

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

JULY 1939-DECEMBER 1942



VOLUME XL

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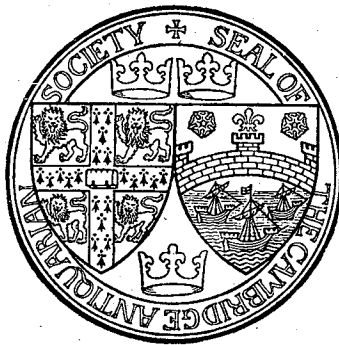
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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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JOHN MORTLOCK III, 'MASTER OF THE TOWN OF CAMBRIDGE'

1755-1816

By H. M. CAM, Litt.D.

IN the autumn of 1833 the young men of the Municipal Corporations Commission were holding their inquiries in borough after borough throughout the country, and *The Times*, then of course an impassioned advocate of reform, was following the reports of their proceedings in the provincial press with unconcealed *Schadenfreude*. On 28 October George Long and John Buckle opened their inquiry at Cambridge, and full reports of the day-to-day proceedings were given by the *Cambridge Independent Press*, rather more selective ones appearing in the *Cambridge Chronicle*. On 16 November *The Times* devoted a leading article to Cambridge:

We are almost tempted to recall the patent of precedence or the honours of *senior optime*, which we had conferred on the bold and presumptuous abuses of the municipal body of Leicester and to transfer the "bad pre-eminence" to the corporation of Cambridge. Probably no judicial investigation into a public trust ever brought to light more shameless profligacy or more inveterate dishonesty, more bare-faced venality in politics, a more heartless disregard of the claims of the poor, in the perversion of the funds left for their benefit, or a more degrading subserviency to the views of the rich, when they appeared in the shape of patrons or distributors of places, a more insatiable cupidity in the corporate officers to enrich themselves with the corporate property, or a more entire neglect of their duties and functions as magistrates, than are presented by the evidence now before us.

The inquiry of 1833, as is well known, revealed a very general state of corruption, inefficiency and irresponsibility in municipal government. Many other boroughs, like Cambridge, "found in the manufacture of members of Parliament one of the chief sources of their own corruption"; the Rutland Club, which met at the "Eagle and Child" (now the "Eagle") in Benet Street, where, as Alderman Abbott said, "they never had so disgusting a ceremony as being called on to pay the bill" because the noble lord who owned the borough financed the dinners, had its parallels elsewhere; the embezzlement of charity funds and the failure to provide local amenities such as lighting and paving were, as the Webbs have shown us, very general abuses. It was merely the formulation of an almost universal attitude, when Mr Starmer said to the commissioners in 1833 that "the Corporation had a right to expend the town's income on themselves and their friends without being bound to apply any part of it to the good of the town. This he thought the general opinion among members of the Corporation."

Cambridge was, then, a typical corporation, but what sets it apart from most of its fellow boroughs is the very recent development of some of the worst elements of the situation.

Fifty years before, in 1780, Cambridge was not a pocket borough. It is true that it had not been represented since 1660 by a townsman, but it was in a position to bargain for itself. There had been a lively contest in 1774, in which the opposition had given the sitting members a good run for their money. The government managers had to write Cambridge down as an uncertain seat, "doubtful who may be elected", though the correspondents of Lord Hardwicke at Wimpole thought of him as the embodiment of "the old interest". Again, in 1780 the constitution of the borough retained a system of checks and balances, which in fact enabled the bench of aldermen to act as a check on the mayor in office, while a policy far more tolerant than that of many boroughs permitted dissenters to become members of the corporation and different groups to take their turn in running the government of the borough. Lastly, in 1780, though a much needed project of paving the town had been held up by disputes in 1769 and no one could have described the administration as progressive, the corporation were still tolerably conscientious stewards of town property and administrators of town charities.

A marked deterioration, then, is traceable in the half-century before the municipal corporations inquiry of 1833, and for this not merely the resentment of the unrepresented majority of borough residents in 1833, but the considered and sober verdict of Cambridge's great town clerk and historian, Cooper, in 1853, blamed one man—John Mortlock, draper, banker, parliamentary representative, recorder, and thirteen times mayor of Cambridge.

John Mortlock came of a family that was holding land in Pampisford in the year 1534. John Mortlock I, the mayor's grandfather, was born at Pampisford in 1674, but by 1725 he had a house in Cambridge, for in that year he was churchwarden of St Edward's, and with his fellow warden presented to the church a candelabrum which Cole saw. He figures in the list of subscribers to the fund for raising a Volunteer force to defend Cambridge in the '45. He died in 1754, aged eighty, and is buried in St Edward's; and his children seem to have carried on the family fortunes. One of his daughters married Peter Goddard, Master of Clare College; another was left a considerable fortune by a tutor of Queens', and a third married a fellow of Caius, whose sister, Sarah Davy, became the wife of his son, John Mortlock II, who built up a large fortune in the woollen drapery business—presumably in St Mary's parish, as he is buried in the church of St Mary the Great, and the family shop was near the "Rose Inn". In 1777 John Mortlock II died leaving five very good-looking daughters and a son twenty-two years of age, recently married to the only child and heiress of Stephen Harrison, a wealthy presbyterian grocer. John and Elizabeth Mortlock came to have a family of ten children, two of

them, like their father, mayors of Cambridge—indeed one might say, with their father, for from 1801 to 1816 the three took it in turns to be mayor, and no one else had an innings. "We called it the bucket system", the Cambridge folk said in 1833.

Neither John II the father, nor John I the grandfather, had been admitted freemen of Cambridge; they had apparently devoted themselves to the business of making money, though they clearly had the entrée of University society. But John Mortlock III seems to have known from the first what he meant to do. He purchased the freedom of the borough on 2 June 1778, thereby becoming one of the hundred and eighty burgesses who had the monopoly of municipal power; was elected one of the twenty-four common councilmen in 1780, and became one of the twelve aldermen in 1782. In 1778 he is described in the Common Day Book as "Mr John-Mortlock, woollen draper"; in 1782 he is "Mr Mortlock, banker". This new appellation gives the clue to his career: "the young man but newly escaped from behind his father's counter", as William Cole calls him, was in a position to lend money to the tradesmen and county squires, and in 1780 he founded the first bank in Cambridge, purchasing from the University the remains of the Austin Friars house and property, and building his house on the site now occupied partly by the Arts Schools, and partly by Messrs Mortlock's successors, Messrs Barclay, whose premises consist of the remodelled remnants of Mortlock's house.

The year 1780 launched the twenty-five-year-old Mortlock on his career. He set up in business as a banker; he entered active borough politics by becoming a common councilman; and he made the acquaintance of the politician who was to become the patron, not merely of Mortlock, but, through him, of the borough of Cambridge.

In national politics Cambridge was, as we have seen, recognized by the party managers as being an unreliable seat. It had, in the past, been subject, from time to time, to the influence of different county families, such as the Cottons of Madingley and the Bromleys of Horseheath, whilst retaining freedom to choose its leaders. In 1780 Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke, whose father had acquired Wimpole in 1739, and who was Lord Lieutenant of the county and High Steward of the University, was generally regarded as having a sort of prescriptive interest in the borough. Various Cambridge correspondents, whose letters are preserved in the Hardwicke collection in the British Museum, kept him informed from week to week of the trend of events and supply the best evidence of the gradual rise over the political horizon of the young John Mortlock.

To these correspondents, men of the older generation, he was at first a political outsider, not to be taken seriously. Not only did William Cole of Milton, as we have seen, label him a counter-jumper; but the movement among the townspeople was described by Dr Ewin of usury fame as "the business of a mob and a mixed medley of people", whilst Soame Jenyns of Bottisham, who had sat for the

borough and county in succession, called it "a kind of epidemical madness. If none of consequence attend these meetings I daresay they will end in nothing." This was to misread the signs of the times. The election of 1774 had shown that the upheavals generated by "Wilkes and Liberty" were touching Cambridge; though only two of its twelve aldermen had voted against "the old interest", they had the backing of the majority of resident burgesses, the tradesmen of Cambridge, and had only been defeated by the non-resident country gentlemen and the outvoters from London and counties even more distant. John Mortlock's marriage in 1776 had linked him up with the dissenting interest in the town, which was all for reform—ana-baptist and republican—as that die-hard Tory, Cole, calls it. And reform was in the air all over England.

In January 1780 the twenty-year-old Pitt wrote to his mother from Pembroke College: "The country in this part of the world is beginning to awaken; most of them will, I hope, adopt the Yorkshire measures." Yorkshire's lead had been followed by county after county, which were forming associations to present petitions for parliamentary and economical reform. The leader for Cambridgeshire appeared in the person of Charles Manners, son of that Marquess of Granby whose popularity as a successful general has perpetuated his name on so many town and village inn signs, and whose sturdy hatless figure looks down from the walls of Trinity Old Combination Room. He had become a Cambridgeshire gentleman by marrying the heiress of Cheveley, and had represented the county in parliament, where he had been a close adherent of Chatham. The younger Granby, as an undergraduate at Trinity, had had for a tutor Dr Watson, later Professor of Chemistry and Divinity and Bishop of Llandaff, whose political views are indicated by a letter from his pupil: "I shall never thank you too much for making me study Locke; while I exist those tenets, the natural rights of man, will ever be the guide of my actions." Granby had been junior burgess for the University till in 1779 the death of his grandfather sent him to the House of Lords as Duke of Rutland: he had tried in vain to get Pitt, his Cambridge and family friend, elected as his successor. Now in 1780 Rutland was writing to his beautiful young wife with the same earnestness as Pitt had evinced to his mother: "If some alterations do not take place I fear some dreadful convulsion may arise. God Almighty avert the storm and leave the beautiful constitution of this kingdom unimpaired."

Rutland, then, made up the third member of the little group of young men in the university, county and borough of Cambridge who in 1780 set out to reform, if not the world, the British Constitution.

Rutland's first aim was to capture one of the two county seats for his sailor brother, Lord Robert Manners, in the election of that year. And the starting-point of Mortlock's political career was his co-operation with Rutland in the meeting held in Senate House Yard on

25 March 1780 for the promotion of a petition to Parliament drafted by Dr Watson protesting against "a system of public administration carried on by parliamentary corruption", and praying for "an inquiry into the expenditure of public money and the abolition of sinecure places and unmerited pensions so as to establish the independence of parliament on the most lasting foundations".

The sheriff had at first refused to summon the meeting, but, at the requisition of a hundred yeomen of Cambridgeshire, it assembled on Easter Eve 1780 in the Shire Hall, in Cambridge market place. Plumptre, the President of Queens', another of Lord Hardwicke's correspondents, was there, growing more worried, as the crowd grew larger and the room hotter, by the thought of the sermon he was due to preach next day out in the country. Finally he gave it up in despair and took his coach for Wimpole. The meeting grew so large that it had to be adjourned to Senate House Yard, where, amongst a motley crowd of county gentlemen, townsmen and gownsmen, Gunning, then a small boy of twelve, listened to the speeches "to my understanding irresistible", of John Wilkes, Thomas Day (the author of *Sandford and Merton*), Crispe Molyneux, M.P., the Duke of Manchester and many others, as well as to the "remarkably bad" speeches of the two Tory members for the county; one of whom, Sir John Cotton, later described this meeting of his constituents, in the House of Commons, as an "assemblage of tag, rag and bobtail."

Dr Watson's resolution was carried by acclamation; and a following-up committee of some fifty gentlemen of the county was appointed, including both John Mortlock and the Duke. Mortlock would be of assistance twice over; his land at Pampisford gave him a county vote and he was worth at least twenty-five votes in the county, whilst his wealth inherited from his father and augmented by his marriage enabled him to establish a hold over his fellow-townsmen as well as country gentlemen. Gunning explains how Mortlock's bank met the needs of the Cambridge gentlemen who were liable to be robbed by highwaymen on the road between Cambridge and London and could now get credit in the City. In 1833 the deputy town clerk put down Mortlock's ascendancy in the town to the fact that as banker he was in the habit of advancing money to influential members of the corporation. Moreover, he lent to the corporation itself; in 1815 it was owing him nearly £1700. More than once his political opponents tried to ruin him by staging a run on the bank, but they only damaged themselves, for he called in the moneys owing him and various county gentlemen were bankrupted as a result.

Mortlock took full advantage of his political connections, as will be seen, but there is no doubt that he was a very good man of business and his bitterest political opponents never impeached his business honesty. He became banker to the University, and he prospered

exceedingly. In 1785 he told the Duke of Rutland that he had real property to the amount of £33,000. He acquired the advowson of the Mortlock's old home, Pampisford, and by 1800 he was wealthy enough to purchase the manors of Great and Little Abington in addition to his lands at Hildersham, Toft and Pampisford. When he died he left not merely a flourishing banking business, but landed estates worth £120,000.

So much for the economic basis of his political power. On the political side the success of Lord Robert Manners in the general election of September 1780 made the Mortlock-Rutland alliance permanent. His fellow member was Lord Hardwicke's nephew and a struggle between the Rutland and Hardwicke interests now began. Mortlock applied for the post of Receiver-General of the Land Tax in the county, which involved the control without payment of interest of some thousands of pounds on their way from the pockets of the landlords to the Treasury. This very valuable piece of patronage was regarded as being at the disposal of the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and Lord Hardwicke was bombarded with a crossfire of letters from his nephew, who declared Mortlock had got him at least forty votes, and from his Cambridge friends, who warned him of the manoeuvres of "Mr M." Worn out, he finally let Mortlock have it. "I believe him to be a designing, intriguing man, but the people at Cambridge hate one another so much that it is difficult to believe what they say."

The people of Cambridge were in fact commenting with interest on the new club founded by Mortlock, now a newly elected alderman, in 1782, in collaboration with his much older fellow alderman, J. Purchas, like him a county voter and a member of the Reform Committee, unlike him a presbyterian and a Cambridge freeman of the fourth generation. It was the rival of the old Aldermen's Club that had met in the "Rose Tavern" since Queen Anne's days. It met in the "Eagle and Child" (now the "Eagle"), just across the way from the site where the new bank house was rising, and in it Mortlock and his friends planned their campaigns in both national and municipal politics. "I am told", the President of Queens' wrote to Hardwicke, in reporting the existence of the new club, "that Mr M. is to offer himself as a member for the town whenever there is an opening." The opening came two years later, when the day of the young men dawned. Pitt, the twenty-four-year-old Prime Minister, had made his friend Rutland Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and in March 1784, after an exciting and unconstitutional three months of fighting the Fox-North coalition majority in the House of Commons, he went to the country and came down in person to canvass the University. Ewin, who was keenly interested in all these elections, but most in the University, tells Hardwicke: "When Mr Pitt was here on Thursday, Mr M. waited upon him and told him he was then come to resign into his hands the Receiver-generalship of Cambs: a gentleman present

somewhat officiously said, 'Mr M., consider what you are doing of; by no means have anything to do with Parliamentary business.... I have found nothing but trouble come of it'. The other said, 'Sir, give me leave to know my own business best'. So he said he would say no more." The resignation of this important post was the final proof that Mr Mortlock meant business: and his rival, Mr Parker Hammond, "a pretty kind of young man with a good estate in the county", but a newcomer to Cambridgeshire politics, after assiduous canvassing, realized he had no chance and retired from the contest. Mortlock and the sitting member were returned unopposed.

The worthy freemen of Cambridge took the opportunity, as one of them said, to assert their independence and send one of their own sons to Parliament, "a gentleman of the corporation and a native of the place". John Mortlock, at the age of twenty-nine, had attained "the favourite object of his heart, to represent the place of his nativity".

The scene now shifts to Westminster, whence reports were sent to Rutland in Ireland as to the conduct of the six members who looked to him for guidance. According to these reports, preserved in the Rutland MSS., Mortlock's parliamentary course was equivocal. After all, Fox and Sheridan had been his first heroes, and others besides Mortlock found it difficult to decide whether the cause of liberty and reform would best be served by backing Pitt or Fox. He coquetted with the Bedford party, and when he got into trouble by a piece of sharp practice in May 1786, he escaped parliamentary censure by the good offices of the opposition and not of Pitt, who did not lift a finger to help him. This probably accounts for the freedom of Cambridge being conferred on Fox and Sheridan in the following August. A friend of Hardwicke's observed at this time: "I should not wonder to see Mr Fox member for the town and Mr Pitt for the University: it would be curious." Rutland's agent told him "Mortlock, who calls himself your member, will be against Pitt"; and Rutland wrote to Pitt: "I fear there has been some mismanagement-respecting the town of Cambridge by the folly of Mortlock. I wish you could allow him to make his peace with the Government. Personally he weighs not a feather, but he has decided influence in Cambridge, which I am apprehensive he will turn into the hands of the Duke of Bedford. *You may remember I made a proposition to you respecting the town of Cambridge before I quitted England.*" The rest is silence; in October 1787 the Duke died, still a believer in the rights of man according to Locke, and left it to his lovely widow and to Pitt to secure the future of his young son by riveting the chain which bound Cambridge to the Tory interest and the Rutland connection for the next forty-five years. In 1788, when Mortlock resigned his seat, only seven votes were given to the candidate backed by his opponents; and no election for the borough was disputed from that date till after his death in 1816. The Rutland nominees were elected unopposed till 1818 and

easily defeated opposition from 1818 to 1832. Cambridge, in fact, had become a pocket borough.¹

"I hear on all hands", wrote Rutland's agent to him in February 1787, "that Mortlock has made himself master of the town of Cambridge." By what steps had the young freeman of 1778 raised himself in nine years to this position?

It should be noted that once started he owed little to his fellow alderman Purchas, joint founder of the club at the "Eagle and Child". In 1784, when Mortlock resigned the receivership, Purchas counted confidently on succeeding him; instead, after a trial of strength between Rutland, the Yorkes and Pitt, the prize went to Mortlock's banking partner Francis, and Cambridge realized that Mortlock had reached the stage when he could stand on his own legs. He was, in fact, perfecting the tactics of popular appeal and was looking outside the little ring of aldermen for his supporters.

At this point a very brief account of the constitution of the borough is necessary. In 1778, when John Mortlock was made a freeman, it was antiquated and exclusive. In a population of about some 7000, where 1200 paid rates, only 100 were freemen and burgesses, for eighty of the 180 who held that rank were non-resident. These 180 burgesses exercised legislative and elective functions in Common Hall; the common council of twenty-four, consisting in theory of ex-officers of the corporation, formed a pool from which the aldermen were chosen; and the real administration lay with the aldermen, from whose number the mayor was chosen every year in common council by an elaborate system of indirect election going back to Tudor times. Within this close ring a system of rotation and give and take existed; no mayor might serve a second time until seven years had elapsed since his tenure of office.

Mortlock's attack upon the corporation began, as we have seen, with the foundation of his club in April 1782, shortly after his election to the bench of aldermen. In the mayoral election of August 1782 the eighteen electors failed to agree, but the majority chose an adherent of the reforming party called Tunwell, who had served as

¹ In 1833, when the Municipal Commissioners were holding their inquiry in the Guildhall, one of the witnesses produced a ledger belonging to the late Mr Butcher, private solicitor to Mr Mortlock, and also, it may be remarked, parliamentary agent to the Duke of Rutland, who had managed to keep the expenses of the election of 1780 down to £12,000. From this ledger the following items were quoted: "Her grace the duchess of Rutland to Joseph Butcher, 6 Oct. 1788, Coach hire to and from London and expenses of messenger to carry to your Grace the Corporation Cross book" (the priceless town record still preserved at the Guildhall). "29 July 1788. Being from home 11 days, when the special verdict was agreed and decided *in favour of your Grace*." "July 1789. Drawing a long and very special case concerning the dispute with Mr Bond, and how it will affect your Grace's interest." These were two of the many law-suits by which the minority in the corporation fought Mortlock's attack on the old constitution of the borough, now to be described.

mayor five years before. This led to the first of a series of law-suits in which the unsuccessful factions appealed to the law courts and the fact became established that Cambridge could alter its own constitution at will and that no court of law could upset its by-laws. The anti-Mortlock faction got its man in next year and Mortlock saw that he must get more support among the freemen. The new Town Hall (pulled down in 1935) was being built, and on the pretext of getting funds for the purpose twenty-four new freemen were created in the spring of 1784 at thirty shillings each. In 1785 Mortlock himself was elected mayor and the by-laws regulating the election of freemen were repealed, and in 1786 the by-laws regulating the election of mayor were revised: the process of election was to be initiated by nomination, not by balloting, and the mayor from the bench could control the whole election. The opposition fought it; but they were only nineteen to fifty-nine. In 1786 the mayor was given the casting vote in all elections, next year this was interpreted to mean two votes, and in 1787 the same procedure was extended to the election of aldermen and common councillors and the permanence of Mortlock's ascendancy was secured.

In 1787 John Mortlock was elected mayor for the second time and in January 1788 he was also elected recorder, a position usually held by some noble outsider. Thus in February 1788 he was at the same time mayor, recorder and member of parliament for Cambridge. As a matter of fact this unique situation lasted no longer than a month; a *quo warranto* ousted him from the mayoralty and he resigned the recordership in favour of the Duchess of Rutland's brother, also resigning his seat in parliament; but in each case he was succeeded by his own nominee, and the judgment of the courts in 1788 recognized the effective sovereignty of the corporation of Cambridge. Neither the law courts nor parliament were going to question its decisions. In 1789 eighty-one more freemen were admitted, mostly non-resident dependents of the Rutlands. As a rule they took no part in Cambridge affairs, but if ever any resistance was attempted, then "hounds were whipped up" and cartloads of voters would be brought over from Cheveley.

From 1787 to 1809 John Mortlock was mayor every other year, in the alternate years serving as deputy mayor to either his business partner, a business dependent, or one of his sons. As an opponent said in 1818, he became the standing mayor. He ran the town, and, while his courage and commonsense were conspicuous at the time of the bread riots of 1795, when he prevented serious trouble, the evil results of unlimited power came out in the scandalous use of town funds and town property. Charities were allowed to lapse. "Mr Mortlock discontinued the payment, finding it troublesome"—so that eleven funds had disappeared from sight by 1833, and the capital and interest of the fund for loans to poor tradesmen had also been lost.

The town property, of immense potential value during the rapid

growth of the town from 1790 onwards, was shamelessly sold or let at token rents to members of the corporation or their friends. The machinery for meeting such demands was cornered; land had been leased for not more than forty years, but now leases were granted for 999 years, to the number of sixty-two; and the land speculators of the 'nineties acquired land for a song and resold it at vast profits. The corporation regarded its property as its own, to do what it liked with, and felt no responsibility for providing social or hygienic amenities; a separate authority looked to the lighting and paving of the town, and when a new bridge was to be built, the University subscribed £400 or £500 and the corporation £10 or £20. The funds provided sumptuous banquets for the corporators, but nothing else.

For all this posterity blamed Mortlock. He died, rather suddenly, I think, in 1816. His eldest son was mayor at the time; neither he nor his brother was re-elected. At the next general election the seat was disputed for the first time since 1788. But the ascendancy of the Rutland family was not overthrown until the Reform Bill of 1832 put in two Liberals for the borough and the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 set up a new corporation, containing not one member of those who had been displaced by the Act.

Mortlock provided well for his large family out of both national and municipal funds. His eldest son was for many years auditor and commissioner of excise and colonel of the militia as well as J.P. and nine times mayor of Cambridge. He was trying to set up a rival bank in Trinity Street when his father died, and letters in the family possession suggest a distinct coolness between father and son. Neither he nor his younger brothers came near their father's ability in municipal politics. The third son,¹ Thomas, was, like his father, a receiver-general of the Post Office; he it was who succeeded to the bank. Frederick, the fifth son, who had run off to Gretna Green in 1807 with Miss Sarah Finch, the daughter of a Shelford gentleman, and had been mayor of Cambridge four times, was the father of the John Frederick who left a remarkable autobiography narrating his experiences as a convict in Australia and an equally remarkable will bequeathing a non-existent fortune to the corporation of Cambridge. Both the ex-mayors had left Cambridge by 1833, though tales of them were told to the Commissioners. Such distinction as the younger generation showed was rather academic than administrative. Thomas and Edmund, the sixth son, became fellows of colleges. The youngest, William, stamp distributor at £400 to £500 a year, an alderman like his elder brothers, left a reputation of piety and rare benevolence and was the founder of Mortlock's almshouses, whilst the seventh son, Henry, is the most attractive of the younger generation. At the age of eighteen he went out to Calcutta to take up the job under the East India Company which his father had obtained for him. Within a year he passed with distinction an examination in Hindustani and Sanskrit

¹ Mortlock's second son, Stephen, died as an infant. I have not been able to trace the career of the fourth son, Charles; he may have gone to Yorkshire.

and, as is recorded on the back of his portrait in his father's handwriting, "he never caused his father a sigh except when he left him". When he finally left the service of John Company he was ordained and became a much-loved country parson.

For an all-round estimate of Mortlock we lack one important source; very few of his own letters are extant. But a valuable record of another sort survives in the drawings of John Downman. On 15 November 1777 the *Cambridge Chronicle* announced: "Last week arrived in Cambridge Mr Downman, portrait painter"; and between 1777 and 1779 Downman spent some considerable time in Cambridge, drawing dons and their wives, undergraduates and townsmen, many of whose portraits may be seen in the Fitzwilliam Museum, including the portrait of Samuel Francis, first Mortlock's clerk, then his banking partner, then his successor in the Receivership of the Land Tax, his appointment in 1784 marking Mortlock's definite breach with his former ally, Alderman Purchas, and then from 1788 to 1794 mayor in alternate years with Mortlock. In 1777 Downman did a drawing of the eldest Miss Mortlock, sold at Sotheby's in 1922, on which he later noted: "Eldest sister of John Mortlock, Esq., banker at Cambridge; also drew her mother and four sisters and two of this."¹

Mortlock's mother, *née* Sarah Davy, left Cambridge soon after the portrait was drawn and went to live at Woodbridge with her unmarried daughters. The eldest Miss Mortlock married Sir E. Lacon of Ormsby Hall in 1783 and Downman's joint portrait of John's five sisters is now the property of her descendant. Downman drew the five girls separately—they were obviously good subjects—and he also made a posthumous sketch of Mortlock's father, the woollen draper, who had just died in 1777 and is buried in Great St Mary's. Downman also drew Mortlock's aunt Ann, Mrs Davy, wife of that fellow of Caius and Rector of Lavenham who was old Mrs Mortlock's brother. The good family features come out clearly in this fine old lady, who must have been at least seventy when Downman drew her; she was forty-seven when she married. The drawings of young Mortlock himself and his newly married wife, the accomplished daughter of the zealous Presbyterian grocer who had just retired from his business on Market Hill, are not so good as those of Mortlock's sisters, but in 1779 Downman departed from his usual technique of drawing in monochrome with only slight touches of colour and did two three-quarter length oil paintings of Mortlock, his wife and his eldest son, born in October 1778. The conception of Elizabeth Mortlock's picture is better than the execution; the future colonel of militia is standing on his young mother's knee, pulling down her head-dress; but her gaze is fixed and the pose lacks spontaneity. On the other hand the portrait of Mr Mortlock is as good as anything Downman ever did. The green coat he wears balances pleasantly the golden brown of his wife's dress in

¹ For Downman at Cambridge, see *The Connoisseur*, Extra number, 1907; also the numbers for December 1921, April 1922, July 1931.

the companion picture; the smiling eyes, the youth and buoyancy of the poise, at once give the clue to the ease with which he established relations alike with dukes and aldermen. The picture is attributed to 1779, only a few months before the fateful meeting at the Senate House which launched him on his long friendship with the Rutlands. It is not difficult to see this man making himself agreeable to county clients, winning votes for Bob Manners, getting the custom of the University, fraternizing with Fox and Sheridan, and captivating the freemen of the borough, and in later days entertaining Pitt royally in the great dining-room at the Bank House, where they drank from the mighty wine-glasses still preserved at Abington, three to the quart. Nor, on the other hand, is it difficult to recognize the affection of the father who sighed for his son in India, or the kindness and energy to which Gunning testifies, when the busy banker and deputy-mayor gave up a whole day in 1789 to riding round the county canvassing on behalf of the needy young friend who was applying for the post of Esquire Bedell. Mortlock's protégé on this occasion was as successful as most of those whom he backed, but his kindness in this case was completely disinterested. Since the day when the little boy had listened entranced to the speeches outside the Senate House Mortlock had abandoned the party of Reform. "We differed," says Gunning, "most essentially differed. He was, in the Reformers' vocabulary, a boroughmonger. . . . My sentiments I never concealed from him, and many a battle did we fight in defence of our respective opinions. 'Without influence,' he would say, 'which you call *corruption*, men will not be induced to support a government, though they generally approve of its measures'." Yet for twenty years the master of Cambridge and the doctrinaire liberal were the best of friends, with favours given and received unconditionally.

A less friendly critic described Mortlock as boasting that he played with real men as other men moved chessmen on a board. His death did not restore the puppets to life: for sixteen years more both the administration and the representation of the borough were dictated by the Rutland interest: the momentum of corruption, incompetence and squandering of capital resources rolled on unchecked till the Benthamites came along in the '30's with their new brooms. I wish that we had a portrait of John Mortlock when he had been the master of Cambridge for thirty years; as it is, we still see on Downman's canvas the John Mortlock of 1780, for whom it is so obviously still that dawn in which it is bliss to be alive and very heaven to be young. The picture stands as silent witness to the fact that the arch-corruptor of Cambridge started on his career as the enthusiastic advocate of a motion "that every system of public administration carried on by means of corruption is absolutely unjustifiable on every principle of good sense and sound policy, dishonourable to the government, burthensome to true prosperity and dangerous to the liberties of the people".

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