix IV "John Sparling" Registers 13 July 1772 owned by Sparling and Bolden	400 and 300 160

Only two of Sparling's ships included Bolden as partner. None of Sparling's five co-partners in the *Brilliant* is included among those partnering Bolden. One of Sparling's partners, with three other Liverpool men, bought the *Mermaid's* prize.

Some of these voyages, though the vessels took prizes, appear to have been normal trading voyages, since New York and Philadelphia were for long in British hands during the war, and the West Indies would be a natural place for a Liverpool merchant to look for employment for his ships. Entry in the Plantation Registers, in any event, implies that goods from a colony had been carried to Liverpool, whether taken on a cruise, or gained by normal trading. It is interesting to see that only twice did Sparling and Bolden as a firm take shares in ships or privateers, and they normally engaged with different sets of partners. Perhaps this was done to spread their risks, and not involve the firm's assets in any losses until normal trade could be resumed after the war.

Two pieces of evidence show that, when peace came, the firm did not consider shipowning a profitable investment. The first comes from the General Registers of Shipping begun in 1786; in the Liverpool Registers between 1786 and 1800 there are references to only two vessels which have any connection with

⁽¹⁶⁾ This prize was called *La Favorie*, 200 tons, in the registers, but by Williams (p. 247) the *Favourite*, 450 tons. R. C. Jarvis, *Customs Letter Books of the Port of Liverpool*, Chetham Society, 3rd Series, Vol. VI (1954), p. 104, appears to have missed the reference to the *Betsey* in Williams. Also on p. 104 Jarvis misquotes Williams in attributing the ownership of the *Brilliant* to Whitakers instead of to Sparling. The acceptance by Jarvis of Williams's figures for tonnages of vessels, obviously based on newspaper sources, seems doubtful in view of the Plantation Register figures.

either of the partners. John Sparling was part-owner of the *Mermaid* (257 tons) and the *Brilliant* (348 tons) in conjunction with John Sargent, senior, Christopher Chambers and Robert Rolleston of London. It will be noted that Bolden is not included, and this is significant since the oath to be sworn on registration was very precise in its demand for the names of any one who had any interest in a vessel. The other three men were obviously the London agents of Sparling and Bolden, and had shares in other Liverpool ships also. Christopher Chambers was elected in 1767 a representative for Liverpool slave traders on the African Company, and Robert Rolleston was so elected 24 times in the 37 years between his first election in 1780 and his last in 1816. But when the *Mermaid* was captured by the French in 1794, Sparling had just sold his half share to seven London merchants; and when the *Brilliant* was lost (the Registers do not give the date), Sparling ceased to engage in shipping ventures.⁽¹⁷⁾

That this was a policy decision is shown by evidence from the Letter Book. In 1789 Captain Priestman of the *Mary and Ann* (probably the Priestman who was master of the *Brilliant* during the war) suggested to Lawrence that he take a share in a vessel Priestman was thinking of building. Sparling and Bolden wrote:

To John Lawrence, 13 May 1789.

"In our last . . . we mentioned we thought you had better decline taking a share in a new vessel Captain Priestman intended building here . . . In the first place we believe he has given up all thoughts of building a ship and is not altogether determined about buying one, but be that as it will, it would be very unsafe for your John Lawrence or any inhabitant of Virginia or other American State to be partowner of any British vessel trading betwixt this country and America or the West Indies, as if found out would be attended with very bad consequences, not only the seizure of the vessel and cargo but the British owners liable to a prosecution, as all the latter now swear to the Register that no foreigners directly or indirectly has any share, part or interest in the vessel, and the officers at all the custom houses throughout the Kingdom are now very exact in these matters, and get information about the same when little expected. Besides we are of opinion most vessels now are bad concerns, very few maintaining themselves in the freight trade, and that in general it's better to freight ships than have any of our own. From what we have now said on the subject we trust you'll be fully satisfied about our not acquiescing in your proposal of holding a share of a ship Captain Priestman may build or purchase when you see the same would be attended with so much risk to all concerned."

In 1794, however, when Lawrence bought an American vessel, the *Betsey*, in collaboration with another Virginian, Robert

⁽¹⁷⁾ See Liverpool Registers 1787 No. 57 and 1793 No. 56 for *Mermaid*, and 1787 No. 93 for *Brilliant*. I owe these references to Mr. R. Craig. Sparling and Bolden were cautious about privateering in 1793 against France in spite of their experience in the war with America, or because of it. They wrote to Lawrence on 3 June 1793 that in spite of valuable prizes brought into Liverpool already, they feared it would be a losing trade; and had no concern themselves with it.

Taylor, Sparling and Bolden approved of this as a good speculation; when she was sent to Liverpool with staves for sale by Sparling and Bolden, and a tobacco freight for other merchants, they wrote:

To John Lawrence, 3 October 1794.

"If one or two more vessels of the like kind could be purchased on reasonable terms we think they would answer very well to employ during the War, as American bottoms have now so great an advantage over British ships (especially in the trade betwixt America and this country) and must have so while the war with France continues. If the *Betsey* had happened to arrive here six weeks sooner, in all probability she would have got a full load of dry goods out, and made nearly as much freight as she did with tobacco here."

When Lawrence sold the *Betsey*, together with her cargo of lumber, Sparling and Bolden in their letter of 9 June 1795 called it "such a lucky hit as seldom happens", a rather cautious note of congratulation; but they renewed the advice about investing in other vessels, "as such must make money with any tolerable management". But the circumstances were those of war, with American vessels as neutrals; there was no such inducement for Sparling and Bolden to invest in British shipping.

Yet before the French Wars broke out there was one field in which Sparling and Bolden might have invested in shipping. The independence of the United States meant that their shipping could no longer enter West Indian ports as before the war, laden with provisions, timber of all sorts, live horses and steers, leather, candles, train oil, etc. This had been a thriving trade before the war, in which the merchants and sailors of the Thirteen Colonies could earn credits to pay for imports from Britain.⁽¹⁸⁾ After 1783 U.S.A. ships were foreign, and cargoes of U.S.A. goods could enter West Indian ports only in British ships. Lawrence suggested that he could enter the trade, and Sparling and Bolden replied:

To John Lawrence, 19 May 1788.

"We shall speak to some of our West India merchants relative to what you mention about getting them to send some of their vessels to your place to load lumber, but most of the people here in that trade prefer sending their ships out to New York and Philadelphia, where they say lumber is better than in Virginia and as cheap, and flour and bread are to be had at both the former places on much better terms."

Possibly the competition persuaded some Liverpool merchants to try Norfolk supplies, for after two vessels were sent early in 1789, other owners followed. The Liverpool owners were Ellis and Robert Bent; Ashton and Co.; T. Hinde and

⁽¹⁸⁾ See, for example, R. Pares, *Yankees and Creoles, The Trade between North America and the West Indies* (1956).

Co.; Watt and Walker (who had "ten vessels in the Jamaica trade"); Humble, Holland and Co.; together with Mitchell and Dagers, and Aspinall and Hardy, two firms in Jamaica who hired Liverpool vessels to make the voyage.⁽¹⁹⁾ The usual cargo out to Virginia from Liverpool was salt, but to judge from Sparling and Bolden's loading of American vessels sent to them on Lawrence's recommendation, such a ballast cargo would be accompanied by whatever dry goods could be taken as freight for other merchants. About twelve vessels were sent to Lawrence between 1789-98. Here then was a trade in which Lawrence obviously had the local knowledge for purchases, and in which Sparling and Bolden might have employed ships during periods when they were not interested in freighting their own goods back to Liverpool from Virginia; it was a trade which might have enabled them to send their exports to Virginia more cheaply than by paying freight to other ship-owners. But their policy was obviously against shipowning, in spite of their having been part-owners of numerous vessels before the American war; this must have been because of the changed situation brought about by the war.

IV THE EXPORT TRADE OF SPARLING AND BOLDEN

Once the effects of political quarrels and of the post-war boom were past, the flow of British exports to the mainland of America was resumed. The figures on page 133 show that recovery from the war was speedy, and that the U.S.A. was soon buying more from Britain than the Thirteen Colonies had done. The disparity between the goods received by the Americans and their exports explains both the accumulation of debts owed to British merchants in 1775, which were such a problem in the period after the war, and the increased difficulties of British exporters in getting their returns from the United States when trade was resumed.

The United States had limited industrial capacity, and relied on British manufactures for, as Professor Heaton wrote:

"cloths (and clothes) of all fibres, kinds and qualities; pottery ware—useful and ornamental—for every part of the American home . . . ; metalware of every kind, size and shape . . . ; . . . sheet glass . . . ; . . . paint or white lead . . . ; and a motley of books and binoculars, guns and glue, sealing wax and slippers."⁽²⁰⁾

⁽¹⁹⁾ See letters to Lawrence, 10 February, 2 March, 30 March, 16 September, 1789; 22 July, 16 August, 25 September, 1790; 2 March, 28 November, 1791; 29 March 1792; 21 October 1794; 9 June 1795; 14 April 1798. The letter of 25 September 1790 states that Mitchell and Dagers were recommended by Moses Benson of Liverpool, the uncle of Dagers. These letters contain interesting indications of the standing of the Liverpool merchants concerned.

⁽²⁰⁾ *The Trade Winds*, p. 197-8, which also adds to the list beer, salt, coal, nails, cheese, playing cards and snuff.

Such goods were charged duty on entry into the United States in proportion to their value, and Professor Heaton calculated that in 1789-90, the first year of the federal customs duty collection, Britain supplied 87 per cent of these, the most valuable goods; he suggested that most of them were of British manufacture and not re-exports. From comparisons of the ports of origin of ships which arrived in various American ports, Professor Heaton also deduced that Liverpool in the period just after the war was competing strongly with London for American trade, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century had outstripped her rivals, London, Bristol and Hull. Her

AVERAGE ANNUAL VALUES OF GOODS EXPORTED
FROM ENGLAND AND WALES, TO THE THIRTEEN
COLONIES AND TO THE UNITED STATES AND GOODS
IMPORTED FROM THE SAME, 1756-1800⁽²¹⁾

	Exports	Imports
1756-60	£1,930,000	£668,000
1761-65	£1,771,000	£992,000
1766-70	£1,825,000	£1,093,000
1771-75	£396,000	£1,452,000
1776-80	£264,000	£35,000
1781-85	£1,596,000	£384,000
1786-90	£2,106,000	£869,000
1791-95	£4,043,000	£936,000
1796-1800	£5,722,000	£1,685,000

docks, her water connections by inland transport with the Midlands and Yorkshire industrial regions, the growing American shipments of cotton, which meant that ships were always available in Liverpool for return cargoes, all these, he considered, gave Liverpool an advantage as a port for shipments to the United States.⁽²²⁾

Sparling and Bolden's Letter Book shows little evidence of the competition of other ports with Liverpool, though the refusal of the partners after the war to invest in shipowning may indicate the cheapness of freight rates from Liverpool, which favoured her merchants looking for cargo space for their exports. The letters have nothing to say of cotton, except once or twice in relation to the prices of West India goods in which the partners had no business interests themselves. But the goods they sent out to their Virginia partners do seem to follow

⁽²¹⁾ See E. B. Schumpeter, *English Overseas Trade Statistics 1697-1808*, (1960). See also H. Heaton, "The American Trade", in *The Trade Winds*, ed. C. N. Parkinson (1948), and "Yorkshire Cloth Traders in the United States 1770-1840", in *Thoresby Society Publications*, Vol. XXXVII, part III (1944), from which much information of the trends in American trade has been taken.

⁽²²⁾ *The Trade Winds*, pp. 204-7.

the general pattern indicated by Professor Heaton. Most goods were sent from Liverpool and were of local manufacture. In addition to exports from Liverpool, a small but more miscellaneous amount of freight was shipped from London through the agency of Sargent, Chambers and Co., the chief London correspondents of Sparling and Bolden. But since the Letter Book does not contain detailed invoices of cargoes, there may have been other varieties of goods shipped than those briefly mentioned in the letters. For instance, there were probably purchases of goods in Liverpool which needed no letter-writing and were recorded only in the detailed account books which do not survive.

The Sparling and Bolden letters to manufacturers, all sent between 1788 and 1794, indicate that the major export from Liverpool was woollen goods. Figures of value can only be approximate, but during the period the invoice value was some £6,400. The following table gives details of firms and goods supplied:

TYPES OF WOOLLEN CLOTH SUPPLIED FOR EXPORT TO VIRGINIA, WITH THE NAMES OF SUPPLIERS

Type of cloth	Name and place of firm	Dates	Approx. cost
"Cottons", both whites and colours	Gough and Braithwaite, (William Braithwaite 1788) Kendal	1788-91	£1,613
White plaids, kersies	Sarah, (later John) Mayson, Keswick	1788-92	£106 +
Rugs, spotted, blue and green	James Chadwick, Rochdale	1788	[small]
Flannel, white and scarlet	William Sagar and Co., Colne	1791	£349
Black durants, ⁽²³⁾ half thicks, fine and pressed cloths	James Kershaw and Son, Halifax	1788-92	£2,961
Durants, blankets striped and rose	Ridsdale and Johnson, Wakefield	1789-92	£1,012
Welsh plains	Masons and Scott (Masons, Scott and Clarke, 1791)	1790-91	£106
Rugs	Henry Thompson (shipped from London)	1791	£49

Sargent, Chambers and Co. also shipped "rugs . . . such as we believe are made in the West of England" from London to Virginia, Sparling and Bolden stating, when they asked for these on 30 March 1790, that they had not been able to get any in Liverpool from Yorkshire to suit the Virginia demand.

⁽²³⁾ A hard-wearing cloth.

The London firm was apparently able to do so, for in 1791 they were asked on 21 June to ship more, and Sparling and Bolden acknowledged invoices for £55 worth on 5 July 1791, for £90 on 24 July 1792, and for £113 on 30 June 1793. There may have been other suppliers for woollens in Yorkshire; in a letter to Sagar of Colne on 6 April 1791, Sparling and Bolden said that they had been well served by their correspondents in "Leeds and Halifax, etc.". Kershaws, of Halifax, were also responsible for supplying buttons and twist for export, this being done through L. Williamson and Son, of Stockport; on 8 May 1790 Sparling and Bolden wrote to Stockport that Kershaws had ordered buttons and twist worth £59, of which they were returning half. On 31 May 1791 they wrote that the order last year had been three times too much, and they asked for twelve bags of "large basket coat buttons" but no vest buttons, in colours that Kershaws would mention.

Other woollen manufactures shipped by Sparling and Bolden from Liverpool were hosiery and carpets. "Yarn hose" came from John Barton of Kendal between 1790 and 1792, to the value of £117 altogether. Samuel Unwin, of Sutton, near Mansfield, sent hosiery worth £474 between 1788 and 1791, and a further parcel of £27 worth in 1794, when Lawrence asked for a number of goods to make up his stocks into a suitable assortment for selling off the whole preparatory to closing down. The carpets were from Thomas Dutton, of Chesterfield, apparently a new supplier in 1791; he sent £125 worth between 1791 and 1794, and references are made to the rising prices of wool causing an increase in costs above the level set by the Virginia order. A regular order between 1788 and 1791 was one sent to Thomas Ramsden and Co., of Halifax. This was for "woollen cards", and in 1790 "cotton cards" were asked for; these were tools for combing wool and cotton fibres before spinning. On 19 July 1774 the Collector of Customs at Liverpool wrote to the Board in London that he had detained some wool cards shipped on board the *Betsey* for Virginia, and Mr. R. C. Jarvis presumes that these were prohibited under an Act of 1749 against the export of any tools used in silk or woollen manufacture. But perhaps the Board ruled that exportation might take place; certainly they were common articles in any domestic textile industry.⁽²⁴⁾

Other textiles, apart from those exported from London direct to Virginia, were as follows:

⁽²⁴⁾ See *Customs Letter Books of the Port of Liverpool*, p. 95. The *Betsey* may have been the vessel partly owned by Sparling (above pp. 122, 129).

TEXTILES EXPORTED TO VIRGINIA FROM LIVERPOOL
WITH THE NAMES OF SUPPLIERS

Type of cloth	Name and place of supplier	Dates	Approx. cost
Checks and silk handkerchiefs	John Philips and Co. Manchester	1789-93	£113
Handkerchiefs	Richard Powel Manchester	1789-90	£207
[not stated]	Samuel Mather and Co. Manchester	1788-92	£980
"Modes" and handkerchiefs	Hutton, Jackson and Spurnel (1791—and Magrath) London	1789-91	£138
Ribbons	Elizabeth Jackson and Son Congleton	1789-90	£38 +
Sailcloth	Langton, Birley and Co. Kirkham	1788-93	£178 +

The links between Sparling and Bolden and the Kirkham firm were close, because of their shipowning partnerships before 1775; not only was sailcloth sent at various times, but Langton, Birley and Co. were the only firm asked for supplies of "seine twine", presumably so-called from its suitability for making fishing nets. This was sent regularly each year from 1788-91, costing £187 in all. Larger sized cordage and rope was sent from Lancaster, well over £200 worth being shipped in 1788 and 1789; but in the letters to Peter Townson and Co. are clear references to the supply of goods from Liverpool. On 8 February 1789 Sparling and Bolden wrote to Townson that they had no need of cordage from Lancaster, having just shipped ten tons, and would take his cordage only in exchange for tar; on 13 March 1790 they declined to order from Townson, saying that Liverpool prices were lower.

Other locally produced exports were in hardware. In 1789 and 1790 Sparling and Bolden ordered pins from Thomas Johnson and Co., of Warrington, to the value of £57. Between 1788 and 1794 they ordered locks and hinges from three obviously associated firms, successively called Jamieson and Clowes, William Clowes and Co., and Clowes and Whitley, to the value of £188 in all. Nails were also shipped, and Sparling and Bolden wrote:

To James Atherton of Billinge, 16 December 1789.

"We want a few nails for Virginia, but we have had such very heavy complaints of some parcels had from your neighbours being greatly deficient in quantity charged in the invoice, that we are almost afraid to order any from your part of the country. However if you'll *warrant* what you sell us shall hold out the full quantity as charged in your bill of parcels and as marked on the head of each cask, you may send us 16 casks."

However, in the following year Mr. Atherton, or his carriers, failed to deliver two casks, one of 5 inch and one of 6½ and

7 inch "deck nails", as Sparling and Bolden complained on 30 December 1790. These are the only two letters addressed to a nail manufacturer, but there are two references in letters to Lawrence acknowledging his complaints of deficiencies in quantities of nails, both written before the letters to Atherton and obviously prompting its phrasing. On 19 May 1788, Sparling and Bolden wrote that some nails then shipped were made "in this neighbourhood", and on 8 February 1790 the deficient quantity of nails is said to have been supplied by a Mr. Morris. This last letter also asked for an opinion on some cutlery, two lots having been sent from different suppliers, unnamed. The source of iron pots, damaged on arrival by being stowed on top of a ballast cargo of salt, is not named in the letter to Lawrence of 24 October 1789, since the loss was to be paid for by the captain concerned. Hoes were shipped in December 1788, and again in February 1790; when damage to the latter cargo was acknowledged on 22 July, Sparling and Bolden said it was shipped early in the year because the goods were in general demand, except for the hoes, which were wanted in May and June.

Only once did Sparling and Bolden charter a ship; this was in 1790, when a return cargo of turpentine and tar seemed likely to make good profits. This was announced to Lawrence in a letter of 13 April, and on 30 May he was informed that her cargo was invoiced at £2,511, being a ballast loading of salt, some dry goods, and the rest earthenware. This was bought from Mollyneux and Appleton, of Prescot, near Liverpool; but the contents of the 100 crates are not specified, and Sparling and Bolden were surprised to hear, they wrote on 25 September, that much was broken on arrival. Their letter of 30 May also mentions that they were sending pipes with the earthenware, presumably the tobacco pipes manufactured near Liverpool at places like Rainford,⁽²⁵⁾ but no name or place of origin is specified. There are similar isolated references to shoes (to Lawrence 11 March 1788), hats (25 September 1790), Irish linens worth £169, sent on the account of Sparling and Bolden (to George Sparling 30 May 1790, and not on his account because that would have prevented the payment of the export bounty only available if the goods were British property), a box of china (sent to William Pinnock of Virginia, 7 August 1795), and white lead which turned out on arrival to be light in weight (to John Granbury of Virginia, 28 January 1797). Pinnock and Granbury had vessels loaded by Sparling and

⁽²⁵⁾ See, on the Rainford tobacco pipe industry, C. J. Berry, *The Manufacture of Clay Tobacco Pipes in Rainford*, privately printed (1963).

Bolden, chiefly with salt; letters to them, and to Lawrence when his vessel *Betsey* was similarly laden in 1794, show that sacking was sent with the cargo, to be made up into sacks by the sailors on the voyage. Lawrence asked for oakum to be sent to Virginia by the *Betsey*, but Sparling and Bolden found that it could not be shipped without an order from the Commissioners of Customs and that the expense was great for such a trifling article.

Sargent, Chambers and Co. shipped a large number of articles from London on behalf of Sparling and Bolden, apparently to the order of George Sparling or Lawrence. Again textiles formed a considerable part: calicoes, chintz, muslins and printed cottons, silk, both twist and sewing silk (sometimes shipped to Liverpool to be sent from there), were probably East India goods. There is nothing said in the Letter Book of shipping Lancashire cotton goods, apart from the rather vague letters to Manchester manufacturers; a letter of 8 September 1793 to James and John Rankie, of Greenock, acknowledged a bill of lading of cotton goods, but stated that none had been ordered from them, but some had been ordered from a "house in this town", which had not been able to procure them, so that the ship had now sailed without any. Rugs were sent, and also a variety of linens, called variously lawns, cambric, russia drills, russia sheeting, brown rolls, holland rolls, siberias, and osnaburgs. Answering a complaint by George Sparling, Sparling and Bolden stated on 19 May 1788 that previously osnaburgs and hempen rolls had always been "much cheaper in London than elsewhere". These were obviously varieties of foreign linen cloths which paid high duty on importation, but had a drawback allowed if exported. Other goods mentioned are more miscellaneous: gunpowder and saltpetre, shot, "half minute glasses", starch in one pound and half pound "papers", pepper and tea.⁽²⁶⁾ Amounts sent each year were as follows:

TOTAL VALUE OF INVOICES OF GOODS SHIPPED EACH
YEAR TO VIRGINIA FROM LONDON ON BEHALF OF
SPARLING AND BOLDEN, 1788-93

1788	..	£278	1790	..	£1,205	1792	..	£90
1789	..	£763	1791	..	£272	1793	..	£113

The letters to manufacturers provide interesting details about the terms of trade between purchaser and seller. The terms

⁽²⁶⁾ This had been shipped before the war also. Jarvis, *op. cit.*, p. 96, quotes a request from the Collector at Liverpool for orders concerning a chest of tea taken to Hampton in Virginia, which the rebels refused to allow to be landed. It was shipped by Bolden in the *Betsey*, from which "wool cards" were seized the previous July, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

which Sparling and Bolden thought they ought to have are best shown in a reply to a manufacturer who sought their custom:

To Messrs. William Sagar and Co. of Colne, 6 April 1791.

"Though we have been extremely well served with woollens for some years past by our correspondents in Leeds, Halifax etc., yet as you seem so desirous to open an account with us, we send you annexed [not preserved] an abstract of a few goods which you'll provide and forward so as we may have them here in about five weeks, observing they are at as near the prices quoted as possible. We never pay for any goods till two, three or four weeks after the vessel sails that we ship them in, which sometimes makes it two months from the date of the bill of parcels, and have always been allowed 10 to 12½ per cent discount thereon, and in bills on London from two to three months date, we mean for woollens from Yorkshire, and have them laid down free of carriage at Manchester, from which place the freight per the Canal is very trifling."

On 24 June they paid for the flannels sent though "the vessel [has] not yet sailed". This phrase is, rather primly, quoted in other letters of the same period. Letters to other manufacturers show that Sparling and Bolden did not always get their ideal terms, though they often complained about their failure:

To Messrs. Ridsdales and Johnson of Wakefield, 15 August 1789.

"We are favoured with yours the 13th instant requesting a remittance for the goods had from you last year, in reply to which we think we told your Mr. J[ohnson] more than once when we had seen him here, that we always expected 16 to 18 months' credit for any goods we bought, or 7½ per cent. discount if paid in 2 or 3 months. Indeed we have a higher discount allowed for all other kinds of woollens we buy in Yorkshire by every person we deal with there. The last parcel of goods (as well as the former) you sent near a month sooner than we ordered. However to close your account we herein enclose you Mr Arthur Heywood and Sons and Co's draft on Joseph Dennison and Co for £72-12-6 which with discount of 5 per cent only, on the last goods, we expect you'll find balance your account, though we expect the next time we see your Mr. J[ohnson] here, he will allow us a further discount than 5 per cent we have deducted."

The Cumberland and Westmorland manufacturers were equally awkward:

To Messrs. Gough and Braithwaite of Kendal, 12 June 1789.

"We observe you'll allow 6 per cent discount for prompt payment, which assure you is 1½ per cent less than we have from any other persons; nay many allow 10 per cent. But as we take it for granted your goods are charged on the lowest terms we herein enclose you three drafts on London."

To John Mayson of Keswick, 30 July 1790.

"You'll observe we have only taken off 6 per cent for discount on the last goods as our Kendal friends only allows us that on the cottons we buy from them, at which rate have just settled for some we had at the time we had your goods; but the chief part of other articles we ship abroad we have 7½ or 10 per cent discount for prompt payment."

An example of 10 per cent discount was quoted when cordage was offered:

To Peter Townson of Lancaster, 8 February 1789.

"As for cordage, we are not in want of any at present, having just shipped the

last week upwards of ten tons for Virginia and of a very good quality at 35/- per ton, eighteen months credit or 10 per cent if paid in 3 months."

Sometimes there are references to ready money transactions, as for a shipment to Virginia:

To John Granbury of Virginia, 28 January 1797.

"In regard to the discounts credited you for being only £8-14-3, you observe there was allowed nothing upon either the salt or sacking, they being both bought for ready money."

This type of payment was occasionally made for the purchases in London by Sargent, Chambers and Co.; for instance on 29 July 1789 Sparling and Bolden wrote to acknowledge the invoice for goods shipped to Virginia of a total cost of £236, and since £120 was paid out for "ready money articles", they sent £115 in bills towards this sum. Usually, Sparling and Bolden sent to London bills of exchange for acceptance and sometimes for collection also, asking Sargent, Chambers and Co. to put the money to their credit; from time to time a statement of the account current between the two firms was exchanged and settlement made accordingly. But ready money purchases evidently merited specially prompt payment by Sparling and Bolden.

It will be noted that Sparling and Bolden expected their new correspondents, Sagars of Colne, to deliver their goods to Manchester, from which they would be carried to Liverpool by canal at a "trifling" charge. This was the Bridgewater Canal, and Sparling and Bolden on 22 April 1793 asked Dutton of Chesterfield to deliver his carpet pieces to Manchester to be forwarded by canal. They wrote on 22 June 1789 to James Kershaw of Halifax that they had not received a bale of woollens, and that their ship was ready to sail. The next letter, on 11 July, stated that the bale "had been lying in the Duke's warehouse at Manchester near ten days without a direction". Hence in the next year when ordering cotton cards, they wrote:

To Thomas Ramsden of Halifax, 25 April 1790.

"must beg your attention about forwarding them in due time and to give orders to the Duke of Bridgewater's Agent at Manchester to have them sent away from thence as soon as possible after they get there, as sometimes we have known goods detained at the Duke's warehouse a considerable time."

On 17 August 1790 they wrote to complain to Ridsdales and Johnson, of Wakefield, that their bale of woollens had "come here only yesterday by the Old Quay Navigation [of the rivers Irwell and Mersey] and not by the Duke's Canal as we directed". Here is tribute to the efficiency of the canal system; this en-

couraged Sparling and Bolden to invest in the projected canal from Virginia to North Carolina, which would be of much benefit to Norfolk; they acknowledged Lawrence's news about the project on 15 October 1792, and on giving instructions for the final closing down of the partnership in 1797, they wrote on 10 October that if the canal was to be finished soon and looked likely to be profitable, their shares in it should not be sold, like the rest of the firm's property, but retained and increased to eighteen.

A letter written on 28 February 1798 stated that the shares were to be owned by Sparling and Bolden and Lawrence jointly, and could be increased to thirty if a reasonable purchase price could be obtained.

V TRADE AFTER THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION—THE EFFICIENCY OF THE AMERICAN PARTNERS

Obviously the resumption of the Virginia trade after the war would be full of problems for the Liverpool and for the Virginia partners, and the Letter Book, beginning in 1788, provides only hints as to the difficulties. Much must have depended on the speed with which the two American partners could assess the demand for English manufactures and obtain goods from Liverpool to re-open their stores. Equally, much would depend on the methods by which the profits on sales of goods could be remitted to England. Where the Letter Book provides concrete evidence, it is clear that Sparling and Bolden in Liverpool were little inclined to take remittances in the form of the earlier exports from Virginia, tobacco, turpentine and tar, and wanted their returns in bills of exchange or specie. This threw on their Virginia partners the responsibility of selling for cash or for good bills which could be cashed in England, and of disposing of any local produce that they might have to take in exchange for the goods they sold.

It is clear that George Sparling failed to meet this responsibility, and the letters sent to him right up to the time of his death in 1791 are full of complaints. George was evidently suffering from gout for much of the time, and it is probable that Suffolk was a much less profitable area in which to work than was Lawrence's area round Norfolk. But George seems to have lacked the commercial sense of Lawrence and of the Liverpool partners, so that, as early as 1786, Sparling and Bolden began to question the profitability of the Suffolk concern. Lawrence, however, was then unwilling to accept their suggestion that it should be closed down, because he "thought that place the

most eligible spot for a store on account of its vicinity to North Carolina, where there was a good deal of specie, and into which state few dry goods were imported directly from Europe”.

This opinion of 1786 was quoted by Sparling and Bolden on 29 July 1789 in one of a series of letters to Lawrence which discussed the shortcomings of the Suffolk concern, and which illustrate the difficulties of business dealings conducted solely by correspondence, without frequent meetings of the partners to thrash out their complaints and conflicts. The failure at Suffolk was held by Sparling and Bolden to be the responsibility not only of George Sparling but also of Lawrence, the partner in charge in Virginia. Lawrence complained to the Liverpool partners that they sent out too many goods to Suffolk, but he seems to have been unwilling to assert his authority over George, the younger brother of the head of the firm, John Sparling. George seems to have been willing to use this situation to avoid proper consultation with Lawrence about orders sent to Liverpool for goods to be shipped to Suffolk. In 1791 when Lawrence had to take direct control at Suffolk during George Sparling's last illness, he complained that in 1790 goods worth £2,242 had been sent on the *Wilson*. But Sparling and Bolden thought they had every right to assume that the order for these goods had been sent by George Sparling with Lawrence's permission:

To John Lawrence, 23 June 1791.

“We received the abstract and orders for them by the same opportunity that we received your abstract of the goods sent you in that vessel [the *Wilson*], and as [George] Sparling was at Norfolk for some days at that very time the two abstracts were forwarded us, it appears very strange and unaccountable that he should not acquaint you of his ordering the goods, as well as show you the abstract; and it's also as astonishing you should never desire him not to give orders for more than a few hundred pounds worth of goods at a time agreeably to your opinion to us about the same, which no doubt he would have paid attention to. For notwithstanding he was the acting manager and equally interested with yourself and us in the Suffolk store, yet we always wished and expected you to have the supreme direction hereof, and that he consulted you on every matter of the least consequence relative to the concern, and the distance between Norfolk and Suffolk being only a few hours ride, how easy would it be to consult together about any matters whatever, and we think many things must frequently occur to make such conferences absolutely necessary.”

The exchange of complaints and replies dragged on into 1792, when Sparling and Bolden thus summed up their view of Lawrence's failure to take personal and decisive action about the position at Suffolk:

To John Lawrence, 4 February 1792.

“You never desired us not to ship *any* goods to that concern, as if you had, not a shilling's worth would ever after have been sent. All you said was you thought seven or eight hundred pounds value at a time should only be sent, and as you

say you knew anything you could do on your side to prevent this matter would avail nothing, you certainly should have told us this some years ago, and in direct terms, not to send any goods that might be ordered by S[parling], L[awrence] and Co. without your particular directions, which would have been fully attended to; and it appears very strange when you knew things were conducted so improperly, you did not directly interfere as well as acquaint us therewith. In short it's very unlucky you so seldom visited Suffolk to inspect things there."

In letters to George Sparling, Sparling and Bolden were critical of his handling of affairs, but seem to have been unwilling during George's lifetime to write in the same terms to Lawrence and so encourage him to use his right to intervene at Suffolk. When in 1789 Lawrence complained about a shipment of goods worth £2,275, Sparling and Bolden confessed to "great uneasiness" about affairs at Suffolk, but concluded quite mildly with only an indirect reference to George Sparling's mismanagement:

To John Lawrence, 29 July 1789.

"... we hope you'll give strict charge to have the goods kept on hand if they cannot be disposed of for ready pay in something or other. Messrs. Donaldson and Stott we find imports very large quantities of goods annually to their concern at Suffolk, and how they manage to sell them there so much readier than S[parling], L[awrence] and Co. does there, is a mystery to us."

If Lawrence had seen the scathing letter sent at the same time to George Sparling, he would no doubt have been more willing to exert his authority at Suffolk with full knowledge that the Liverpool partners would support him:

To George Sparling, 3 August 1789.

"We cannot help saying we think it very strange you could not find time in the course of four months to make out and send us the remarks on the list of outstanding debts which you sent us last year . . . as [we] suppose you could not have been very much hurried with business, particularly with selling of goods; as if you had, we think you ought to have made us far more remittances than you have done, for notwithstanding the large value you have in your concern, you have only sent us £200 in *bills of exchange* since the month of February 1788 and since then we have shipped you above £4,000 value of goods from hence. Therefore as [we] have wrote you so often before, if nothing but produce [of Virginia] is to be got in payment for the dry goods you sell, it will by no means answer to continue the store any longer at Suffolk than can possibly be helped."

This failure to remit meant that debts owing to the Suffolk concern were piling up, which it was easy for a merchant to allow to happen in the period after 1783. The lack of English goods in America during the war led to a boom in imports as soon as peace came, which could not be paid for by corresponding American exports; a drain of specie resulted, estimated at £1,260,000 in the three years after the peace, and still substantial debts to British merchants remained unpaid. George Sparling

refounded the Suffolk store in 1784,⁽²⁷⁾ at the beginning of the boom, and apparently failed to secure payment for his English goods either in the specie which Lawrence expected in 1786, or the bills which Sparling and Bolden expected. By 1790, when trade was more normal, he was found to be over-stocked with goods, and had extended credit too freely, particularly by selling goods by retail in small quantities:

To George Sparling, 27 September 1790.

"We are surprised to see you had so large a sum as near £1,400 sterling (prime cost) of dry goods on hand the 20th July last, and we are more so at the very long list of outstanding debts at that time, nearly 260 accounts open, amounting to upwards of £5,700, which we are much afraid will be a long time before any considerable part thereof is collected. We have continually recommended and requested you by no means to give the extensive credit you have done, but rather to keep your goods on hand than do it, more particularly in retail, where if people have not money or some kind of produce to give for trifles when they buy 'em, [we] think they're not fit to be trusted."

The same letter criticised George Sparling's re-ordering of goods for shipment in 1790 which he had already in store, and his lack of initiative in disposing of such "dead stock": "You should endeavour to barter such off for any thing you can get, or if that cannot be done, export 'em out of the country to some place or other where there's a probability of their being disposed of."

As a result of these criticisms, when in 1791 another large shipment of goods was sent out to Suffolk, specific instructions were given as to their sale by Sparling and Bolden, though both goods and instructions arrived after George Sparling's death at the age of 51:

To George Sparling, 23 June 1791.

"In regard to these goods now sent [worth £2,849], we would have them sold in the wholesale way if the profits are ever so little, rather than open the same to be retailed; perhaps some of the large packages of woollens may be obliged to be divided into two, they're so valuable. However, rather than open them to retail out, would prefer their lying on hand except such of the very coarse woollens that may be in danger of being motheaten by keeping any great length of time. We desire you will consult with J[ohn] L[awrence] and Co. respecting these goods, whether many of them should be kept at Norfolk to be disposed of there in the wholesale way, as it never can answer to give a general credit and open accounts with so many people for trifles of goods in the retail way."

Finally, George Sparling seems to have been unable to manage

⁽²⁷⁾ This is established by a letter to Lawrence on 30 July 1796, commenting on a claim by George's widow for his wages for looking after the Suffolk store. On the general trade position after the war, see E. L. Bogart and D. L. Kemmerer, *Economic History of the American People* (2nd edition, 1948), New York, pp. 184-5, where the following U.S.A. trade figures are quoted: 1784: imports, £3,679,467, exports £749,345; 1785: imports, £2,308,023, exports, £893,594.

his subordinates at Suffolk, as is shown in the sad story of James Newall:

To George Sparling, 27 September 1788.

"From what Mr. Lawrence says in his last letter to us, we have thought it prudent to engage a person for an assistant to you, one who we expect may be able to do the necessary business for your store, etc., whenever your G[eorge] S[parling] may happen to be indisposed with the gout which we are extremely sorry to hear he is so very frequently afflicted. . . . His name is James Newall, a Scotchman, but has resided many years in London chiefly in a haberdashery warehouse both as a clerk and on his own account, in which last we believe he was unfortunate. . . . as he is pretty far advanced in years, hope he'll behave properly, and answer the purpose intended. He has been a clerk in the Post Office here about nine months, where he had £50 per annum . . . he is well recommended to us, and it's on that account we have given him such handsome wages [not stated]."

3 August 1789.

"We notice what you say about Mr. Newall, and though he has not been used to a retail store, yet as he has been accustomed to business in this country in a wholesale warehouse, surely he might make himself acquainted with the nature of your trade, in six months or sooner, as there is little mystery therein, for if he can but rise early in the morning and keep sober all day, he may very soon learn the art of dealing with a tar burner, as well as of a pinseller, and of measuring stay tape and buckram."

18 October, 1789.

"We are astonished to hear what you say about Mr. Newall after what you wrote us in your last letter concerning him. Surely the air of Virginia must be productive of infection, from so many Europeans becoming idle, dissipated and drunkards after they go and reside there. As to his eyesight being bad and using spectacles was no great fault, for he writes a good hand, and had he not given himself up to liquor, he might have suited you very well in the line you wanted him for provided he was honest. He was very well recommended to us (as we wrote you) by the person he was clerk to, and who by no means wished to part with him. However when you found him so much addicted to liquor you should have turned him away as you were not obliged by the tenor of his articles to keep him when by his irregularity and misconduct he was incapable of doing any business."

George Sparling did eventually bring himself to dismiss Newall, as was acknowledged by a letter from Liverpool of 9 July 1790; there is only one further reference to him in the Letter Book, when Sparling and Bolden replied on 28 June 1791 to an enquiry from Mrs. Mary Newall of London that they had now no knowledge of the whereabouts of James Newall, "who you say is your husband".

Another serious failure of George Sparling's management of business at Suffolk is shown in the letters to have arisen from his inability to solve the problem of remitting to Liverpool the proceeds of his sales of goods shipped to him. He seems to have thought that the shipment of Virginia produce to Liverpool would suffice, but not to have appreciated that sales of produce there depended on market conditions changed since the American war. Thus the tobacco and naval stores he shipped were not welcome; for example, Sparling and Bolden thus

commented on a shipment of tobacco and tar in 1788 which was insured for £395:

To George Sparling, 27 September 1788.

"No sale for tobacco scarcely at any price, and tar is so plenty that it's not worth 11/- per barrel per the quantity, so that after paying freight etc of these articles from America the net proceeds are very trifling, insomuch that making remittances in that way will do little towards paying for even a very small assortment of dry goods and therefore if neither bills of exchange or specie is to be got with you to make remittances with, depend upon it 'twill never answer to send many goods out from here; for the European markets are now quite overstocked with all kinds of American produce, and we are persuaded that will always be the case in future. Your account with us is now very large; therefore we hope you will exert yourselves to lessen it considerably very soon either by good bills or specie, for as we have already observed it will seldom or ever answer for you to ship any of your produce by way of making a remittance."

Sparling and Bolden wrote to George Sparling on 6 November 1788 that a bill of exchange was 30 or 40 per cent better than shipment of either tar, turpentine or tobacco; on the following 26 February, John Lawrence was told that a bill was 60 per cent better than tar. George Sparling was informed at the same time that this far exceeded any profit on dry goods. Moreover, Sparling and Bolden had continually to complain of the quality or quantity of goods shipped:

To George Sparling, 9 March 1789.

"[About the goods insured for £680 received 3 weeks before] the 16 hogsheads of tobacco is such sad mean stuff that we think 'twill scarcely fetch 2d. per lb., besides which there is near 1,300 lb cut off at the King's Scale, which appeared to have been chiefly damaged previous to it being put on board the ship in Virginia.⁽²⁸⁾ The tar and turpentine also still continues very short gauge, the former only about 29 gallons and the latter under 2 cwt nett per barrel, so that neither your tobacco or naval stores inspectors are to be depended upon.

"You would find by our last what a very great drug tar was here and we see not the least prospect of its being otherways soon; therefore we must desire you'll not ship any more till we advise you of its being likely to answer, but sell every barrel you purchase in the country for the most you can obtain for it.

"We have not sold your turpentine yet, but hope to do it so as 'twill make you a very good remittance. This [port] is generally the worst market for naval stores, as such great quantities of both tar and turpentine are brought here from all parts of North America. Hull and London are by far the best ports for turpentine, and if you can buy it with you the ensuing season at or about 10/- [Virginia] currency per barrel we think you need not fear purchasing and shipping all you possibly can get. Never ship a hogshead of tobacco again to this country on your own account except it's the very best quality, or the price with you a vast deal lower than it has been ever since the late war."

A similar shipment of turpentine later in 1789 was also criticised by Sparling and Bolden as being short in quantity because of unfilled barrels: according to a letter to Suffolk dated 3 November, it was "the lightest we ever knew any", averaging only 1 cwt. 3 qu. 21 lbs. per barrel, much short of the

⁽²⁸⁾ See Jarvis, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 171 and *passim*. Damaged tobacco was burnt by the customs officials.

31½ gallons each barrel ought to have contained. A similar complaint was sent to Lawrence on 2 December 1795, that a shipment of turpentine to Hull averaged less than 2 cwts. per barrel, nett. Sparling and Bolden wrote on 23 November 1795 to the sellers of the cargo, Messrs. M. and J. Dobson of Hull, that they thought the barrels must have been either not filled to capacity, or smaller than was usual; this caused great loss to the owner, since the cost in America and the freight across the Atlantic were both reckoned per barrel, without regard to size or the amount in each barrel. In 1789 complaints were made to Lawrence also about tobacco damaged and of poor quality.

But the worst complaint against George Sparling was his inability to follow instructions to buy, or to sell locally, in accordance with the assessment of the market in Britain made by Sparling and Bolden. The instructions to sell tar in Virginia and to buy turpentine for shipment to Britain, sent in May 1789, were not followed:

To George Sparling, 3 August 1789.

"We are surprised to hear you say you've 2,500 barrels tar on hand, which as you had purchased and could not sell again in the country, you ought at any rate to have freighted a vessel on the best terms that could be done, and we can't help thinking but you might easily have got one had you looked out for the same, and shipped off all the tar you had to either London or Hull, as the leakage and expense of keeping it in good order during the summer season must be very great. We have just sold all your tar at 11/6 per barrel chiefly to go to Hull so that there's not much now in this place, and if no great quantities arrives soon, we expect it will get up to 12/- or 12/6. But you'll observe the duty is near 12d. per barrel and the casks from your State continues so small still that the dealers here begin to give the preference to tar brought from Carolina as the casks there gauge 31 gallons and upwards on an average, and from your place only about 29 gallons at most. We have also sold your turpentine per *Active* at 15/6 per cwt which is likewise to go to Hull, and is a fine price as 'twill net above 20/- per barrel after freight, duty etc is paid; and as you have received our letters urging you to buy all you could possibly [get] of this article, we hope you'll exert yourselves in purchasing all that's possible to be got throughout the country and ship the same immediately to the different places we recommended. Tobacco continues the greatest drug imaginable . . . so by all means sell again in the country whatever you are under the necessity of taking in payment . . ."

18 October 1789.

"[Turpentine shipped to London and Liverpool has been sold at 15/6 per cwt] We have likewise sold at the same price what your J[ohn] L[awrence] advises us you were shipping in the *Thomas* for London provided it arrives betwixt [now] and the 1st January next, so that you see it will make you a very good remittance. But 1,250 barrels, the quantity you mention purchasing during the season, is a trifling matter indeed, even in retail which suppose you must mean. However after what we wrote you so often concerning this article, desiring and recommending you to endeavour to buy all you could, nay to engross the whole if possible, let the price be almost whatever it would, you should have engaged all that your different neighbours got in the retail way. which might have been easily accomplished by employing some friend to purchase the same for you. We doubt not but Messrs. Stotts who, we fancy, buys far more in retail than you do, would have sold the same again at a moderate advance or at a price they could

not get from any other person, rather than ship it themselves for Britain, and we think every one else would have done the same. We fancy you made no application up at Edenton, otherwise you might have bought a good deal there, or in that quarter, as a ship arrived here lately from thence who had 400 barrels in consigned to Mr. Anthony Warwick who has resided here some time. This vessel had also 1,000 barrels of tar on board but notwithstanding there has been several other parcels of tar imported here lately from different places, the prices keeps at about 12/- per barrel. Yet if you can sell what you buy in retail at 6/- sterling per barrel cash, 'twill be better than shipping it to Britain on your own account, we mean so long as you buy it on the terms you last mentioned. As for tobacco, sell all you receive on the best terms you can rather than send any here, where it continues the greatest drug imaginable. We have been obliged to send the 16 hogsheads you shipped in the *Brilliant* last spring [received in May 1789] to Holland, where we expect 'twill fetch but a very poor price, being of so bad a quality."

A similar letter to John Lawrence on 17 October says that the turpentine would make nearly 10s. per barrel clear profit in sterling, "a prodigious thing", and repeats the complaint that not enough effort had been made by both partners in Virginia to buy up more turpentine throughout the neighbouring countryside. The shipping of tobacco to Holland was not expected to be very profitable; a letter to Lawrence earlier in the year on 25 April complained that freight cost 12s. to 15s. per hogshead, that insurance was $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 2 per cent, and that these with the cost of handling the shipments constituted a heavy increased charge against the proceeds in Holland.

It is clear that Lawrence's shipments of Virginia produce were subject to some of the complaints levelled against those shipped by George Sparling. Since Lawrence was held by Sparling and Bolden to be in charge of both the Suffolk and Norfolk concerns, he was blamed for some of the mistakes made by George Sparling too. But Lawrence had one supreme virtue in the eyes of his Liverpool partners; he continually sent bills of exchange. Whilst on 3 August 1789 Sparling and Bolden complained that George Sparling had sent only £200 in bills since February 1788, the letters between January and 3 August 1788 actually acknowledged the receipt of £481; but letters to Lawrence in the same period acknowledged the receipt of £4,272.

VI TRADE AFTER THE AMERICAN WAR—THE PROBLEM OF REMITTANCES FROM VIRGINIA

Before the American war, with the Thirteen Colonies as part of the trade system of the British Empire, American exports were in a favoured position. American ships could use British or British colonial ports on an equal basis with British ships. The export of naval stores from the colonies was encouraged

by bounties, so as to reduce Britain's dependence on Baltic supplies, which might be cut off in war, and which were often to be paid for in specie whether legally exported or not. Tobacco from Virginia had to be sent to a British port, but from there it was re-exported to many countries in Europe, and the planters shared the prosperity of the British merchants who handled it. Such exports, therefore, were the natural means of payment for British manufactures, necessary to American life because so little industry had by that time developed in the colonies.

After the American war, the need of the United States for British goods remained great, and the trade in woollens, iron and steel goods, and luxury goods of all sorts, soon exceeded that of pre-revolutionary days. But the payment of import duties on these British goods tended to raise prices for the consumer: Sparling and Bolden commented thus on the Virginian State taxes:

To John Lawrence, 19 May 1788.

"The late additional duties laid on goods imported into your state we should suppose must soon lessen the importation thereof greatly, as the duties on many articles are so high that it makes it next to a prohibition, though we fancy few things can be manufactured with you so as to be sold on as good terms as the like can be when imported, notwithstanding the excessive high duties on the latter. However it's the consumer that pays the tax in the end."

The Federal duties which began in August 1789 were not so heavy,⁽²⁹⁾ and Sparling and Bolden seem to have made no complaint of conditions of trade being affected by them, in spite of the forebodings of 1788. But together with the financial difficulties caused by the circulation of inflationary paper money left over from the war period, the new duties may have accounted for the frequent complaints of Sparling and Bolden about the high prices of Virginian produce. These are continually made the basis of warnings to George Sparling and to Lawrence not to ship tobacco, tar and turpentine to Britain as remittances; when the British market appeared favourable for sales the recommendation to buy tar or turpentine is always qualified by a consideration of the purchase price in Virginia.

Exports from Virginia to Britain were also subject to other changes arising from the independence of the U.S.A. Bounties on the import of naval stores disappeared, and the competition

⁽²⁹⁾ See H. Heaton. "The American Trade" in *The Trade Winds*, for the new conditions for American trade after 1783. The textile duties are detailed in Heaton's article in *Thoresby Society Publications*, Vol. XXXVII, part III (1944), p. 242. Some details of the Virginian State's protective tariffs are to be found in E. R. Johnson and others, *History of Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States*, Vol. I (1915), chapter viii, "American Commercial Policy 1776 to 1789."

of Baltic and Russian production was therefore greater. Thus Sparling and Bolden's recommendations about the shipment of Virginia tar were often based on the flow of competing imports. The only comparative figures for various sources of supply so far discovered are taken from J. Jepson Oddy's *European Commerce* (1805):

TAR IMPORTS TO ENGLAND 1786-1799,
MEASURED IN "LASTS"

	From Russia	From Sweden	From U.S.A.	Total Imports ⁽³⁰⁾
1786	2,647	2,388	1,822	7,112
1787	2,557	3,605	3,465	9,753
1788	3,244	1,687	2,617	7,809
1789	1,306	2,868	2,753	7,043
1790	2,535	4,566	5,337	12,614
1791	2,639	1,655	2,203	6,732
1792	2,365	2,870	3,124	8,534
1793	1,513	4,447	2,929	9,001
1794	5,899	3,078	2,141	11,283
1795	1,899	3,409	3,843	9,820
1796	2,781	4,906	3,337	11,279
1797	1,750	2,359	2,613	6,960
1798	5,005	4,513	1,586	11,403
1799	7,264	7,325	2,285	17,231

The fluctuation is more marked in the Baltic supply than in that from the U.S.A., partly owing to the Russo-Swedish war of 1788-90, which gave an opportunity to the U.S.A. to attempt to make good the expected deficiency of Baltic imports. However, there seems to have been a limit to the capacity of Britain to absorb such quantities as were sent, so that until the French wars began in 1793, a year of considerable importation from one country was followed by a year when much less was imported.

The Letter Book provides evidence of the fluctuating nature of the trade. For example, on 4 November 1788 Sparling and Bolden wrote to Lawrence that tar, using their favourite word for low prices, was a "drug", since 2,000 barrels had lately arrived in Liverpool from Archangel. On 8 February 1789, they were prepared to offer tar to Peter Townson and Co., of Lancaster, at 11s. 3d. per barrel on normal terms, but at a valuation of 12s. 6d. in barter for an assortment of cordage;

⁽³⁰⁾ Oddy, p. 548, also printed figures for Denmark and "Other Countries", both insignificant; the figures given above for total imports include these sources of supply, but differ from Oddy's figures slightly, because his addition in each year was incorrect in the units. Oddy also printed figures of imports into Scotland, without any indication of source of supply, and figures for import of pitch, in smaller quantities than tar.

A "last" was 14 barrels of pitch or tar; see J. A. Halliwell, *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* (1889).

the deal went through, and they wrote to George Sparling on 27 April that they would be glad to get rid of further tar on such terms again. But by the middle of the year, a change in the situation was reported:

To John Lawrence, 3 July 1789.

"We have this day sold the whole of S[parling], L[awrence] and Co.'s tar, about 2,000 barrels, at 11/6 per [barrel], above three quarters of it to go to Hull. Had not upwards of 1,000 barrels arrived here about a week ago from Philadelphia and as much more soon expected from same place, think we should have got 12/- or 12/6 for ours, as there was little left in town besides what we had, and this [is] just the time tar is wanted for sheep salve."

The east coast market was important in the market for both tar and turpentine, from its close connections with the Baltic; by the end of 1789, a cargo of tar for Hull was advised:

To George Sparling, 3 November 1789.

"We understand tar is lately advanced in Hull, being now worth 15/- or upwards per barrel, and likely to be scarce there as well as at other ports on the East coast from the very short importation this year from Russia and Sweden. Therefore agreeable to what we mentioned in our last⁽³¹⁾ we think it would answer very well was you to send a cargo to that port early in the ensuing spring and also one to Newcastle, to both which places we doubt not but you'll meet with vessels to freight on tolerable easy terms, as it will be so good a season of the year to go there, besides being so convenient for a vessel to go from thence to the Baltic for a loading of timber, hemp, flax, iron etc., which is always to be got there on freight, for some port or other of Britain."

None was sent, which was fortunate, since tar prices remained low. Sparling and Bolden wrote to Lawrence on 30 May 1790 that Hull was overstocked, and on 8 July that Liverpool had recently imported about 12,000 barrels, "by far the greatest quantity that was ever known at one time". Only the threatened outbreak of war with Spain, because of the dispute about Nootka Sound in Vancouver, seemed to offer a prospect of prices worth a shipment of tar from Virginia. Similarly the danger of war with Russia in 1791, when Pitt protested about Russian advances on the Black Sea coast, caused Sparling and Bolden to discuss possible price improvements; but on 1 May they wrote to Lawrence that peace seemed the most likely outcome, and that tar was a "great drug". Thereafter tar prices remained low, and the retirement of William Bolden in 1793 made the Liverpool firm less concerned with shipments of produce from Virginia: thus they gave little news of the effect of war on prices.

There is less comment on alternatives to Virginia for the

⁽³¹⁾ This was dated 18 October (quoted above, p. 145), advising him to sell locally. But a letter to Lawrence of 24 October suggested a cargo to Hull because Archangel imports were less than had usually been sent in the previous few years. On 16 November Lawrence was told that Archangel tar was fetching 18s. per barrel in Hull.

supply of turpentine, but prices in Britain seem to have fluctuated more widely than in the case of tar. Liverpool does not seem to have been a particularly good area for selling turpentine locally; Sparling and Bolden wrote:

To George Sparling, 6 November 1788.

"We have frequently mentioned to you that Hull is generally a better market than this [port] for both tar and turpentine.⁽³²⁾ and that whenever you had a quantity of these articles on hand, and could not dispose of them for cash, to charter a vessel to carry the same to that port [would be wise]; for above half the good turpentine that's brought here, is sold to go there. A little good tobacco also generally answers to send thither, as a considerable quantity is manufactured there and other parts of Yorkshire."

The strong connection of Liverpool with the American trade probably accounts for the fact that so much was shipped to Liverpool though used elsewhere, so that Liverpool was often overstocked, as was so with tar. Lawrence complained of the sales of turpentine sent to Liverpool by Sparling, Lawrence and Co., and Sparling and Bolden replied:

To John Lawrence, 23 June 1791.

"[we] think we ought to be the best judges of such matter [as the time and price at which to sell] from our knowing of the very great quantity there was at all the markets in this Kingdom, and so much more expected that we were convinced the best price we could get offered for it would be most prudent to accept, and we never could have got so much for it since. Besides it's an article that grows worse in quality when kept long on hand, and storage is no small expence. There's now above 10,000 barrels *here* and no sale. We have been told some small parcels have been sold at 7/6 per cwt, and as the quantity distilled at this place is only trifling, we fancy there's enough for two or three years consumption if no more is imported here, and Hull and London, the two principal places for distilling it, are also both quite overstocked *therewith*, and [turpentine] is scarcely saleable at either on any terms at present."

The degree of fall in price is shown by the results of the sales of much smaller quantities in 1789 and 1790:

To George Sparling, 2 March 1790.

"Turpentine has just taken a start again and is much enquired after, so that we fancy 16/- and upwards per cwt. might now be obtained for it here, especially such as comes from your State, which is preferable to any other."

Fifty barrels were sold at 16s. per cwt., Sparling and Bolden reported to Lawrence on 15 March 1790, "being wanted for distilling, the spirits of which we understand is much more used than formerly". On 19 March they evidently anticipated that such prices might cause a glut, and advised Lawrence not to buy after 1 August unless Virginia prices were low: "We are told a cargo of 1,500 barrels is just arrived at Hull from Cape Fear [N. Carolina], but such a quantity does not stock that market more than 500 barrels would this."

⁽³²⁾ "At which place [Hull] four times the quantity is distilled than is done here" to Lawrence, 15 November 1791).

There were good profits made on small quantities of turpentine in Liverpool in 1789, and two cargoes were sent to London where good prices were expected. (See p. 147.) A large cargo sent to Liverpool in 1790 was not so profitable, but prices improved and two cargoes were sent to Hull in 1792. Sparling and Bolden reported to Lawrence on 8 June 1792 that the first, of 1,000 barrels, netted a profit of almost 8s. sterling per barrel, in spite of the fact that the barrels were light in weight. The second, of similar size, did not do so well; its quality was "so very ordinary", and large imports at London had brought falling prices; only one offer for the cargo was received, they wrote on 4 August. Good prices returned in 1795, when Lawrence sent 2,500 barrels of turpentine and 500 barrels of tar to Hull. Sparling and Bolden wrote on 24 October to M. and J. Dobson of Hull, who handled the sales there, that at the prices they quoted, the shipment should equal as a remittance a bill of exchange at a rate of exchange between Virginia currency and sterling of 40 per cent. They reported to Lawrence on 29 October that though imports from Archangel would damage the tar prices, the turpentine should make "a very handsome profit". Again the barrels were light, this reducing the profit; but when the tar was finally sold, Sparling and Bolden wrote to Lawrence on 2 April 1796 that the cargo, excluding the charge for Lawrence's commission, equalled about 15 per cent exchange.

There is little in the Letter Book about sales elsewhere than Hull and London. No doubt much would be sold in Liverpool without need for letters to be copied into the Letter Book, and be shipped by the purchasers to other ports. Sparling and Bolden sold tar to Lancaster, in no great quantity, and small quantities of tar and turpentine to Warrington.⁽³³⁾ On 29 November 1795 a letter to Dobsons of Hull reported that 1,000 barrels of tar had recently been sold to go to Newcastle, but not apparently by Sparling and Bolden.

In the first year of customs records for the newly-formed federal government of the U.S.A., tobacco accounted for two-fifths of the total exports.⁽³⁴⁾ But importing tobacco was not an important part of Sparling and Bolden's business, and unfortunately no letter gives any indication whether it was of any importance to them before the American war.⁽³⁵⁾ In the period of the Letter Book, 1788-99, what few shipments of tobacco they

⁽³³⁾ Lancaster sales: see letters to P. Townson, 13 September 1788, 8 February 1789 (see above, p. 139) and 24 February, 6 March 1789; Warrington sales: see letters to Chandlers and Higginbotham, 24 April 1789 and 3 February 1791.

⁽³⁴⁾ *The Trade Winds*, pp. 196-7; rice and indigo made up another one-fifth. No proportions are given for other commodities.

received were small, and not welcome as a remittance. Though in general exports of tobacco to Britain were less than before the war, Sparling and Bolden complained that Liverpool was overstocked:

To John Lawrence, 3 September 1788.

"There is upwards of 6,000 hogsheads now in this town and we fancy a good deal more expected, which is a far greater quantity than has been at this market at one time for a great number of years past."

10 February 1789.

"[on the sale of 55 hogsheads of tobacco, net proceeds £398] with respect to the tobacco, if we had not disposed thereof when we did, we never could have got so much for it since, and those people that have speculated much in the importation of this article from America the last year must be very great sufferers."

The freedom since the war for U.S.A. planters and merchants to export tobacco direct to Europe also meant that the glutted markets could not be cleared by exports from Britain to Europe. Perhaps answering a suggestion from Lawrence that Sparling and Bolden should ship tobacco from Liverpool to Holland, they replied:

To John Lawrence, 25 April 1789.

"The freight of tobacco from hence to Holland is generally 12/- to 15/- per hogshead, and insurance $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 per cent, which with other expenses of landing and reshipping makes a heavy additional charge thereon."

Two shipments to Rotterdam were made at the end of 1789, one of which brought in a profit of £99 for 16 hogsheads insured for £130, and the other, lost on the Isle of Wight, brought in £247 from the insurance on 27 hogsheads.⁽³⁶⁾ No more was sent because the price in Rotterdam was also low, and letters to Virginia show that Europe, as well as Liverpool, was overstocked with tobacco:

To John Lawrence, 28 November 1789.

"Notwithstanding the severe frost you had the beginning of last month may have destroyed near a third part of this year's crop of tobacco, it is thought it will have little or no effect on the price here, as there is such an immense quantity now on hand in this country as well as in Holland, and the French buys none at present."

16 August 1790.

"All places in this Kingdom are at present quite overstocked with tobacco turpentine and tar. . . There's now upwards of 22,000 hogsheads tobacco in London and we fancy betwixt 7 and 8,000 hogsheads here, and no sale scarcely at any price. Holland is likewise quite overstocked with this article at present."

⁽³⁵⁾ The Liverpool Town Books record the granting of permission on July 5 1769 by the Town Council to John Sparling and William Bolden, merchants, to vary the terms of the lease of "the pitch house" and ground adjoining on the South Shore.

⁽³⁶⁾ See letters to George Sparling, 9 July 1790, and to John Lawrence, 3 October 1791. The sales were handled by William Tasker of Rotterdam, to whom four letters were addressed between 17 October 1789 and 6 March 1789, and these include details of sales.

In fact, this situation appears to have continued, in spite of the French wars, until 1797. Sparling and Bolden's letters then allow tobacco to be a good remittance, but seem chary of recommending that Lawrence should be involved in any shipments:

To John Lawrence, 13 February 1797.

"Tobacco has sold very well all the last year, and have been told has made a great remittance, which has seldom been the case before. However, from the high prices with you now, think it's a dangerous thing to meddle with."

8 July 1797.

"No kind of North American produce will answer to send here at present except tobacco which still continues to sell at great prices."

10 October 1797.

"At foot you have the prices of your produce, which being so high with you, will not answer to send here at present except tobacco, which continues to sell well, but it is a most dangerous article to speculate in, especially when the price is so exorbitantly high in America."

In one letter it is suggested that one cause of the trouble was that the planters were producing too much:⁽³⁷⁾

To George Sparling, 3 November 1789.

"There's now upwards of 6,000 hogsheads of tobacco here and scarcely any sale whatever for it, so don't see what the importers must do with it. Your planters ought not to make half the quantity they have done of late years, but grow wheat in lieu thereof which will always answer to some part or other of Europe."

Possibly planters had assumed that freedom of direct trade with Europe would increase consumption there; but this trade could not be combined with large exports to Britain also, since a large amount of the tobacco reaching the British Isles was re-exported, both before and after the American war:

TOBACCO IMPORTS TO ENGLAND AND WALES
1772-1775 AND 1784-1791

	Imports	Value	Exports		Imports	Value	Exports
1772 ..	51.5	£0.48	49.8	1784 ..	40.0	£0.38	28.0
1773 ..	55.9	£0.54	50.4	1785 ..	34.1	£0.32	26.3
1774 ..	56.1	£0.53	44.1	1786 ..	37.7	£0.36	21.1
1775 ..	56.0	£0.53	43.9	1787 ..	31.8	£0.30	26.5
				1788 ..	39.1	£0.37	7.2
				1789 ..	47.6	£0.45	29.1
				1790 ..	47.1	£0.44	26.3
				1791 ..	38.2	£0.36	44.3

(Figures in millions of lbs. weight, and millions of £'s value)

⁽³⁷⁾ See H. U. Faulkner *American Economic History*, (8th ed., 1960), New York, p. 134 *et seq.* He gives tobacco production in 1774 as 101,800,000 lbs. and in 1790 as 130,000,000 lbs., when over half the population of the southern states were engaged or dependent on the plantations. But the war was not succeeded by favourable commercial treaties with the war allies, France, Spain and Holland, or the other European countries.

The figures from 1792 onwards, on a slightly different basis of calculation, show the same trends.

TOBACCO IMPORTS TO THE BRITISH ISLES, 1792-1799⁽³⁸⁾

	Imports	Value	Exports		Imports	Value	Exports
1792 ..	44.1	£0.42	31.2	1796 ..	23.6	£0.22	17.3
1793 ..	25.0	£0.24	31.4	1797 ..	26.8	£0.26	18.6
1794 ..	33.1	£0.31	19.9	1798 ..	40.7	£0.39	18.5
1795 ..	22.6	£0.22	24.1	1799 ..	37.2	£0.35	18.4

The glut of 1788-92 is well illustrated by these figures, and the distrust by Sparling and Bolden of the good prices of 1797 was obviously not shared by many importers, so that 1798 and 1799 re-exports were small and a good deal of stock was left in the British Isles.

The direct American exports to Europe, however, did affect the trade of Sparling and Bolden in that it enabled them to accept bills of exchange instead of shipments of produce, in return for goods sent for sale in Virginia. A few examples of this are to be found in the Letter Book. Sparling and Bolden wrote to William Tasker of Rotterdam on 22 October 1789 sending a draft on him drawn in favour of John Lawrence by William Stokes, presumably of Virginia, explaining that the draft was on account of tobacco shipped for Rotterdam, and that this was the only way in which Lawrence could get money from Stokes. The debt was for only £63 7s. 0d. sterling, which was to be remitted to Sparling and Bolden when due. A somewhat different method was indicated when the latter wrote to Lawrence on 11 April 1792 that he had been commissioned by the Liverpool merchant John Brown to charter an American vessel and load her with 200 to 220 hogsheads of best James River tobacco for L'Orient in France, and to draw bills on Brown for the cost. The partners reported on 27 October that the ship had arrived safely and that Lawrence's bills had been honoured by Brown.

Sparling and Bolden were thus gaining money in Liverpool from American shipments to Europe. As examples of other American transactions which built up credits in Europe or Britain, which would eventually be used to pay for British exports, may be quoted the dealings of Sparling and Bolden with two Virginia merchants, no doubt recommended by Lawrence. In these dealings, Sparling and Bolden would earn only commission by handling in Liverpool the business sent to

⁽³⁸⁾ Figures from *English Overseas Trade Statistics 1697-1808*, by E. B. Schumpeter, pp. 56-62. There are figures for tar and pitch imports for the same period, but unfortunately no distinction is made between American and Baltic origin.

them, and by remitting the profits to London merchants as instructed.

In 1795 William Pinnock of Virginia sent his vessel, *Fanny and Betsey*, to Bordeaux with a tobacco cargo, the freight for which, worth £619, was to be taken by the master to Liverpool to pay for a cargo for Virginia. The master arrived without the freight money, which was eventually remitted to Liverpool by Fenwick, Mason and Co., of Bordeaux, through Parish and Co., of Hamburg. Sparling and Bolden also handled about this time two other ships for Pinnock. On 12 March 1795 they advised Pinnock of the arrival of the *John* from Virginia, whose cargo of tar and barrel staves they sold. Whilst waiting for freight from Liverpool to Virginia, the master took a cargo of tobacco from Liverpool to Havre; Sparling and Bolden did not arrange this, though they approved of the master's decision and paid his insurance and outfit costs, and received the freight money for the voyage, £480. On 2 November 1795, they advised Pinnock of the arrival in Liverpool of the *Moses Myers*, with tobacco, flax seed and staves; they sold only the staves, but received the freight money for the whole cargo. These three ships were all loaded for Virginia from Liverpool by Sparling and Bolden, with a ballast cargo of salt and whatever amounts of cargo from other shippers in Liverpool could be obtained. When the accounts were cleared by 1796, they were able to remit £400 on 16 May to Messrs. Douglas and Shaw of London, and the balance remaining, £86 10s. 0d., to Messrs. Lamb and Younger of London.⁽³⁹⁾ John Granbury of Virginia sent his vessel, the *Swift*, with tobacco and staves, and again Sparling and Bolden only sold the staves and received the freight for the tobacco, from the proceeds of which they outfitted the ship for Virginia and bought a cargo of salt and other goods including white lead and paint. Again, only a little freight could be found for her, and, thanks to a scarcity of salt, and increased cost of outfitting, owing to a long stay in Liverpool because of contrary winds, there was only £31 13s. 6d. to remit to Granbury's London correspondents, Messrs. Crewe and Allport. Granbury also drew a bill for £345 on Sparling and Bolden, in anticipation of the freight of a voyage by the *Swift* to Madeira in 1797; the value of this totalled £393 16s. 11d., and it was eventually accounted for by Crewe and Allport.⁽⁴⁰⁾

⁽³⁹⁾ See the nineteen letters to Pinnock, 26 February 1795 to 3 November 1796, the nine letters to Douglas and Shaw, 10 March 1795 to 16 May 1796, and a single letter to Lamb and Younger, 31 October 1796. There are references to the transactions in the letters to John Lawrence during this period.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ See the nine letters to John Granbury, 28 October 1795 to 28 January 1797, and the five letters to Crewe and Allport, 23 January 1796 to 5 March 1797.

These voyages represented two sorts of earnings for Americans, in that the sale of tobacco would create credits for them in Europe or Britain, and in that an American shipowner could earn freight money. Such freights might be sent to European ports, like that of the *Fanny and Betsey* to Bordeaux, or that of the *Swift* to Madeira; and the value could be transmitted to London or elsewhere in Britain, to pay for goods bought there.

The effect of the achievement of independence by the U.S.A. on the position of American ships in trade with the British Isles was not as harmful as it might have been. American vessels could enter British ports at the same rates as British or British colonial vessels, whereas all other foreign ships suffered the disadvantage of having to pay an "alien duty" on all goods they brought into British ports. But the federal government in 1789 favoured American shipping in all trade to U.S.A. ports by charging duties of 50 cents a ton on foreign-owned and foreign-built ships, and of 30 cents a ton on American-built but foreign-owned ships, as against 6 cents a ton on American-built and American-owned ships. Thus the goods sent by Sparling and Bolden to Virginia, both from London and Liverpool, were frequently carried in American vessels, and the special cargoes of goods shipped by George Sparling or Lawrence from Virginia were sent in American vessels. The only limitation on Anglo-American shipping produced by independence was that American vessels could no longer be sold to Britain and put on the British register, and thus be used to create credits or pay debts in Britain. A further limitation did not much affect Sparling and Bolden, since it concerned chiefly the West Indies: no American vessel could be admitted to the trade between Britain and her colonies, or between any colonies, or between the U.S.A. and any British colonies. But when the French wars broke out, even this limitation had to be lifted by special licences. Of course American vessels, as neutrals, were for a long period less liable to seizure by the French,⁽⁴¹⁾ and thus favoured in Anglo-American trade.

It was because of these earnings of U.S.A. planters and ship-owners in the trade to Europe, and of U.S.A. shipowners in the carrying trade to Britain, that Sparling and Bolden could ask George Sparling and Lawrence to send the profits of their sales of British goods back to Liverpool in the form of bills of exchange, and yet not engage themselves continuously in receiving and disposing of cargoes of American produce. This is most marked in one respect. A new feature of American

⁽⁴¹⁾ *The Trade Winds*, pp. 195, 203.

exports after independence was the growth of the trade in wheat and flour, worth a million dollars in the first year in which the federal government collected customs duties; one quarter of America's wheat and one seventh of her flour went to Britain in that year.⁽⁴²⁾ Sparling and Bolden had noted the importance of this trade, and besides mentioning to George Sparling in 1789 that the Virginian planters would do better to plant wheat than tobacco, they referred regularly to the prospects of the British harvests and the consequent effect on the possibility of importing American wheat or flour. But they themselves never dealt in these or strongly recommended George Sparling or Lawrence to take part in the trade. Bills of exchange made available by other merchants' efforts were no doubt much to be preferred.

VII THE PROFITABILITY OF THE TRADE

Since the Letter Book contains references merely to the accounts of the firm, and no detailed figures or invoices, only estimates can be given of the proceeds of the trade. To consider first what had happened before 1788, there are indications of prosperity in the size of the debts outstanding in 1775. The evidence concerning the profitability of shipowning, mainly from other sources than the letters, points to similar conclusions; the readiness with which Sparling and Bolden abandoned shipowning after 1783, together with their obvious shrewdness and command of commercial intelligence, makes it clear that they would not have entered into shipowning previously had it not been profitable. This careful assessment of trade possibilities is shown in their refusal to enter into the speculative tobacco trade or into the corn trade. In their purchases for export, the firm seems to have been well supplied with capital, and so able to pay suppliers of goods soon after receipt and take the discount for prompt payment; and this was in spite of having money locked up in America in debts unpaid since the war. The firm survived the financial crisis caused by the outbreak of war with France, which led to many bankruptcies in Liverpool and elsewhere. During 1793, Sparling and Bolden were scathing about some of the failures; for example:

⁽⁴²⁾ See *ibid.*, pp. 196-7, for a description of the various U.S.A. exports. Apart from tobacco, tar, turpentine and staves, the only other import dealt with by Sparling and Bolden was an occasional cask of beeswax. They wrote to George Sparling on 30 May 1790 that one cask had brought £10 per cwt., and was a good remittance; the duty was 31s. 7d. per cwt., but it was always in demand and should be shipped whenever available.

To John Lawrence, 22 July 1793.

"Most of the houses that stopped payment here in March and April were not worth a shilling ten years ago and scarcely any one of them ever worthy of being credited for £500, not even those that stopped [payment] for above £500,000. . . . We have been lucky enough to keep clear of any loss by any of the bankruptcies that have yet happened in this place, but many people have suffered greatly as well as much inconveniency thereby."

An attempt can be made to interpret the various financial references in the Letter Book and estimate from the following table the commercial success of the firm:

EXPORTS AND RECEIPTS OF SPARLING AND BOLDEN,
1788-1799, DIVIDED AT THE TIMES OF THE DEATH OF
GEORGE SPARLING IN 1791, AND AT THE RETIREMENT
OF WILLIAM BOLDEN BY 1 JANUARY 1794

Goods shipped by			Remit- tances ⁽⁴³⁾	Accounts current		
Lawrence Sparling		Total		Lawrence Sparling		Total ⁽⁴⁴⁾
1787				£7,458	£2,827	£10,285
1788	£2,798	£3,128	£3,913	6,564	[5,600] ⁽⁴⁵⁾	[12,164]
1789	3,465	2,322	5,787	5,326	5,651	10,977
1790	4,722	2,411	7,133	5,385	3,097	8,482
1791	3,210	3,705 ⁽⁴⁶⁾	6,915	6,155	2,278	4,850
	<u>14,195</u>	<u>11,566</u>	<u>25,761</u>	<u>23,427</u>	George Sparling died 1791	
1792	1,910		1,910	3,313	4,717	1,333
1793	1,679		1,679	3,128	3,748	400
			<u>3,589</u>	<u>6,441</u>	Bolden retired	
	Grand totals	<u>£29,350</u>	<u>£29,868</u>			
1794	£1,932		1,932	4,633	£436	£96
1795				1,539		£532
1796				2,317	[none stated]	
1797				664		
1798				1,412	6,680	272
1799				952		6,952
	Total of goods	<u>£31,282</u>				
	Total remitted		<u>£41,385</u>			

⁽⁴³⁾ These figures refer mostly to bills, but also include a small number of shipments of specie amounting only to £1,633 in all. Though clear differentiation between goods shipped and accounts current is made in the letters for the two firms of J. Lawrence and Co., and Sparling, Lawrence and Co., it is impossible

In addition to remittances by bills and specie, there is also to be estimated the value of shipments of tar, turpentine, tobacco and beeswax, which was credited to the Virginia partners against their balances owed to Sparling and Bolden. These figures are much more difficult to calculate: sometimes a specific profit is named, sometimes the gross proceeds, more often a price per pound or per hundredweight.

ESTIMATED VALUE OF GOODS SHIPPED FROM VIRGINIA 1788-95, TOGETHER WITH REMITTANCES BY BILLS AND SPECIE

	Remittances	Goods shipped	Total
1788 ..	£3,913	£725	£4,638
1789 ..	4,635	3,871	8,506
1790 ..	8,724	1,164	9,888
1791 ..	6,155	477	6,632
1792 ..	3,313	716	4,029
1793 ..	3,138		3,138
1794 ..	4,633		4,633
1795 ..	1,539	2,183	3,722
	<u>£36,050</u>	<u>£9,136</u>	<u>£45,186</u>

The calculation of profits made by the firm during the period of the Letter Book is complicated by the fact that some of these remittances in bills and goods must include payment of debts contracted before 1775, and there is little indication, even when debts are mentioned, of what proportion of the payments made are trading debts from 1775 and what from trading after the war. But a balance sheet can be attempted:

to distinguish between bills of exchange sent to Liverpool by the two firms. Bills drawn by Lawrence on Sparling and Bolden and thus paid in England amounted to just over £1,000 for the period of the Letter Book 1788-99, and were probably included in the Account Current figures.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ These figures are dated in the Letter Book for 1 January each year. Thus the first figures quoted are for 1 January 1788, and represent the trading situation of the previous year. Instructions to close down the firm were sent to Lawrence on 10 October 1797, which accounts for the large increase in the account current for 1798 in spite of the fact that no goods had been shipped out to Lawrence. There is no figure for 1 January 1800, since the last letter in the Book is dated 8 July 1799.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ No figure was included in the letters for 1789, but a letter to Lawrence of 8 February 1790 stated that the balance then was much the same as the year before.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ A cargo worth £2,849 was shipped to George Sparling in 1791, but arrived after his death. It was taken over by Lawrence, sold at Norfolk, and incorporated into his accounts for 1792, in spite of complaints from Sparling and Bolden that they were thus a further year out of their money.

ESTIMATED BALANCE SHEET OF THE FIRM OF SPARLING AND BOLDEN, BETWEEN 1 JANUARY 1788 AND 1 JANUARY 1799

DEBIT	CREDIT
Stock and debts in Virginia shown by Account Current on 1 January 1788.. ..	Bills remitted and goods shipped 1788-95..
£10,285	£45,186
Goods shipped to Virginia..	Bills remitted 1796-8 ..
31,282	4,393
Profit	
41,567	
8,012	
£49,579	£49,579

Assets not included: £6,952 owing to Sparling and Bolden on Account Current on 1 January 1799, of which £952 was remitted in 1799.

If we count £8,012 as a suitable estimate of profit on an expenditure of £41,567, this makes nearly 20 per cent profit, and in view of the fragmentary nature of the estimates of goods shipped to Sparling and Bolden, this must be an underestimate. If the £6,952 still owing on 1 January 1799 is counted as a good debt, to be remitted in due time, then the total profit is £14,964, about 35 per cent.

Certainly from the evidence of the later careers of John Sparling and William Bolden we can assume that they were rich men. In 1788 Bolden was able to marry into the landed family of the Flemings of Rayrigg, Windermere; his wife was the widow of the Reverend William Raincock, rector of Ousby in Cumberland, and her sister also married a prominent Liverpool merchant, Thomas Lake. The Lake District was then becoming popular as a resort for wealthy mercantile and industrial families. Near to Rayrigg lived Sir John Legard, another prominent Liverpool merchant; Sir Clement Jones's book, *John Bolton of Storrs 1756-1837* (1959) gives an interesting picture of the society gathered in that area, mostly in the period after 1807 when Bolton had bought Legard's house at Storrs. Bolden sent out one of his stepsons, Christopher Raincock, as an apprentice to Lawrence, according to a letter of 15 February 1791; but there is no further reference to his progress. Fletcher Raincock, another stepson, was a prominent northern barrister in the early nineteenth century, and was buried at Liverpool. But Bolden's will is the best proof of his prosperity; after small legacies to his stepchildren, he put the bulk of his fortune in trust to purchase an estate for his nephew, John Lennard, on condition that he took the name of Bolden. This was done, and the estate purchased was The Hyning, near

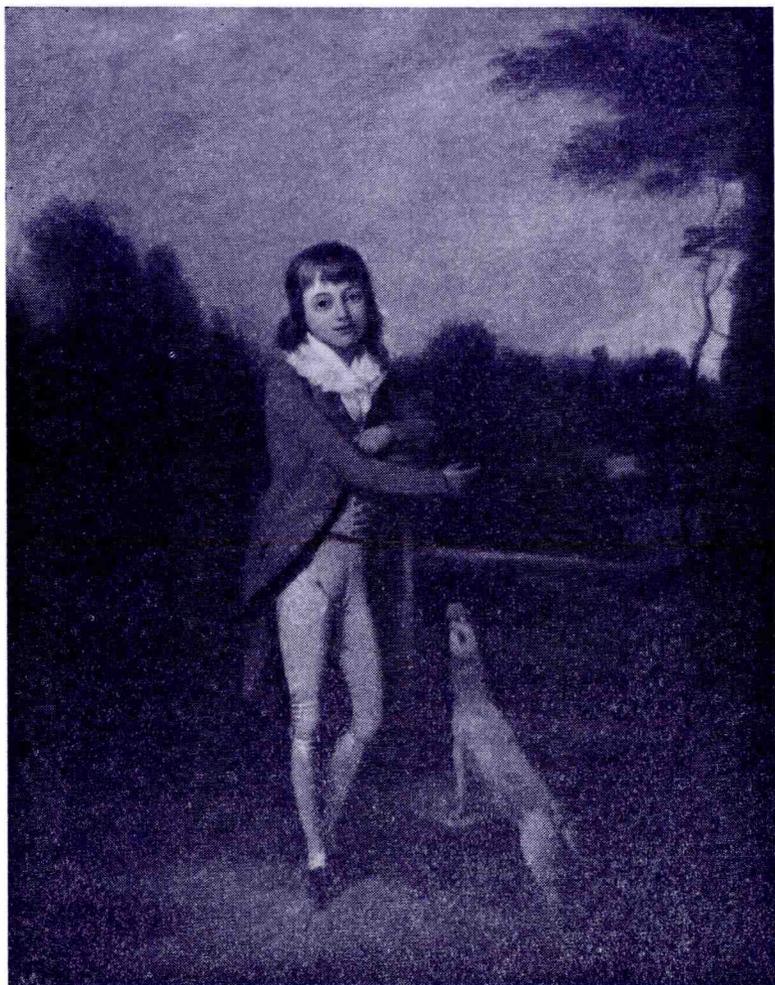


Plate 15.

WILLIAM SPARLING, 1777-1870
A portrait of 1790 in Eton Montem dress

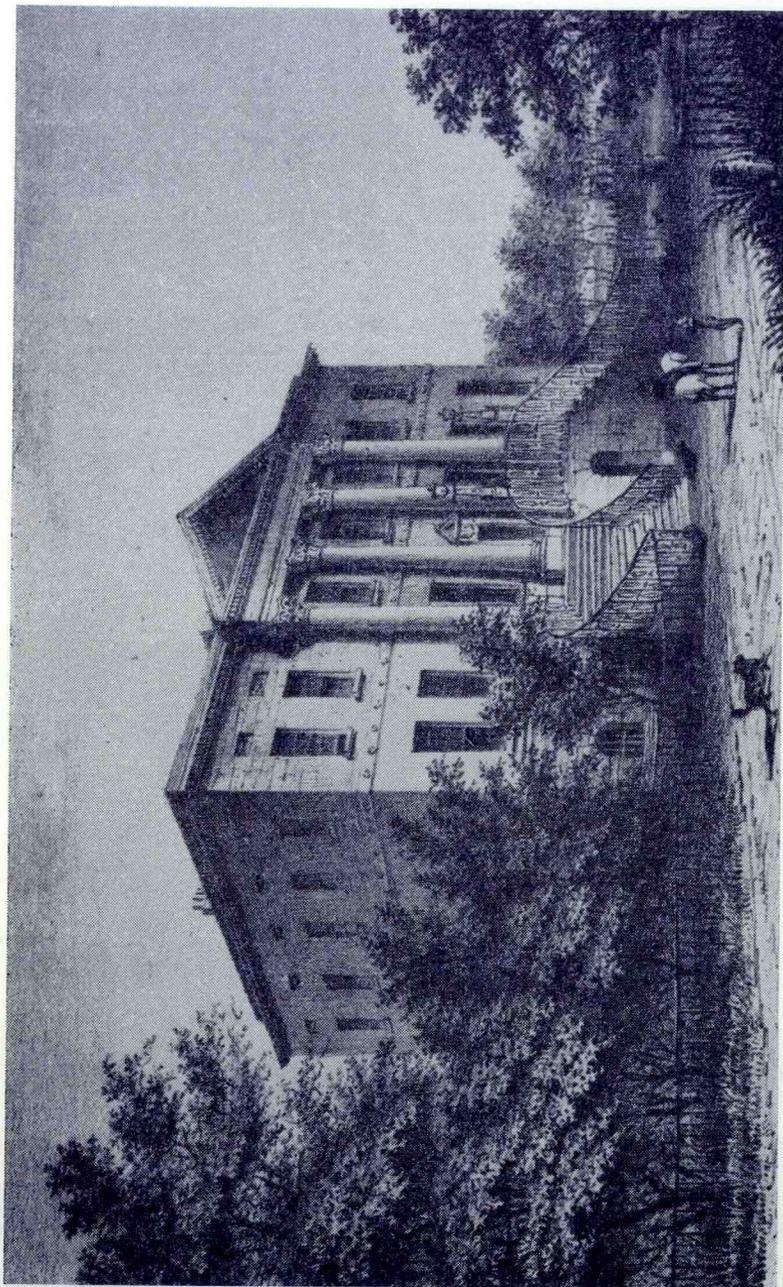


Plate 16.
ST. DOMINGO HOUSE IN 1839

Warton, north of Lancaster, which remained in the family until 1948. William Bolden was described as "Esquire" in his will, though no landed estate has been traced in his possession.

John Sparling was also called "Esquire" in his will; and in 1785 he was sufficiently prominent to be appointed sheriff of the county of Lancaster. He was again mayor in 1790 in Liverpool. He lived mostly on the St. Domingo estate near Liverpool, and died there in 1800; but in 1786 he bought the estate of Petton in Shropshire, which his descendants held until the 1920s. His son, William Sparling, deserted Liverpool for Petton after fighting a notorious duel in Liverpool in 1804, for which he was tried and acquitted on a charge of murder. John Sparling had wished his St. Domingo estate to be inhabited by his family, or by others of the name of Sparling, and made special provision for this in his will. His trustees, however, had an act of parliament (50 Geo. III, c. 109) passed in 1810 to break the provisions of the will and enable them to sell the land for the benefit of his children, who all married into the landed gentry. When the act was passed the value of the land was quoted at £20,300, a tribute to his foresight in purchasing the estate at £3,740 in 1773.

Neither family seems to have fed back any of this capital into the mercantile life of Liverpool. Here is yet another example of a business fortune providing for the entry of families into the landed gentry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks for assistance in preparing this paper and for permission to reproduce the two portraits are extended to Mrs. M. Cunliffe-Fraser, a descendant of John Sparling; Mr. W. N. L. Bolden, a descendant of William Bolden; the directors and staffs of the Liverpool Record Office, and of the Lancashire County Record Office.

