



John & Charles Palmer: Bath's Multi-Tasking Entrepreneurs

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The Palmers were entrepreneurs in the sense of seeing and seizing economic opportunities, and the wealth they created allowed them to move steadily up the social scale. (Fig. 1)

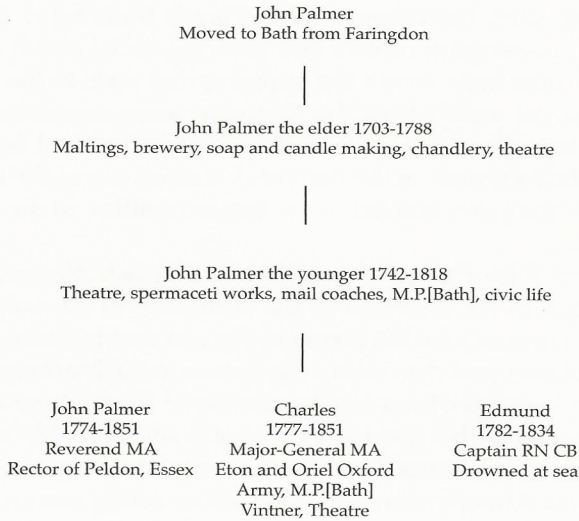


fig. 1. The Palmer Family of Bath

My research on the Palmer family began with an invitation to contribute the entry on John Palmer (1742-1818) in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), with a short note on his son Charles Palmer (1777-1851). This interest continued as enquiries from France about Charles Palmer inspired further research that was published in the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* (2012). The present article, based on cumulative enquiries, was presented as a talk to the History of Bath Research Group, February 10th 2014.

There were many profitable openings in Bath in the eighteenth century, and after their arrival from rural obscurity under the guidance of the most senior John Palmer about whom very little is known, his son John Palmer the elder (1703-1788) established several businesses. These thriving concerns, growing up in Bath's 'industrial zone' between the South Gate and the navigable river Avon, included maltings, a brewery, and soap and

fig. 2. John Palmer the younger, aged c.17 years of age. Portrait in oils on canvas painted c.1759 by Thomas Wordlidge. Formerly attributed to William Hoare. Reproduced by courtesy of Victoria Art Gallery, Bath and North East Somerset Council.

candle-making concerns. The family home was at the place of work and the products were sold at a chandlery in Lower Borough Walls.¹ By the mid-eighteenth century he had two new projects underway: a theatre in the orchard outside the south-eastern borough walls, and a house within and backing against those walls at Galloway's Buildings. The theatre, which the Palmers came to dominate, would have offered a commercial as well as a cultural opportunity through its regular and continuing demand for candles to light the venue, and the property at 1 Galloway's Buildings may have been run as a lodging house as well as a family home. The builder and architect Thomas Jelly was involved in both projects and both still survive. The former is increasingly known especially at Bath Festival times as the Old Theatre Royal, although after the opening of the New Theatre Royal in Beauford Square in 1805 it became a Roman Catholic Chapel in 1809 and a Masonic Hall from 1865 to the present date; the latter has become North Parade Buildings.² Studies such as that by Jan Chivers on the developing careers and growing social status of the medical men James and George Norman have shown the opportunities open to the professions in Bath. But the Casualty Hospital with which the Normans were associated was not founded until 1787, by which time the city's built and social structure had been well-established by craftsmen and tradesmen such as the Palmers.³ Indeed it was the numerous accidents befalling workers over the years that led to the late recognition in the 1780s of the need to provide for casualties.

The success of John Palmer the elder's businesses allowed him, in the mid-eighteenth century, to turn his attention to the education of his only son, another John (1742-1818), referred to here as John the younger. He was sent to study first at the Academy run by the rector of Colerne, and then with a clergyman at the Marlborough Free Grammar School, both of whom may have been family members.⁴ Given these clerical connections, it is likely that he emerged with a good grasp of Latin and probably also of Mathematics. His father had hoped he would enter the Church, a way into the gentry for a Bath working family, but this step was strongly resisted by the active young man who, having failed to gain permission to enter the army, preferred to labour in the family businesses, reportedly toiling in the workshops as well as gaining an overview in the counting house.⁵ A little known portrait of him at the age of seventeen conveys something of his strength of character, qualities referred to in a lengthy memoir published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* at the time of his death. This described how a 'quickness of intellect and a spirit of enterprise, marked his earliest character...qualities he preserved through life', a life that is well-represented by the three portraits chosen.⁶ These are all held in Bath's Victoria Art Gallery and show him in youth, maturity and old age. (Figs. 2, 3, 4).

The family businesses flourished but it seems that the theatre, despite its access road named Orchard Street and its location close to John Wood's smart new Parades, was a cause of concern for John the elder. He decided that to secure its status against rivals an Act of Parliament authorising the granting of a Royal patent should be promoted. The agreement and help of the Corporation of Bath was crucial to this, but so also was the confidence placed by his father in John the younger. The task was undertaken successfully by this relatively young man still in his mid-twenties, and after the conduct of parliamentary negotiations in London this honour was secured in 1768 (8 Geo. III, cap.10). When the patent was renewed in 1776 it was in the name of John the younger, as it was that of 1779 for the theatre recently acquired in Bristol. The two Theatres Royal and their companies of actors were run together as complementary enterprises, their status allowing them to draw on actors from the London stage.⁷

The prestige of the Orchard Street Theatre had now been secured, but with its

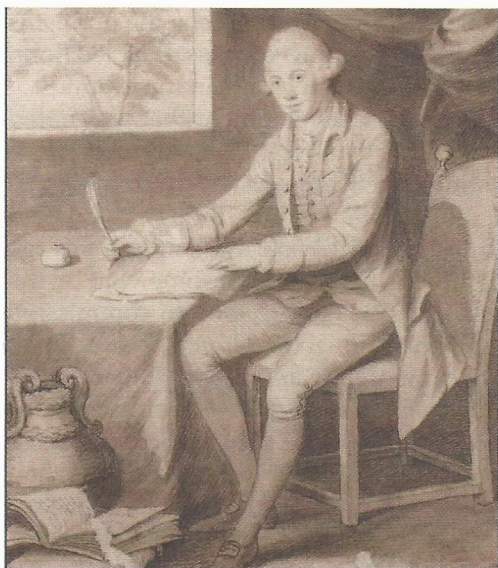


fig. 3. **John Palmer the younger in maturity.** Portrait drawn by Thomas Beach [n.d.] Reproduced by courtesy of Victoria Art Gallery, B&NES.



fig. 4. **John Palmer the younger in later years, aged c.75.** Etching by the Hon Martha Jervis dated May 30th 1817 (reproduced by Charles R. Clear in *John Palmer (of Bath) Mail Coach Pioneer*, 1955). Probably based on a pencil drawing by George Dance, 1793, (National Portrait Gallery), published in the contribution on John Palmer in the *ODNB* (2004).

rectangular shape and flat roof the building was not entirely suited to its purpose. Several re-designs were undertaken, most successfully and lastly in 1774 by the architect also named John Palmer.⁸ But although the heat and fumes of a full house could be improved by installation of a ventilation system that is still in use, little could be done about the inadequacies of the tallow candles which, whilst providing limited illumination, dripped on to the fine clothing of the audience.⁹ There were windows in the façade of this classical Georgian building, yet internally the boxes along the walls blocked out any natural light. The absence of candles supports the observation of Professor Martin White of the University of Bristol in his recent research on the Jacobean Indoor Playhouse that ‘illustrations of theatres in which the source of illumination was candlelight regularly fail to include the source of that illumination’. But conveniently for our study he later quotes evidence from what is for his case a disappointingly ‘later playhouse’, but which is for the Bath theatre a very close contemporary. This is the still-existing Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden, where in 1766 nearly 230 candles per performance were accounted for, employed on the stage and in the house, with chandeliers above and bracketed upon the walls of the auditorium. This total may have been even greater in English theatres because a contemporary cartoon by Thomas Rowlandson entitled ‘Tragedy in London’ shows a box lit by a small candelabrum holding two candles, a separate provision which may have been repeated many times over in the crowded boxes of the Bath Theatre Royal.¹⁰

The economic opportunity provided by the demand for candles came however with a challenge, that of dealing with complaints such as those recorded in the *Bath*

Chronicle, 10th December 1767 and February 18/25th 1768. It may have been the problems set by these clothes-damaging dripping and spluttering tallow candles that led John Palmer the younger to seek a solution by setting up a spermaceti works in the grounds of a large house he bought on the west side of the borough, a development that was noted at the time but has been little remarked upon since.¹¹ This was West Hall, a house whose building had been embarked upon by Governor John Holwell after his return from Bengal in India, where he had survived the 'Black Hole of Calcutta' of 1756 though many had died without water or air. His account of this tragedy, written on the long sea voyage home, had a profound effect on national susceptibilities, since modified somewhat by the development of an historical perspective.¹² By the 1760s he had decided to commission another house in a more commanding position, further along the Upper Bristol Road. Built by 1772 and named Belle Vue, this was to become the Beaulieu Lodge that makes an occasional appearance on the present Bath property market. But the Governor's move released West Hall on to the property market of the late 1760s, for Benjamin Donn's map of 1769 shows that 'Mr Palmer' was by then in possession of the house (fig. 5). The map shows the Upper Bristol Road leaving Bath by the West Gate, and shortly thereafter we see the name 'Mr Palmer' and a drawing of a house flanked by black dots indicating buildings. The Name 'West Hall' appears a little further on, just above the first mile stone where it was probably accommodated due to a lack of space nearer the house itself.

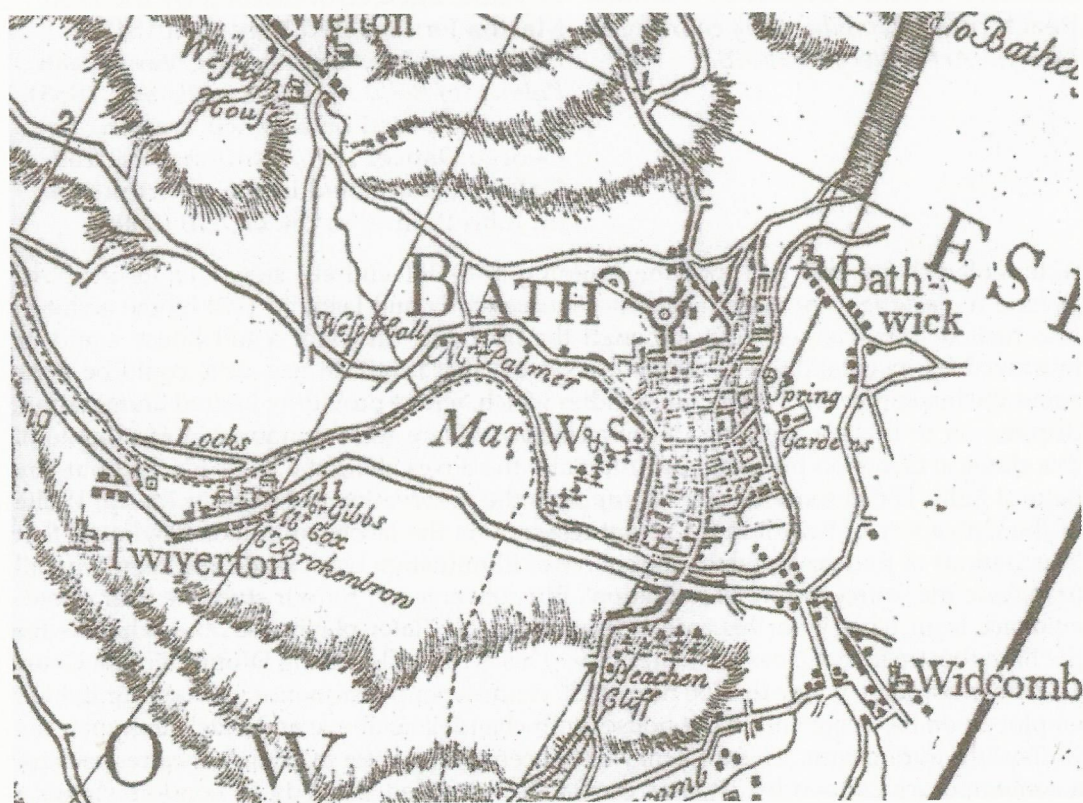


fig 5: Map of the country 11 miles round the city of Bristol. Section from the 'Actual Survey' by Benjamin Donn (1769), showing Mr Palmer's West Hall on the Upper Bristol Road. Reproduced by courtesy of the Bristol Record Office: BRO, Bristol Plans/arranged/232c.

The move by John Palmer the younger to the west of the city may have marked a step away from the tutelage of his father and the family workshops beyond the South Gate, but the location on the upper turnpike road to Bristol could also have been attractive to a young man anxious to improve amenities in the theatre with which he was now closely concerned, especially the lighting. Not only would there have been space in the grounds of West Hall to establish a spermaceti works, but the oil to be made into these superior candles could have been carried in barrels along the turnpike road from the port of Bristol. Little is known of this industry, but Bristol sources reveal that in the 1750s and 60s partnerships of local merchants set up joint stock companies to 'fish' for whales, though they found sailors difficult to recruit, especially after one ship was frozen in the ice for more than ten weeks.¹³ But this commodity was then in any case becoming available from the north-east coast of America where whaling flourished and the oil was exported from places like Nantucket Island.¹⁴ The attraction of the sperm whale to the sailors from those ports lay in the large quantities of the mis-named sperm oil found in cavities in the massive head, probably as an aid to buoyancy. After being harpooned, tethered alongside the ship and killed, the oil would be drawn from the head and submitted to preliminary work on deck before being shipped, congealed in large casks, to British and mainland European ports.

The casks were carried from these ports to spermaceti works like those attributed to Palmer junior, where candles that would shine with a brilliant light and be smokeless and odourless were produced. Achieving this standard required a high degree of craftsmanship, especially in the control of the temperatures to which the oil was submitted, but these candles were much more acceptable to theatre-goers and wealthy families than those of tallow or hard animal fat. Perhaps as a sign of growing stability and success, on 24th August 1769 John Palmer the younger married Mrs Sarah Mason, a widow from Clifton in Bristol. Many merchants lived in this wealthy suburb but no connection has been found between her family by first marriage and a whaling partnership.¹⁵ Nevertheless this suggestion of a link between the marriage, the move to West Hall, and the setting up of the spermaceti business is worth serious consideration, especially as it was observed in *Public Characters 1802-1803* that Palmer 'took the shell of a large house and grounds... called West-hall, moulded the house into a comfortable mansion, with suitable offices, and established a considerable spermaceti manufactory'.¹⁶ Perhaps the decision by Governor Holwell to leave the partly built or 'shell' of a house created an opportunity for the young entrepreneur to shape both a family home and a business enterprise.

By the end of the decade as the *Bath Journal* of 15th February 1779 records, John Palmer the younger was again in pursuit of new openings. He proposed a scheme that has a very modern ring – for the development of 'a THEATRE, ASSEMBLY ROOMS, and HOTEL, on a Piece of Ground situated betwixt Mr. Harford's, chymist, in High-street, and Mr. Council's [meaning Council property?] in Walcot-street, for making convenient roads to, and furnishing the same'. He looked to raise 30,000 guineas in four tontines, but it seems that nothing came of this proposal.¹⁷ He was however able to secure in 1781 through the Corporation, the construction of a new road linking Orchard Street to St James' Street. This not only allowed better access to the theatre for the practical aspects of running such a business, but also permitted theatre-goers from the fashionable parts of Bath being built to the west and north, to arrive by coach in greater style.¹⁸

The year 1781 is also of interest because it saw the first performance of a short interlude play that confirms John Palmer the younger's continuing close involvement with the theatre. Entitled 'The Rose-Wreath or Chaplet of Innocence, a Pastoral Drama in One Act Perform'd by Children', this came to figure often in the three-part programmes then common

at the two Theatre Royals. I knew nothing of this play when I wrote to that fine repository of British documentary and published eighteenth-century material, the Huntington Library in California, in search of information of general interest on John Palmer the younger and other Bath worthies for whom I had been invited to write biographies for the forthcoming *ODNB*. They replied that with John Palmer I had 'struck the Mother-lode' because they possessed a manuscript copy of 'The Rose – Wreath – in which the script ends with the signature of John Palmer -. I asked for a copy of this rare manuscript, which on arrival raised several questions. Did John Palmer himself write the play, as a diversion from his many activities, or was he 'signing off' a manuscript that was to go to the Lord Chamberlain for authorisation as required by the Licensing Act of 1737?¹⁹ Or was this John Palmer neither the one whom we are concerned, nor the architect mentioned earlier, but an actor of the same name who sometimes appeared on the stage in Bath? This last suggestion seems improbable in view of the notice in the *Bath Chronicle* of 16th May 1782, recording the much-applauded appearance at 'our theatre on Saturday last [of] Mr Palmer of Drury Lane', in a programme that included 'The Interlude of the Rose Wreath'. If this highly acclaimed actor of the London stage had been the playwright, this connection would surely have been proclaimed as a proud boast.

The authorship of the theatre proprietor himself is not ruled out in the *Catalogue of the Larpent Plays* in the Huntington Library (see n.19), but the possibility of the signature being a signing off of a manuscript destined for the office of the Lord Chancellor may be a stronger suggestion, unless Palmer was both author and proprietor. Permission had to be granted fourteen days before the first performance, which the Catalogue notes was to be in Bath on 16th June 1781. This may have been the date in the case presented to the Lord Chancellor by John Palmer, but as the *Bath Journal* of 14th May 1781 shows, it was launched a month before that. Here it was announced that on Saturday next, the 19th May, there would be 'a new Interlude (Never Perform'd here) call'd THE ROSE WREATH, or CHAPLET OF INNOCENCE', preceded by 'DOUBLE FALSEHOOD, or The Distress'd Lovers (Written by Shakespear)' and followed by 'the Farce of the GHOST'. Perhaps we see here in his dealings with the Lord Chancellor, a foreshadowing of Palmer's later attitude to figures of authority personified by the Postmasters General.

The discovery of 'The Rose Wreath' also throws an interesting new light on the portrait of Julia Keasberry, a member of the well-respected family of actors of whom William Keasberry (**fig. 6**) had been appointed actor-manager at the Bath Theatre Royal in 1771. Ten years later he cast his daughter Julia (**fig. 7**) as Helena, the charming queen of the May, in the short interlude play mentioned above. Helena was a demure young woman who wished generously that the title and the wreath or garland of roses could have been shared with her two close friends. Before knowledge of the contents of this play had surfaced as a result of correspondence with the Huntington Library, Susan Sloman's article in *Bath History* (1996) on 'Artists' Picture Rooms in Eighteenth-Century Bath', had included a painting of Julia Keasberry by Thomas Beach as an example of studio portraits of the time.²⁰ The date of this painting, c.1782, is contemporary with performances of 'The Rose Wreath' and it is now possible to suggest that this portrait shows Julia Keasberry in the role of Helena, holding not an artist's studio prop, but a garland of roses that would have been very familiar to Bath's theatre-goers. 'The Rose Wreath' has had no lasting theatrical reputation but it must have suited the temper of the time, and its present significance lies in what it and the portrait of Helena can tell us about the artistic community in Bath in those years.

Despite these interests, by the early 1780s, John Palmer the younger's energies were turning to a larger stage, that of the delivery of mail across the nation. He found delays in the system personally frustrating as so many of the arrangements concerning

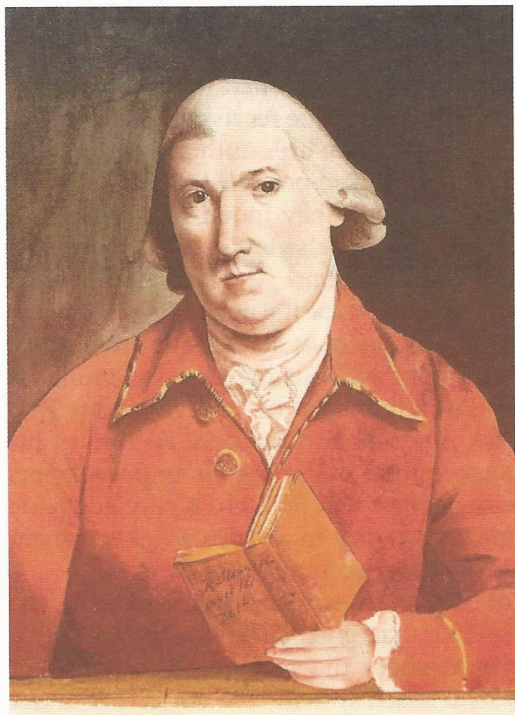


fig 6. William Keasberry of Bath, actor-manager of the Old Theatre Royal, Bath until his retirement in 1795. Portrait by Ralph Stennet(t), created c.1790 as a miniature watercolour, reproduced by courtesy of the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath and North East Somerset Council.



fig 7: Miss Julia Keasberry, Bath Actress. It is likely that she is shown here as Helena in 'The Rose-Wreath', a short play presented frequently at the Old Theatre Royal Bath in the early 1780s. Full-length portrait, oil on canvas, painted by Thomas Beach c.1782. Copyright Christie's of London, whose generosity in providing this image and allows its publication, are gratefully acknowledged.

the theatres had to be conducted by this means. This led him to devise an improved and speedier mode of delivery by suggesting the introduction of a specially designed system, with mail coaches operated by trained and armed staff, able to pass unheeded day or night through the toll gates then operating at intervals along the turnpike roads.²¹ The system of cross country routes initiated by Palmer the younger's Bathonian predecessor Ralph Allen, which removed the need for all mail to go through London, was developed further, and the mail coaches leaving London were freed from the delays imposed by having to wait for government business papers of the day.²² Speed, security, and delivery at all cost, were to be the main criteria.

In a repeat of his lobbying for theatrical status, John Palmer the younger now secured the help of both William Pitt (at the Treasury 1782-83 and Prime Minister and Chancellor 1783-1801 & 1804-06), who was attracted by the prospect of prompt delivery and improved finances, and the Hon. J.J. Pratt (later Lord Camden, Recorder and MP for Bath) who was willing to promote its business. The scheme was agreed after a successful trial on the Bristol-Bath-London road in 1784, and John Palmer the younger accepted

responsibility for setting up and operating it on a national scale. This great challenge was achieved and he travelled widely in mainland Britain and to Ireland and France to give advice. In 1786 he had been appointed Surveyor and Comptroller General of the Post Office at a salary of £1,500 p.a. and a percentage of the improved revenue received, but there was to be no retrospective meeting of his costs and the title gave him little authority within that organisation, which continued to be controlled by aristocratic postmasters-general who were not inclined to take orders from a provincial upstart. They found him difficult to deal with and referred to him privately as 'The Dictator'. Palmer's view of them, expressed unwisely in letters to his formerly-trusted deputy Charles Bonnor, were unhappily to be revealed by the recipient. This was a double blow to Palmer, for the apostasy of someone he had trusted was followed after much in-fighting by his own suspension from office in 1792. He found himself obliged to leave the service without the past reckoning he felt should have taken place, although through Pitt's influence he received from 1793 an annual pension of £3,000 in recognition of the practical and financial success of his reforms.²³ He also had the satisfaction of immense public praise for his improvements to the system, although as an experienced entrepreneur he had failed to secure adequate returns for his pump-priming investment of time and money in an historic government institution towards which his powers and rewards had not been properly defined.

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Human Resource Management at the University of Bath, John Purcell claimed in the late 1990s that John Palmer was 'one of Bath's most successful entrepreneurs', having a clear view about the systems of employment and training of those chosen to operate the new mail coach system. He noted that under Palmer's routine the coaches were checked daily by the manufacturers from whom they were leased; the drivers, employed by the contractors concerned with passenger services, had to meet and maintain high standards; and the guard, the only employee of the Post Office, was armed and highly trained to meet all emergencies. If for example the mail coach was held up for any reason he was to abandon the passengers, take one of the horses, and ride through to deliver the mail. This dramatic instruction provides a powerful example of the main principle of entrepreneurship on which it was claimed John Palmer operated: that of recognising 'the importance of organising against uncertainty'.²⁴ But if this is the ultimate test of entrepreneurship, then John Palmer was to prove inadequate because he failed to secure his own position against 'uncertainty'. Despite the brilliance with which he conceived his novel ideas and put them into practice he never established himself in the metropolitan context within which he had to operate. This was probably due in part to an uncompromising manner, seen already in the dispute with the family about entering the Church, and in part to the failure of the man from the provinces to fit in with what was (and with the continuing association of the Queen's image with the Royal Mail still is), essentially a part of the 'establishment'. Although awarded the pension through Pitt's patronage noted above, he was denied the lump sum for monies expended to which he felt himself due. That had to await the parliamentary lobbying of his son Charles, who accommodated himself much more easily to the centres of power and privilege.

The decade leading to John Palmer the younger's suspension in 1792 must also have been a difficult one for him personally. From the *Bath Chronicle* of 9th January 1783 we learn that his mother had died in the most painful circumstances, three weeks after her 'neck-handkerchief' had been accidentally set on fire in a blaze which spread so rapidly that 'she was burnt in a most shocking manner, before it could possibly be extinguished'. The death of his father, still living in Galloway's Buildings, was reported in the same paper of 17th April 1788. John the younger's wife and at least two children also died in these years but

on 2nd November 1786 he married again, a Miss Pratt who was reputedly the niece of Lord Camden.²⁵ Perhaps as a sign that the family were moving out of active participation in the brewing business, property in Southgate Street had in March 1783 been leased to Opie Smith, a brewer of Bathwick.²⁶ With their long-standing connections with brewing however there is the teasing circumstance of a public house on the Upper Bristol Road which carried the name 'The Westhall Inn' until it was recently refurbished and renamed the 'New Westhall'.²⁷ Could there be some connection with the Palmer house and workshop of that name?

After leaving the Post Office John Palmer the younger continued to be active in civic life, consolidating his position in Bath. He had already become a member of the Bath Council in April 1775 and a Bath Improvement Commissioner from the inception of that body in July 1789. Now he became a Bath Turnpike Trustee in 1793, an Alderman in April 1795 and Mayor of Bath in 1796 and 1809. He resumed a close connection with the Orchard Street Theatre in 1792, after retiring in 1785 as his postal service commitments grew.²⁸ Having given a silver cup for horse racing in 1791, he now gave silver cups to the Bath Volunteers in 1805, to encourage their shooting skills in case of an invasion by the French.²⁹ He also returned to the national scene by serving in the Whig interest as one of Bath's two Members of Parliament from 1801 to 1808, retiring after the death of his second wife. He had by then moved to grander homes, in Bath to 25 Circus, and in London to Upper Gower Street. He died in 1818.³⁰ The continuing success of his three sons must have been a source of great pleasure, for with their careers in respectively the Church, the Army and the Navy (see fig 1), the Palmer family had entered the ranks of the gentry. And through Charles, who added membership of Parliament to his career in the Army, John Palmer had at last been able to find recompense for his Post Office losses. He had hoped to achieve this same end through his own service as Member of Parliament, but it was Charles who in 1813 secured an award of £50,000 for his father, in addition to the pension he already received.³¹

In Charles Palmer (1777-1851), the spirit of entrepreneurship flourished as it had in earlier generations, perhaps even more diversely as he developed his interests in four separate spheres: the Army, Parliament, Bordeaux wines, and the Bath Theatre Royal.³² After a privileged classical education he entered the army in May 1796 as a cornet in the 10th Dragoons. These were to become the 10th Hussars, the Prince of Wales' own fashionable regiment, known informally as the 'Shiny Tenth' on account of the splendour and high gloss of their uniforms. Charles Palmer served with his regiment in the Peninsular War (1808-14), becoming Lieutenant-Colonel in 1810 and aide-de-camp to the Prince of Wales in 1811. He fought in several major battles and skirmishes including Sahagun, Benevente, Orthes and Toulouse, but was also present in Parliament on sufficient occasions to secure the large sum for his father mentioned above, and to defend the army in the debates that took place there.³³ In March 1812 for example, as was reported in the pages of Hansard, the Colonel was called upon to defend the 10th Hussars on account of the large number of 'gentlemen from the German legion' promoted into positions of authority in this regiment. The Hanoverians were clearly not yet trusted, for it was thought that if they found themselves stationed in an area of unrest in England and were allowed to act by proclamation rather than by the call of the civil authorities, then a dangerous power would have been entrusted to foreigners.³⁴

A second matter on which Colonel Palmer was called upon to defend the 10th Hussars in Parliament came about in June 1815, and concerned the use of corporal punishment (specifically flogging) in the army. How, asked the MP Mr Bennet, could we treat our own soldiers so harshly? Palmer responded by reflecting in general on the problem

of maintaining discipline without the power of inflicting corporal punishment, and spoke specifically of the challenge he had faced when placed in command of the Regiment on its embarkation for and arrival in Lisbon. There, in this 'wine country,' the men were soon in a state of intoxication such that he had to assemble them and warn of the punishments that would be served out for drunken misconduct. Three or four such judgements showed he was in earnest and order was restored.³⁵ There must have been undercurrents of tension during this debate because by this time Palmer had become critical of the then commanding officer Colonel Quentin and his laxity in matters of discipline. Palmer's friendship with the Prince of Wales cooled when he joined other officers in making these criticisms known. The Prince was intent on maintaining authority in his own corps, so in November 1814 the critics were dismissed to other regiments, Palmer to the 23rd Dragoons. Although he was to be promoted to the rank of major-general, and known thereafter in Bath as General Palmer, there must have been a continuing bitterness between the leading adversaries until honour was settled by a duel fought in France in February 1815: Quentin fired first and missed; Palmer shot into the air; and the protagonists retired to Paris.³⁶

After the defeat of the French at Toulouse in April 1814 and the abdication of Napoleon, Charles Palmer joined the many British soldiers heading to Bordeaux and a passage from France, but probably he was the only one who took the opportunity to buy a vineyard on the way. This was at Cenon near Bordeaux and it was being sold by the widow of the owner. French sources tell us that the deal was concluded in a shuttered carriage. The transaction took place on 16th June 1814 and so began Palmer's third career, with a considerable investment in developing and extending the property. French and English experts were employed and the estate was extended to a total of 163 hectares, with 82 hectares set with vines. I was alerted to the continuing importance of this enterprise that I had thought to be of historical significance only, by M. Gilbert Perrez who contacted me through the University of Bath after reading the entry on John Palmer in the *ODNB*, with its brief reference to Charles Palmer in whom he was particularly interested.³⁷ The wine, Château Palmer (suitably pronounced in the French fashion), became very popular in England as the estate was developed by Charles Palmer, and it was soon to be found especially on the royal tables and in the London clubs. It is still highly thought of and commands a premium price in the present wine markets.³⁸ The long-standing enjoyment by the English of the wines of Bordeaux had been interrupted by the French wars, giving Palmer's entrepreneurial investment in this reviving business a sound economic basis.

From M. Gilbert Perrez of Cenon we learn not only of the fine Bordeaux wine still bearing the Palmer name and the circumstances in which the estate was purchased, but also of the château set in parkland, built by Charles Palmer. As **fig 8** shows, this was Georgian in style and materials, and decorated with medallions dedicated to 'Mars' and 'Minerve'. It may be that we see in these not only a tribute to the General's own profession (or at least one of them), but also a recall of his home city of Bath. As the years advanced it must have become difficult for the General to oversee this venture along with his many other interests and in 1843 the vineyard was sold. The new owners built themselves a more typically French château with towers and turrets (as portrayed on the current labels), and that at Cenon fell into disuse, to be revived now as an arts centre for the community.

Meanwhile in Bath as the old Orchard Street Theatre Royal was replaced in 1805 by the new Theatre Royal in Beauford Square, Charles' father's attention was diverted away by competing Parliamentary interests and the ownership of the shares became split several ways. But in 1823, after the death of his father and as his fourth career, those in the new Bath Theatre Royal were brought together again by Charles Palmer, whose interpretation

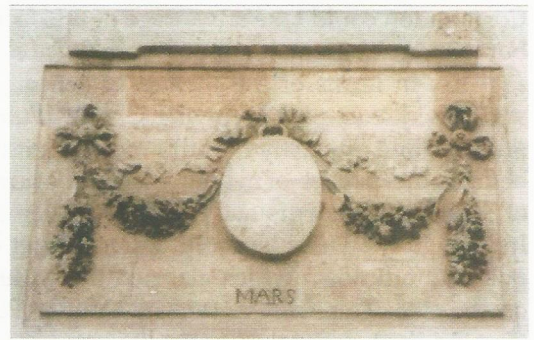
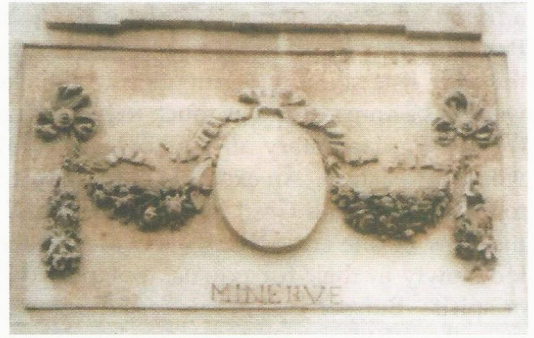


fig 8: The two faces of Château Palmer at Cenon near Bordeaux, built by Charles Palmer after his purchase of the estate and medallions labelled Mars and Minerve placed above the round-topped windows at Château Palmer, providing a decorative tribute to Charles Palmer's military careers and links with Bath. These photos were sent to the author by M. Gilbert Perrez of Cenon – the generosity of sending photographs and publication permission is much appreciated.

of entrepreneurship in this sphere of activity was to be revealed by his placing the running of the enterprise (other than the stage department) in the hands of his economy-minded managers. The effect of this greater emphasis on the theatre as a commercial enterprise may be seen in the treatment of Mrs Summers who performed on the Bath stage for fifty-six years. She was supported in her retirement by the actor-manager William Dimond, receiving from various sources associated with the theatre an annual pension of some £50-£60 on which she lived comfortably. But Mr Dimond left Bath in the summer of 1823, Charles Palmer became the sole proprietor in the autumn of that year, a Mr Taylor was appointed manager, and within a month Mrs Summer's pension had been halved, gradually decreasing further after that. Several eminent Bathonians spoke to the proprietor on her behalf, including Mr Sloper, a political supporter to whom Charles Palmer was under a great obligation, but the response was always that the matter must be taken up with Mr Taylor. This attitude towards the running of the theatre was expressed very clearly in a reply to a Mr Warner quoted by the Rev. J Genest in his near-contemporary publication: 'I have never interfered in any shape with the management of the theatre, and know nothing of the salaries, or engagements with the performers, all of which, since I came to the property, I have left entirely with Mr Taylor...'. And if distant from administration Palmer seems also to have lacked interest in the culture of the theatre, prompting one contemporary to write of him that '...never perhaps did a theatre belong to any gentleman who was so little theatrical – in the preceding season he had asked

a friend what sort of play Hamlet was...'. Yet this may indicate that not only was Charles Palmer's interest primarily commercial, but that he was also in tune with the audiences for the play lists show little attention to the classics, suggesting rather that the theatre-goers went to be amused and as much to be seen as to see.³⁹

Parliamentary affairs however continued to provide their own special theatre of words and action. An example of the former comes from Charles Palmer's attempt in 1818 to oppose the Bath Gas Lights Bill on behalf of the Mayor and Corporation, which elicited the view of one critic that these were 'a set of gentlemen who move about business much too slowly in their fur gowns, to expect they would effect anything that required energy or spirit'. But perhaps in this case the slowness served a wily purpose, as the civic leaders were thought by some to be delaying the introduction of gas lighting in the city until the Corporation could take advantage of this facility, acknowledged by Palmer to be 'beautiful' but with an 'abominable' smell from the accompanying 'effluvia'.⁴⁰

In terms of the theatre of action, the drive to electoral reform provides some very vivid examples involving Charles Palmer. Although the Council was a small self-perpetuating oligarchy of thirty members it had a deserved reputation of independence, of being in the 'pocket' of neither aristocratic nor rich men, although susceptible to the influence of local entrepreneurs such as Ralph Allen or John Palmer, both of the Whig persuasion. Indeed, in the years before the Reform Act of 1832 there was a growing reputation for a political radicalism which alarmed the Tories, and led to a determination to assert a hold on the city. This was resisted by Charles Palmer in the 1820 election when his speech at the Guildhall, maintaining that the city's representation in Parliament should not be 'made subservient to the will of the Crown and the Administration' was met with great acclaim.⁴¹ He retained his office on this occasion but lost it in 1826 when both of Bath's seats were taken by younger members of aristocratic families. This caused great anger in Bath where through his campaigns Palmer became a local hero, regaining his seat in the election of 1830. He now became an active advocate of the extension of the franchise, which had great support from Bath's professional middle class as well as from its skilled and respectable working men. Amidst Palmer's many speeches and rallies perhaps the most theatrical occasion was the demonstration staged in October 1831 by permission of the Mayor and Justices, after the Reform Bill had again been rejected by the House of Lords.

On Monday 13th October 1831, crowds gathered in Bath at appointed meeting places, Queen Square being the most favoured. There was a great air of solemnity in the city, emphasised by the closing of shops and the pealing of muffled church bells. With banners and bands the crowds converged in front of the Sydney Hotel [now the Holburne Museum] at the far end of Great Pulteney Street. The most dramatic parade was that leaving Queen Square, from where the crowd moved along George Street and down Milsom Street, along Cheap Street across Pulteney Bridge and into Great Pulteney Street, joining a gathering already swollen by those on the broad pavements and clinging on to vantage points, the total estimated to number 22,000. The hustings alone, in front of the Sydney Hotel, carried 250 people. The whole dramatic affair was 'stage-managed' by Captain Mainwaring, an advocate of reform who became chairman of the committee set up to deal with Bath's cholera outbreak of 1832. Speakers such as General Palmer and E.A.Sandford figured prominently, the former one of the borough of Bath's and the latter one of the county of Somerset's M.Ps.⁴² The Bill was passed in 1832 to great rejoicing. The electorate of Bath expanded from 30 to almost 3000, and Palmer was again returned to Parliament to sit until 1837, when the suspected republicanism of his fellow M.P. J.A. Roebuck, and concern for the city's declining prosperity, brought down both of these

radical Liberals and both lost their seats.⁴³

Perhaps with all this manifold activity there was little time for home life for Charles Palmer. On 14th April 1823 he had married Mary Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of John Thomas Atkyns of Hunterscombe House in Buckinghamshire, but very little is known of their life together, and there seems to have been no family. There was a home in Brock Street, adjacent to the Royal Crescent in Bath, and with all his metropolitan responsibilities Charles also had an apartment in the Albany, Piccadilly. After this life lived with panache at the highest level in so many aspects of the 'establishment', the last references to Charles Palmer found so far seem sadly commonplace. An obituary notes his address as 'Mayfair, London', but he was recorded in the Census of 1851 as a widower living at 35 Warren Street, Clerkenwell, London, an address to which he had perhaps retired to die in his mid-70s on 17th April 1851. The landlady was Kezia Clark, born in Chippenham and with several children of whom a daughter Ann was born in Bath. General Palmer was interred in London's Kensal Green Cemetery with a number (9522/80/RS) but no surviving monument. So ended the life of one of Bath's multi-talented entrepreneurs, described in a military tribute as 'a most forward cavalry officer in all of the 10ths encounters with the French in the Pyrenees and south of France', a vigorous approach that was reflected in his many diverse activities.⁴⁴ No portrait has yet been found.

With the death of Charles Palmer in the mid-nineteenth century not all the Palmer connections with Bath came to an end and indeed, figuratively speaking, the city has perhaps inherited more from these entrepreneurs than any family might expect. We have the former Orchard Street Theatre Royal now the Masonic Hall, the town house 1 Galloway's Buildings, and the Theatre Royal in Beaufort Square. A Memorial Tablet in the Abbey commemorates the family (Fig. 9).

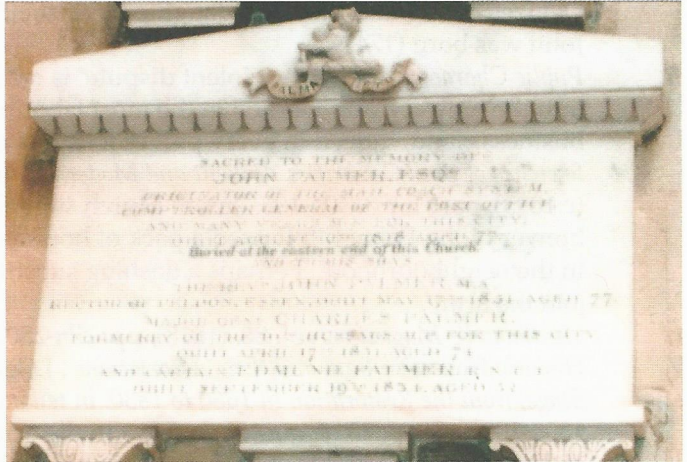


fig 9: Memorial plaque in Bath Abbey, north of the Great West Doors. Photography courtesy of the late William Hanna, published with the permission of the Rector of Bath Abbey.

and the first steps towards a more egalitarian electoral regime, and on the international stage we have a renowned vineyard and wine that still carry the name 'Palmer'. To complete the city's inheritance there are family portraits in the Victoria Art Gallery, and a fine piece of silver in the Guildhall – a splendid and valuable cup presented to John Palmer by the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, hallmarked 1789/90. One of many such tributes received in honour of his work on the mail service, this was presented to the Corporation of Bath in 1875 by Miss Henrietta Palmer, the eldest surviving child of Captain Edmund Palmer, in memory of her grandfather. Yet, whilst John still figures significantly in the story of the city's history and inheritance, Charles, despite his success in so many different and challenging fields of entrepreneurial activity is largely forgotten. Now *Bath History* allows us to restore to our collective memory something that we and the city were in danger of forgetting.

Notes

1. For a general introduction to the Palmer family see the entry on John Palmer with its brief note on Charles Palmer in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
2. Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath from 1700 to 1830* (Kingsmead Reprints, Bath, 1969, first published 1948), pp.101-102, 149; Charles Robertson, *BATH, An Architectural Guide* (Faber & Faber, 1975), pp.126,139,140. R.S.Neale, *BATH A Social History 1680-1850 or A Valley of Pleasure, yet a Sink of Iniquity* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.205, notes that the building lease granted in 1749 by William Galloway, an apothecary, stipulated that no wheeled traffic should enter the street. The condition is still observed though the name Incised in stone has now become 'Galloway's Buildings'.
3. Jan Chivers, 'James and George Norman and the rise of the Casualty Hospital, 1783-1861', *Bath History vol. XI* (Bath Preservation Trust, 2009), pp.42-61.
4. *Public Characters of 1802-03* (Printed for Richard Phillips and published in 1803), pp.534-544. This is a contemporary source of information, suggesting a welcome degree of accuracy in the text. John Palmer the elder married a Mrs Figgins of Devizes in 1737 and they had daughters Elizabeth (1738) and Mary (1740) before John was born (1742).
5. *Public Characters*, p.545. A 'violent dispute' is noted after which the son 'went into the brewery, and worked in the most laborious and servile parts of that business...and, indeed in every part of it, for nearly a year'. In his *Biographical Sketches of Bath Celebrities Ancient and Modern, with some fragments of local history* (c.1893), part 1, pp. 104-105. Jerom Murch suggests that whilst working in the brewery John Palmer 'followed a pack of hounds belonging to a clerical relative in the neighbourhood'. Perhaps a dashing substitute for his frustrated wish to join the army.
6. *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 88, (1818), pp. 276-280, esp. p. 277.
7. *Historic Houses in Bath and their Associations*. J.Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830, in ten volumes* (Bath, 1832), vol. VIII, 1805-1806. On p. 28 he quotes an entry in the actor Cooke's *Journal* of March 27th 1807, 'I played 13 nights at Bath and Bristol, at £20 a night, which was the sum I always received there, but the managers were so satisfied on this occasion, that they paid me £300'. Also William Lowndes, *The Theatre Royal of Bath* (Radcliffe, Bristol, 1982) and Malcolm Toogood, *Bath's Old Orchard Street Theatre* (Cepenpark Publishing Ltd., 2010).
8. Ison, *Georgian Buildings*, pp.101-4, provides a useful overview of the physical features of the Bath theatres. See also Lowndes, *Theatre Royal*, pp. 19-20 and Toogood, *Orchard Street Theatre*, pp. 18-20.
9. Toogood, *Orchard Street Theatre*, pp. 19-20.
10. Martin White, 'Artificial Lighting in the Early Modern English Commercial Playhouse', in the research project on 'The Chamber of Demonstrations: Reconstructing the Jacobean Indoor Playhouse', consulted on the internet, May 2015.
11. *Public Characters 1802-1803*, p. 549.
12. ODNB and also John Cannon ed., *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 107. John Zephaniah Holwell had a varied career

- in India, succeeding Robert Clive as the temporary governor after surviving the 'Black Hole'. As well as his account of this disaster Holwell wrote on Indian [politics and mythology. An inaccurate summary of the ownership of these Bath properties was presented by R.E. Peach in his *Historic Houses in Bath and their Associations* (London & Bath, 1884, second series), p. 71.
13. John Latimer, vol.2, *The Annals of Bristol Eighteenth Century* (Bristol 1893, reprinted Kingsmead Press, Bath 1970), p.296. As late as 1765 Bristol merchants were seeking the grant of an island in the 'Gulph of Lawrence' in which to set up a 'Whale Fishery'. Evidence of the early eighteenth century local use of this commodity, probably as an ointment, may be found in *Female Alliances* by Amanda E. Herbert, reviewed in the *TLS* of 6th February 2015, for in her 'Household Book' of 1692-1733 Lady Grisell Baillie of Mellerstein House in the Scottish borders recorded that on a visit to Bath in 1716 she spent 18d on 'spermacity'.
 14. Information on this industry is available on-line. See for example the research of the Nantucket Historical Association, published in *Historic Nantucket Articles* such as that by Ben Simons, 'Christopher Hussey Blown Out (Up) to Sea' (vol.53, 3, pp.9-10, 2004).
 15. All Saints Weston became the Palmer's parish church. The marriage of Sarah Mason and John Palmer the younger on 24th August 1769 was recorded in the parish register, of which a transcript is available in the Bath Record Office. Palmer's parents are commemorated by a memorial tablet in the church.
 16. *Public Characters 1802-1803*, pp.548-549.
 17. Palmer's proposal was set out in the *Bath Journal* of 15th February 1779. Tontines were essentially a way of raising funds in which increasing returns were received by surviving subscribers.
 18. Toogood, *Orchard Street Theatre*, p.21.
 19. I wish to thank the staff of the Huntingdon Library in California for the copy of the manuscript and for information on 'The Rose Wreath; or Chaplet of Innocence' from the *Catalogue of the Larpent Plays in the Huntingdon Library* (1939). The *Catalogue* p, 95 notes that the play was to be produced in Bath on 16th June 1781, and that it was signed by 'J. Palmer'. It adds that 'he was no doubt the author of it. The characters are all filled up as acted at Bath, including Mas[ter] Siddons who acted Henry. It is all in Palmer's writing'. See also Arnold Hare ed, *The Theatre Royal Bath, A Calender of Performances at the Orchard Theatre* (Kingsmead Press, 1977).
 20. Susan Legoux Sloman, 'Artists' Picture Rooms in Eighteenth-Century Bath', *Bath History vol. VI* (Millstream Books, 1966), pp.132-154, esp. p.136.
 21. Brenda J. Buchanan, 'The Great Bath Road, 1700-1830', *Bath History vol.4* (Millstream Books, 1992), pp.71-94.
 22. See the entry on Ralph Allen in the *ODNB* by the present author,
 23. There are extensive holdings on the matter of John Palmer's dispute with the Post Office in the reference section of the Bath Central Library. Amongst the parliamentary and legal papers two may be chosen for their significance. The first is a bound copy of Palmer's own Collection of Papers Relative to the Agreement made by Government with Mr. Palmer for the Reform and Improvement of the Roads (1797), addressed 'To the Public', (24194, 383, PAL). Its 65 pages include eight appendices, the first of which is a copy of the Warrant of 5th August 1786

- setting out the financial conditions of his appointment. The terms are not retrospective. The second is a copy of Charles Bonnor's intervention in *Mr. Palmer's Case Explained* (1797), bound with the *Falconer Pamphlets* volume 4 (4/27702, Class V). His charges are many, and include Palmer's attempts to cause mischief by delaying the mails, and alleged instances of him ordering the falsification of accounts. Amongst the books no longer easily available that by Herbert Joyce, *The History of the Post Office from its establishment down to 1836* (1893) may be selected especially for his account of strife within the Post Office. Because of the success of his work, Pitt continued to support Palmer until the letters to Bonnor were revealed. In *John Palmer and the Mailcoach Era* (The Postal Museum at Bath, 1984, 25 pp.), Sally Davis, presents a short, accessible account of John Palmer's successes and disappointments in his post office career.
24. John Purcell, 'A good question...What do we mean by "a good employer?"', *People Management*, (17th April 1997), pp.40-42.
 25. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1786, ii, p.995.
 26. *Bath Corporation Minute Books*, vol.11, March 31st 1783. Lease on the lives of himself (31 years), John Palmer the elder (80) and John Palmer the younger, gent. (42).
 27. Kirsten Elliott and Andrew Swift, *Bath Pubs* (Akeman Press, 2003), pp.125-126.
 28. For details of these public bodies see the Bath Record Office and the Somerset Record Office; also Lowndes, *Theatre Royal at Bath*, pp.31-32.
 29. The *Bath Chronicle* of July 25th 1805 includes the following item, 'On Friday last eleven silver cups, the gift of John Palmer, esq; representative in Parliament for this city, to the regiment of Bath Volunteers, were shot for on Claverton Down, and adjudged as follow...' – and eleven names are listed. W.G.Fisher notes in *The History of Somerset Yeomanry, Volunteer and Territorial Units* (Taunton, 1924), that the cup won that day by William Smart, private, for the best single shot on the target, was later presented to the Somerset Light Infantry. It is included in the 'Regimental Silver List' as Item 154. I am indebted to our late colleague William Hanna for this information, and the opportunity to see and handle the cup.
 30. For a generous assessment of John Palmer's character and career, see the obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* note 6 above, pp.276-280.
 31. Once elected to Parliament in 1808, Charles Palmer raised the matter of his father's unpaid costs in 1809, 1811, and 1813, achieving at last by Act of Parliament (53 George III, c.157) a payment of £50,000 in addition to the pension of £3,000 pa already being received.
 32. For a fuller account of the activities of General Palmer see my article entitled 'Charles Palmer (1777-1851: Soldier, Politician, Vineyard Owner, and Theatre Proprietor' in the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* (vol.90, 361, pp.11-24, 2012).
 33. I am grateful to the archivists of the Friends of the Waterloo Committee, Mr. David and Mrs. Janet Bromley, for this information from the Friends' Register of Memorials.
 34. The Parliamentary debate on 'Foreigners in the British Army' of 10th and 11th March 1812, as reported in Hansard, has been made available on-line by the *History of Parliament Trust* (vol.21, cc1240-50 & cc1258-60).
 35. *History of Parliament Trust*, Hansard on-line, 'Motion Respecting Corporal Punishment in the Army', June 21st 1815, vol.31, cc918-42. The problems in Lisbon

- probably arose in August 1808, though the date is not recorded in this volume.
36. Notes on Charles Palmer in the Friends' Register of Memorials. Dismissal from 'The Shiny Tenth' by the Prince must have been a great blow to the rejected officers but as they became known as 'The Elegant Extracts' they must have retained some flair, especially as the 10th Hussars then became known somewhat disparagingly as 'The Prince's Mixture' as new officers were drafted in. Charles G. Harper, *Stage Coach and Mail in Days of Yore* (1903), 2 vols., Appendix p.360.
 37. I must thank M. Gilbert Perrez for causing me to look in more detail at this aspect of the career of Charles Palmer, and for the photographs and manuscript notes that he sent as preparations were made towards opening Château Palmer as an arts centre.
 38. The websites of the winemakers of Bordeaux show the present value of the Château Palmer wines, whose 'finesse and elegance are legendary' (and expensive).
 39. Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage* vol. IX, (1823-24), pp.75-77, 270-271.
 40. Hansard Report, House of Commons Debate, vol.37, cc576-578, February 28th 1818.
 41. Palmer's speech was reported in the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette*, March 16th 1820, and is quoted by Neale, *Bath A Social History*, p.335.
 42. Neale, *Bath A Social History*, pp.337-340.
 43. Neale, *Bath A Social History*, pp. c. 347 & 368-380.
 44. *Gentleman's Magazine* vol.36, new series, (1851), p.92 and the Friends' Register of Memorials.