

ART. XXIV.—*The Stockdale family, the Wilkinson brothers and the cotton mills at Cark-in-Cartmel, c. 1782-1800.* By W. H. CHALONER, M.A., Ph.D.

Read at Rydal Hall, July 12th, 1963.

THAT a cotton-spinning mill existed at Cark-in-Cartmel during the late 18th and early 19th centuries is fairly well known, but little first-hand information about it is generally available. The purpose of this paper is to bring forward fresh evidence concerning the personal and business relationships between the Stockdale family, the notorious brothers John (1728-1808) and William Wilkinson (c. 1744-1808), ironmasters, and the world-famous engineering firm of Boulton and Watt, of Soho, near Birmingham. The three Stockdales most directly concerned were James Stockdale I of Cark (1724-1806), his eldest son James Stockdale II (1755-1823) and his second son Fletcher Stockdale (1760-1787). A fourth Stockdale (1792-1874) comes into the story indirectly, for he was the author of that fascinating but highly unsatisfactory compilation, *Annales Caermoelesenses*, or "The Annals of Cartmel", as it is frequently but inaccurately called.¹

James Stockdale I appears to have been a most active and enterprising businessman; he owned lands in the North American colonies, which he lost during the War of American Independence, and also had interests in at least one West Indian plantation. In addition he built small cargo vessels at Cark and invested in a number of shipping ventures overseas. At various times he owned estates at Windle, Mote and Gleaston in Furness, operated iron ore mines at Lindale and Whitriggs, held shares in the blast-furnaces at Leighton and Halton, and was

¹ Cartmel Priory parish registers; Stockdale grave inscriptions in Cartmel Priory churchyard and memorial tablet to James Stockdale III in south transept of Priory. I am greatly indebted to Mr H. Clegg, of Grange-over-Sands, for searching for this information under trying conditions. James Stockdale III (*Annales Caermoelesenses* (1872) 497-498) was extraordinarily erratic in his indications of dates of birth and death in his account of the Stockdale family.

concerned in iron-forges in Cark, Caton and Liverpool. As a result of his association with John Wilkinson he bought five shares at 50 guineas a share in the Perier brothers' company for supplying Paris with water (1783), owned a 1/16th share in the Minera lead mine near Wrexham in North Wales, and adventured in Wheal Virgin copper mine (1/128th) and Polgooth tin mine in Cornwall (1/64th).²

About 1778-9 John Wilkinson had purchased the Castlehead estate near Grange-over-Sands, which he made into his headquarters. He was therefore a close neighbour of the Stockdales. There is evidence to indicate that by the 1790's, James Stockdale I, then past seventy years of age, was less active in business than formerly, and remained very much in the background, leaving everyday direction of affairs at the cotton mill in the hands of his sons John and Fletcher.

It is not surprising to find James Stockdale I entering the cotton industry during the great boom in spinning by water power which occurred during the 1770's and 1780's. He and his partners began by securing possession of Cark mills, i.e. control of the local water power, at a time when a shortage of suitable water-power sites was developing in urban areas. This encouraged the proliferation of the new industry in the countryside. His grandson wrote:

"About the year 1782 my grandfather and others built the large cotton mill (now a corn mill), and a number of cottages, workshops, engine-houses, tail and other races, and no fewer than nine bridges and archways, destroying entirely the rural appearance of the village, and leaving it in appearance little better than it is today."³

² Evidence for these activities and investments may be found in (DDHj) Lancashire Record Office, Preston, and J. Stockdale, *Annales Caermoelesenses* (1872), *passim*.

³ *Annales Caermoelesenses* (1872) 385, Stockdale added: "When the mill had been fully completed (being one of the first erected in England), it was thought to be a handsome building, and in order to prevent the smoke of the 'fire engine' from blackening the mill, it was conducted by an archway under ground as far as the most easterly of the cottages in the High Row where it made its exit through the large square chimney still standing there."

This mill presumably produced coarse cotton warp threads, and made use of Sir Richard Arkwright's water-frame process for spinning by rollers, the patent for which expired in 1783.⁴ James Stockdale III printed some details about the first of the steam-engines introduced to supplement the available water-power. It is interesting, however, to note the way he slurred over the discreditable features of the business, documentary evidence of which was almost certainly in his possession. He wrote:

"... one of the first of these [Boulton and Watt steam-engines] was constructed for my grandfather's cotton works at Carke, by John Wilkinson, under the personal superintendence of Watt, at Wilkinson's great works at Bersham. It was a pumping engine . . . and was used for the purpose of lifting the water out of the tail race back into the mill dam, and thus, as it was thought, of furnishing a continuous supply — an operation which had till then been less perfectly performed by a large gin or wheel, turned by six horses. But the engineer of the cotton works soon perceived that to apply the like engine power directly to the works of the mill would be a more economical application of steam power, and this soon afterwards was done, a new and still more powerful engine having been obtained for the purpose."⁵

What are the facts about which Stockdale remained silent? In 1775 Boulton and James Watt, of Soho, near Birmingham, had obtained by Act of Parliament a monopoly extending over the following twenty-five years for the construction of steam-engines embodying the separate condenser. This improvement, of tremendous economic importance, cut down the fuel consumption of steam-engines to which it was fitted by between two-thirds and three-quarters. Clearly this formed an important consideration in districts away from the coal-fields (coal consumed in the parish of Cartmel at this time came by sea from Whitehaven). When customers wanted a steam-engine erecting, Boulton and Watt would send directions

⁴ The Carke mill is in Lower Holker, and is not to be confused with the two cotton spinning mills in Upper Holker, which belonged to Ainsworth, Catteral & Co., of Preston, in 1824-5 (E. Baines and W. Parson, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, I 595).

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 206.

enabling them to order nearly all the parts direct from outside suppliers, and these would be assembled on the chosen spot, where, in the meantime, the engine-house was being built. Boulton and Watt supplied certain secret parts (e.g. nozzles and condensers), together with a skilled engine erector to put the parts together and get the completed engine going satisfactorily. The Soho partners made their profit from half-yearly premiums paid by the operators of the engine, and usually calculated on the basis of one-third of the saving in fuel.⁶

James Stockdale I had had business dealings with the Watt family since at least 1768, when he supplied James Watt of Greenock with fine iron from Cark forge.⁷ The elder Stockdale was of the same age-group as Boulton and Watt, and it is clear that they held him in some esteem. In July 1785 he visited Birmingham to open negotiations on behalf of himself and his partners in the cotton mill for the purchase of a Boulton and Watt engine. Watt wrote to him on 11 July as follows:

“An engine of our construction, capable of raising 8 cubic feet of water to 20 feet high per second, will require from 184 to 200 pounds of good Whitehaven coals per hour when going at the rate of 12 strokes per minute. We will guarantee that it will not burn more than 200 pounds per hour when in good order and going at that rate . . . a common [i.e. *Newcomen-type*] engine would burn more than 3 times as much.”

Watt had calculated that the engine required by the Cark partners would save 66 cwt. of coal a day as compared with an ordinary engine. One-third of this saving would be 22 cwt., so that Boulton and Watt's premium would be 13s. 2¼d. per working day, since Whitehaven coals cost 12s. a ton delivered at Cark; the cost of the engine itself would be between £1,000 and £1,100.⁸

⁶ H. W. Dickinson and Rhys Jenkins, *James Watt and the Steam Engine* (1927), *passim*; E. Roll, *An Early Experiment in Industrial Organisation, being a history of the firm of Boulton and Watt, 1775-1805* (1930), *passim*.

⁷ Stockdale, *op. cit.*, 206.

⁸ James Stockdale to James Watt, 11 July 1785; James Watt to Jas. Stockdale, 11 and 14 July 1785 (B. & W. Collection, Birmingham Public Library).

Stockdale and his partners, of whom the chief was Joseph Thackeray, a rascally fustian manufacturer of Manchester,⁹ decided to order a Boulton and Watt engine. The agreement dated 1 January 1786 between Boulton and Watt on the one hand and Joseph Thackeray on the other acting on behalf of himself "and all other the proprietors and partners of and in the cotton mills at Cark", for the erection of an engine "able to work a pump of thirty-three inches in diameter and twenty feet high at the rate of ten strokes of eight feet long each in one minute" is still preserved in Birmingham Public Library.

Great delays occurred in erecting and setting this engine on work. First of all, Fletcher Stockdale wrote that the weather had been wet and "so exceedingly unfavourable"¹⁰ in the autumn and early winter of 1785 that little work could be done on the site. Then came a flood of orders to Boulton and Watt for steam-engines, and consequently a shortage of skilled engine erectors developed. James Watt wrote to one of their best erectors, James Lawson, then in Scotland, on 26 April 1786:

"Mr Stockdale, whom I mentioned to you, wants some instructions about building his Engine-house and I wish you to set out for his place as soon as you can.

⁹ Joseph Thackeray is described in Elizabeth Raffald's *Manchester Directory* of 1772 (Reprint, p. 40) as a fustian manufacturer. In Edward Holme's *Directory for the Towns of Manchester and Salford* (1788) 83, he was described for the first time as a cotton spinner. He had evidently begun as a merchant under the domestic system, organizing the production and sale of fustian cloth, a mixture of linen warps and cotton wefts. Later, like another prominent Manchester middleman, Peter Drinkwater, he went into the highly profitable business of cotton spinning under the factory system. Besides being a partner in the Cark mill he was in partnership with John Whitehead in a cotton spinning mill at Garrat or Garratt on the River Medlock, Manchester. This was claimed as one of the earliest to be established (1785) in Manchester (*VCH Lancs.*, vol. ii (1908), 386) — quoting appendix to pamphlet, *An Examination of the Cotton Factory Question* (1819), but it is clear that it must have been established before 1785, since two Savery steam-engines were installed in it in 1784, either to replace water-wheels or to provide power additional to them (A. E. Musson and E. Robinson, "The early growth of steam power", *Economic History Review* (April 1959), 420-421). Joseph Thackeray disappears from the Manchester directories between the issues of 1808-9 and 1811. Little further is known about him, but he must have been one of the most important figures in the Manchester cotton trade of his time. He died at Cartmel in 1825, aged 82 (*Manchester Mercury*, 15 February 1825, Cartmel Par. Reg., Burials, 13 February 1825).

¹⁰ F. Stockdale to James Watt, 10 December 1785 (B.P.L.).

In order to get thither you will proceed on your road southwards to Kendal and from thence take horses to Cark in the parish of Cartmel where Mr Stockdale lives; there may be some nearer road, but I do not know it."¹¹

We shall meet Lawson at Cark again.

By this time James Stockdale was writing frantic letters to Watt about the delay. The weather had now changed to the opposite extreme. Young Stockdale complained on 20 April 1786:

"The dry weather has made us so scarce of water that we have not [enough] to work with half the time — we therefore write this earnestly requesting that everything may be hastened to have the Fire Engine going as soon as possible."¹²

Meanwhile, John Wilkinson, at his great ironworks and heavy engineering establishment at Bersham, near Wrexham in North Wales, had been getting on well with making the engine parts, and particularly the cylinders, which were shipped from Chester to Furness.¹³ But by June, Joseph Thackeray felt constrained to write from Manchester to Watt lamenting that "the water [at Cark] is not now sufficient to keep their hands employed one-fourth part of their time".¹⁴

Watt was "most at a loss about a man to assist in the erection having none capable at home", and the state of affairs continued for more than a month. It led to a plaintive and most informative letter from Fletcher Stockdale to Watt (18 July 1786), giving a precious, if approximate, statistic — the number of hands employed at the mill:

"We have not less than upwards of 400 people nearly unemploy'd and not one fourth of their time at work, which we are obliged to keep constantly in pay and whose wages does not amount to less than 70 or 80*l* per week."¹⁵

¹¹ B.P.L. Lawson was at this period a freelance engineer, and not in the direct employment of Boulton and Watt.

¹² B.P.L.

¹³ Jas Stockdale, jun., to Jas. Watt, 9 and 15 May 1786. The piston rod was supplied by Spedding, Hicks & Co., of Whitehaven (Jas. Watt to Jas. Stockdale, jun., 5 August 1786).

¹⁴ Jas. Thackeray, 10 June 1786, to James Watt, and Watt's reply of 13 June.

¹⁵ B.P.L.

At this period the owners of a cotton factory in a country district had to go to considerable trouble and expense to recruit over a wide area the comparatively large labour force required, and this passage clearly indicates the high degree of interdependence between employers and employed in these early industrial villages.

Fletcher Stockdale continued:

“We are particularly anxious on several accounts, and a material one is that of being quit of blame to the rest of our partners who were rather partial to an old Engine, and it was from our recom[m]endation entirely that your Engine was adopted at Cark.”¹⁶

By the beginning of August Watt had succeeded in calling an engine erector out of a remote district of Caernarvonshire to despatch him to Cark to erect the Stockdales' engine. He was Robert Muir, another Scot, and a “very pushing, clever fellow”.¹⁷ By 18 September James Stockdale II was able to report: “We have had a few strokes with the engine today”, and by May 1787 the Cark firm wrote to Boulton and Watt: “Our Engine has been going from 6 to 8 strokes a minute for this six weeks and seems to be quite master of our water and to answer our purpose very well.”¹⁸

On the face of it, all seemed satisfactory. The Cark partners employed a resident engineer, “young Hardy”, and it was probably for his benefit that they asked for a copy of the printed instructions on “how to work and manage the engine”. Watt replied, in terms which are familiar to a modern ear, that these instructions were out of print: “. . . we found very little advantage to accrue from these directions, as few people read them and still fewer followed them.”¹⁹

The engine seems to have been used only intermittently, i.e. as a piece of reserve equipment, and by November

¹⁶ B.P.L.

¹⁷ Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., to Boulton & Watt, 8 August 1786.

¹⁸ Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., to Boulton & Watt, 25 May 1787.

¹⁹ Jas. Watt to Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., 19 June 1787.

1789 the partners had entered into negotiations with Boulton and Watt to settle for the half-yearly premium payments for the unexpired portion of the patent (1790-1800). After some haggling and grumbling Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., agreed to pay the £260 demanded by Boulton and Watt, although James Stockdale II stated (11 February 1790): "We have not struck one stroke for this 4 mos. and very few for this past year."²⁰ Boulton and Watt insisted that the engine should not be moved or "applied to any other use than the raising [of] water to a water-wheel or wheels by means of a pump or pumps and shall not be employed to work any rotative motion without the intervention of a water-wheel".²¹ A document in Watt's handwriting in the Boulton and Watt Collection provides the valuable information that in 1790 the Cark cotton mill contained 3,400 spindles, of which the water power supplied by the steam-engine could drive 1,200, or about one-third.²²

Up to this point the account given merely supplements that given in the *Annales Caermoelesenses*, but from this point onwards a very different story emerges. James Stockdale I was on friendly terms with John Wilkinson, who had persuaded him to invest in Cornish and Welsh mines and in the Paris waterworks company. At this

²⁰ B.P.L. James Stockdale I took this opportunity of trying to beg three items of church plate of Matthew Boulton's manufacture as a free gift: "[He] expects Mr B. will make him a present of these articles in the Engine."

²¹ Thackeray, Stockdale & Co.'s discharge, 14 February 1790, in Watt's handwriting (B.P.L.).

²² This engine was offered for sale in 1800 by agreement with Boulton & Watt in the following terms:

"PATENT STEAM ENGINE.

TO be SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT

At Cark Cotton Mill, near Lancaster, all the WOOD and METAL MATERIALS of a Steam Engine of Boulton and Watt's construction, having a Cylinder 33 inches in diameter, and 8 feet long in the stroke, together with a pump of 33 inches diameter, which the engine worked for some years at the rate of ten strokes of 8 feet per minute, raising two thousand nine hundred Ale gallons, to the height of twenty feet. Apply to Mr. Joseph Thackeray, Manchester, or Mr. Stockdale at the said Cotton Works" (*Manchester Mercury*, 21 January 1800, p. 1, col. 5; and James Watt, jun., to J. Stockdale, 11 December 1799. (B.P.L.).)

period, however, Wilkinson was beginning to play traitor to his business associates Boulton and Watt in two ways. First, he started to make and erect engines which contravened their Act of Parliament of 1775, and secondly, he started to recommend customers to purchase steam-engines of a different pattern from those of Boulton and Watt, but which were either inferior or worthless in operation. It has been mentioned that in 1789-90 the Cark cotton mill partners were becoming dissatisfied with their first engine. They decided to install a second engine and consulted Wilkinson, who replied in August 1790:

“By the conversation I have had with them (i.e. Boulton and Watt) on the prospect of your wanting ano[the]r Engine there is so much indifference — that if you can go without their aid I shou’d (*sic*) (for myself) not sollicit (*sic*) it.²³

Wilkinson suggested instead that the Cark partners should get an engine set up by John Westaway Rowe, who was at that moment at Bersham foundry erecting one of his own invention for which he took out a patent in the same year. Thackeray, Stockdale & Co. followed this advice, disastrously as it turned out, for when the engine was erected at Cark in 1791-2 it turned out a complete failure.²⁴

The second engine was replaced by a third engine made by the celebrated firm of Bateman and Sherratt of Salford. This firm, because of the proved inferiority of its own engines to those of Boulton and Watt, had set out to infringe Boulton and Watt’s patent in a wholesale fashion. The pirate engine at Cark was erected by Richard Bradley of Manchester, “formerly a coachman to Mr T. Walker”,²⁵ assisted by a father and son named Hardy, from parts made at Bateman and Sherratt’s works in Salford. According to the Stockdales, it began to work

²³ J. Wilkinson to Jas. Stockdale, sen., 9 August 1790 (Lancs. C.R.O.).

²⁴ Musson and Robinson, art. cit., *Economic History Review* (April 1959), 429, quoting letter of 2 June 1796 from Jas. Watt, sen., to Jas. Watt, jun.

²⁵ M. R. Boulton to Jas. Watt, jun., 22 February 1796. Edward Hardy, the father, died in 1796 (Cartmel Par. Reg., Burials, 19 July 1796).

on 21 February 1795, although Lawson thought "about Xmas 1794" was the correct date.²⁶ The cylinder flaunted Bradley's name "cast in large letters . . . I suppose by way of defiance", commented James Watt, jun., later.²⁷

Boulton and Watt delayed as long as they could before proceeding against John Wilkinson, Joseph Thackeray and firms like Bateman and Sherratt but in the winter and early spring of 1795-6 they were busy collecting evidence with a view to legal action. Matthew Robinson Boulton and James Watt, jun., the two heirs-apparent in the firm, organized the system of industrial espionage necessary for the purpose, since the pirate engines were in general closely guarded from inspection by unauthorised persons. Their choice of agent for Lancashire fell on James Lawson, who had made a fleeting visit to Cark in 1786 and had apparently visited the place again in July 1794. Lawson (d. 1818) was a Scot, son of the Rev. Archibald Lawson of Kirkmahoe, near Dumfries. He served his apprenticeship to Boulton and Watt from 1779 onwards as an office draughtsman and engine erector, but had left their employ in 1787. A man of versatility, he rose to become a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1812.²⁸ In the early spring of 1796 Lawson conducted a brilliant campaign against users and manufacturers of pirate engines in the North-West and in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Dressed like a jockey, he carried with him a liberal supply of half crowns for corruptible engine minders. As he wrote to James Watt, jun., on 22 March 1796:

" . . . my jockey appearance and carelessness has done the rest with the assistance of half crown pieces of which I took care never to be without and in my waist coat pocket. This I found enough for any Engine man . . . half crowns being pretty things with them."

²⁶ Jas. Lawson, 21/22 March 1796, to Jas. Watt, jun. (B.P.L.).

²⁷ Jas. Watt, jun., to A. Weston, attorney, 24 March 1796 (B.P.L.).

²⁸ H. W. Dickinson and R. Jenkins, *James Watt and the Steam Engine* (1927), 286-288.

By the middle of March Lawson had gone up to Preston and Lancaster, and from the latter town he arrived in Cark on 20 March to find out whether in fact a pirate engine was working there. He took a room at the Fire Engine Inn and succeeded in getting inside the engine-house fairly easily the same day. The account of this incident which he posted to James Watt, jun., later the same day is unfortunately missing from the Boulton and Watt Collection, but James Watt, jun., writing to his attorney, A. Weston, on 24 March, stated:

"On the 20th inst., Lawson not only saw, but to use his own words, touched both the air pump and condenser."

This is clearly based on the missing letter. The long letter Lawson wrote to James Watt, jun., on the following day, 21 March 1796, when his presence in Cark had been discovered, is worth quoting almost in full for the light it sheds on local society and customs as well as on the engine affair:

"Had I the pencil of Hogarth or the pen of Pindar, I would describe to you the scene on my return here from putting my letter [of 20 March] in the Post Office. On entering my room at the Inn [I] found Mr Stockdale, junr., who's first salutation was 'Dam[m]é, Lawson, how do you do?'" and in attempting to get up to shake hands, could not, but again regain'd the chair. "You shan't see our new engine, by God," was the second speech, tho' [he was] so drunk I could hardly understand him. I said very little but asked him what he would drink and he chose brandy and water. This was hardly brought in when young Hardy entered, if possible in worse plight than his master. The instant he came in Mr Stockdale begun (*sic*) to abuse him by saying he was dam[n]'d drunk and had neglected his business. This the other denied, swearing he had been true to the C[ompan]y who on the contrary had not use[d] him well and that he did not care a dam[n] for them as he would get a better place if he was turned off tomorrow.²⁹ In this way they went on quarreling (*sic*) and then agreeing and shaking hands, then damning each other and so on. This was to get me to join in the contest, as all they wanted to know was what I had seen. For Stockdale every now and then talked of the great neglect

²⁹ Lawson wrote elsewhere in the letter that young Hardy was "much dissatisfied and has only a Guinea per week".

of that afternoon, having heard that I had had a peep; all I joined in was begging them to settle it in the morning. Stockdale press'd me much to take a bed in his house. This I positively declined, as I had bespoke a bed, had my boots off etc. Then he insisted I must breakfast with him. This I also declined, as I intended going to Ulverston in the morning, but would call on my return. I was obliged often to leave the room to get my laugh, for I could not keep up my gravity at all times. They left me, or rather I left them, about 9 o'clock — the Landlord assisted Mr Stockdale home and Hardy tumbled home in the best way he could after breaking the bowl (we drank brandy and water by word of mouth) i.e. without glasses, being the custom here and [an] excellent one I found it.

After seeing the engine working this morning (from the outside) I took Poney (as I was told I might get to Ulverston by making haste) . . ."

Lawson was, however, forced back by the strength of the tide, so he returned to Cark the same morning. He continued:

"I am back and had just breakfasted when in came Mr Stockdale sober and very bad from last night's work . . . He said he was going to walk in colecting (*sic*) land tax, and I must go with and dine with him, as I could not get away before three o'clock; as I had no good excuse to make I sett out with him, but not a word on engines."

However, Stockdale, jun.'s reserve did eventually break down — in Lawson's phrase he proved a "Slabber Chops"³⁰ who gave the game away completely. He told Lawson:

". . . a long story about his Engineer Hardy and Mr Bradley. I asked him if that was Mr Bradley of Manchester; he answered yes and that he erected their new Engine — I then said I supposed his Engine was the same as Mr Thackarey's (*sic*) at Garrat and was answered, 'Yes, the same and the same size,' viz., two 36" cylinders. If this is not sufficient proof for Messrs. Thackeray & Co. the devil takes them — as I can give full and clear evidence of the Engine here.

You will no doubt think I did wrong in coming here direct where I was known, but I must tell you I was not aware that Mr Thackeray's and Mr Stockdale's mill was one [concern], having never heard Mr Stockdale's name and Mr Thackeray's

³⁰ Jas. Lawson to Jas. Watt, jun., 21/22 March 1796.

name joined and only learnt it on my arrival, as I find getting into chat with the girls or boys useful."³¹

Stockdale then went on to tell that:

"The moment I (Lawson) went to dinner on the 20th, Hardy had gone to sound the alarm in his master's ears — whilst I was quietly examining the Engine . . . I may [get to] know more at dinner, tho' not much, as I am glad a third gentn. dines with us.

One thing I forgot is the drol[1] appearance of Mr S., who had on a fancy French-looking coat, half boots with spurs, and printed cotton breeches and his hair in great disorder with a little [pig]tail tyed close to his head and standing out straight. I wish to God I could draw. He is a short man, less than I am by the head, with a little red nose, his hair quite grey, bellys a little — draw him if you can from this description."

Lawson added a postscript to this letter, datelined Chorley, Lancs., at 3 p.m., 22 March, in which he reported that nothing had occurred at dinner with Stockdale on the previous day "only being pressed much to take wine". He added:

"Some who you thought your friends must, I fear, come in for a share [of rascality]. W[illiam] Wilkinson must know of Cark Engine, being, as I am informed, a partner in the [cotton] works (tho' perhaps it may be Mrs Wilkinson)³² — I give this only as a hint . . . they dreaded detection and I believe *I am* the only person has ever seen that engine except intimate friends. I shall endeavour to learn the partners of Cark mill at Manchester, several I already know.

This journal, I beg may be, so far as I have sported with Mr S., concealed, as I note down just what came uppermost at the moment."³³

This introduces another complication to the story. On 1 January 1791 William Wilkinson (c. 1744-1808), John's younger brother had married a widow, Mrs Elizabeth Kirkes (died 1808) of Liverpool, the daughter of James Stockdale. After returning from his various Continental expeditions in the late 1780's, William, who was a

³¹ An indication that Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., may have been employing pauper apprentices, a common practice at the time.

³² i.e. Mrs William Wilkinson (née Stockdale). See *infra*.

³³ Jas. Lawson, Cark-Chorley, 21/22 March 1796, to James Watt, jun. (B.P.L.).

partner in Bersham ironworks, had become increasingly dissatisfied with his imperious elder brother's conduct and had given Boulton and Watt valuable information from the Bersham account-books about many pirate engines. He had, however, apparently kept quiet about the Cark engine, in the face of a conflict between family interests and business relationships.

In the spring of 1796 Boulton and Watt applied for injunction in the Court of Chancery against the more important makers and users of pirate engines — Bateman and Sherratt, Joseph Thackeray, Richard Bradley, and Watson of Preston. William Wilkinson's efforts were now directed towards softening the blow to his father-in-law. He wrote from Wrexham to old James Stockdale at length on 5 April 1796 about Boulton and Watt's proceedings, and finished in some concern:

"I am *particularly desirous* of seeing you here upon a Business which I cannot write you upon and which concerns you. I think I can be of service to you therein and the sooner you come here the better."³⁴

Two days later he wrote to James Watt, jun.:

"I expect old Mr Stockdale here in a few days. He will stay sometime with us, so that when you come over at midsummer you can settle with him for the Cark engine."³⁵

Young Watt replied that as Boulton and Watt had found they could proceed against Thackeray and Bradley without making James Stockdale a party to the bill they had "left his name out altogether, judging that it would be more agreeable to him to be left out of the scrape". He continued:

"We shall, however, endeavour to procure the injunction against the Cark engine as well as Manchester, as we cannot wink at it without injuring our cause . . . I hope Mr Stockdale will remain with you till after that time (i.e. the beginning of May) and that by your assistance the matter may be quickly settled between us."³⁶

³⁴ Lancs. County Record Office (DDHj).

³⁵ W. Wilkinson, Court, Wrexham, to Jas. Watt, jun., 7 April 1796.

³⁶ Jas. Watt, jun., to Wm. Wilkinson, 17 April 1796 (B.P.L.).

Boulton and Watt's application in Chancery was successful and the Court issued the injunctions on 2 May 1796. The Cark engine was ordered to be stopped, but James Stockdale's name did not appear in the injunction.³⁷ James Watt, sen., writing to William Wilkinson thanking him for his "friendly interference" in the affair of the pirated engine at Cark, stated:

"We are very much concerned that Mr Stockdale should be implicated anyways in this matter . . . no unfriendly steps should be taken against him or the other innocent members of the Cark Company."³⁸

Meanwhile Thackeray and Bradley had filed a lying affidavit in the Chancery and were continuing to work again the injunction in other ways, but on 13 May Boulton and Watt took a further legal step to counter these moves. Matthew Robinson Boulton stated that the "folly, presumption and ignorance" of Thackeray and Bradley passed all belief.³⁹ In the summer James Watt, jun., went over to Wrexham as promised to meet Stockdale and handed to him a memorandum addressed to the Cark partnership from which the following is an extract:

"It appears from Mr James Stockdale's statement of the 25 April 1796, that the Cark Engine has worked 278½ days and nights from the 21 Feby. 1795 which was the time of its first starting until the 23 April 1796 . . . B[oulton] and W[att] will state the whole of the working up to the 1st day of August 1796 at one year only, the premium for which will be £232. 10s. The purchase of the premium of the remainder of the term of B. & W.'s Act of Parlt. from the first day of August, amounts to £730, from which B. & W. are willing to deduct £200 on Account of the Premium paid by the old Cark Engine . . ."⁴⁰

This generous offer, which did not attempt "to extort the uttermost farthing",⁴¹ was replied to by delaying tactics, and on 1 January 1797 Boulton and Watt wrote to James Stockdale II, as the acting agent for the Cark

³⁷ Jas. Watt, sen., to Wm. Wilkinson, 23 May 1796 (B.P.L.).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ M. R. Boulton to Wm. Wilkinson, 13 May 1796 (B.P.L.).

⁴⁰ Letter Book Office, 1796-7, 264 (Boulton & Watt Collection, B.P.L.).

⁴¹ Jas. Watt, jun., to Jas. Watt, sen., note of (?) August 1796 (B.P.L.).

Cotton Spinning Company (i.e. the partnership), "concerning the unsettled premium for the Cark Engine".⁴² Apparently old Mr Stockdale had objected in the previous August to making any decision on Boulton and Watt's offer as he had not been authorised to act on behalf of all the partners, but had promised to lay the matter before them. Nothing further had, however, happened. Boulton and Watt's letter concluded:

"... if you or Mr Stockdale [sen.] can propose any mode of agreement consistent with our general duty to our customers you will not find us disposed to throw difficulties in the way of it, as the respect we entertain for your father is a principal reason why we should wish to bring this disagreeable matter to a conclusion."⁴³

Again nothing happened, and on 16 March a second and stiffer letter went forth from Soho requesting a "speedy answer".⁴⁴ Yet a third letter had to be sent by Boulton and Watt (29 May 1797) before any significant action resulted. It ended with the ominous words "... we shall upon no consideration allow the matter to be left any longer in this state of suspense".⁴⁵ This finally led to action, for Thackeray, Stockdale & Co. proposed that William Wilkinson should be appointed sole arbitrator to settle "all matters in dispute . . . relative to the Premium of the Engine", a proposal which met with Boulton and Watt's "perfect concurrence".⁴⁶ As James Watt, jun., remarked to his father about this time in an undated memorandum:

"I have purposely avoided stating the case stronger, as I approached our object is not to extort the uttermost farthing, but to oblige Mr W[ilkinson] and his father-in-law, by leaving it discretionary with him (i.e. W. Wilkinson) to make what allowance he likes."⁴⁷

It is clear that the delaying force was Joseph Thackeray

⁴² B.P.L.

⁴³ B.P.L.

⁴⁴ Boulton & Watt, 16 March 1797, to Jas. Stockdale, jun. (B.P.L.).

⁴⁵ B.P.L.

⁴⁶ Matthew Boulton, Soho, to Wm. Wilkinson, 26 June 1796 (B.P.L.).

⁴⁷ B.P.L.

of Manchester; when he procrastinated in concurring in the appointment of William Wilkinson as arbitrator, James Watt, jun., threatened “. . . if you do not receive proper powers [from Thackeray to act as arbitrator] in the course of a fortnight, we shall proceed upon a different system altogether with him”.⁴⁸ Thackeray realised that the game was now up and agreed to the appointment; William Wilkinson made his award on 2 August 1797, in which Boulton and Watt acquiesced “with perfect satisfaction”. He awarded them £550 instead of £762. 10s. they had claimed: a substantial victory. The money was paid over a few days later by a draft on the Cark Company’s London bankers, Messrs. Masterman, Peters & Co., of Lombard Street, and the whole unpleasant business was concluded.⁴⁹

It is pleasant to record that relations between the Boulton and the Watts and the Stockdales continued to be friendly. In 1809 and 1813 James Stockdale II sent legs and kegs of hung beef from Furness for James Watt, jun.’s table⁵⁰; and on 24 February 1813 Miss Mary Anne Wilkinson, daughter of William and niece of James Stockdale II, married Matthew Robinson Boulton, the son of the great Matthew Boulton, in Cartmel parish church.

⁴⁸ Jas. Watt, jun., to Wm. Wilkinson, 30 June 1797 (B.P.L.).

⁴⁹ Jas. Watt, jun., to Wm. Wilkinson, 7 August 1797; Boulton & Watt to Thackeray, Stockdale & Co., 15 August 1797.

⁵⁰ Invoice of hung beef dated 1 April 1809; Jas. Stockdale, jun., to Jas. Watt, jun., Jas. Stockdale, jun., to Jas. Watt, jun., 30 April 1813 (B.P.L.).