

ROBERT DIGHTON

1751–1814

INTELLIGENCE ON THE PEACE 1783

Pen and black ink and watercolour,
heightened with touches of bodycolour, on laid paper
13 1/16 x 9 3/4 inches; 332 x 247 mm

Signed lower right: 'Dighton del'

Inscribed lower left and lower centre: '495 Intelligence on the Peace'

Drawn 1783



Collections: Carington Bowles (1724-1793);
by family descent until sold, London, Sotheby's, 30 April 1953, lot 464 (as an
album), bt. Sabin, £720;
The Sabin Galleries, London;
Jeffrey Rose, bought 1 May 1953, £900;
Rose sale, Sotheby's, London, 23 February 1978, lot 12;
with Abbott & Holder, London;
Michael Winner (1934-2012);
Winner sale, Bonham's, London, 16 December 2024, lot.76;
Lowell Libson & Jonny Yarker Ltd.

Engraved: Mezzotint for Carington Bowles published in 1783

This humorous drawing was made by Robert Dighton for the publisher Carington Bowles, it shows a group of London working men reading the report of the Proclamation of Peace between Britain and America at the end of the American Revolutionary War. Dighton's print was published with the title 'Intelligence on the Peace' and his satire explores the familiar trope of tradesmen neglecting their work to discuss the politics of the day. The London Gazette containing the announcement that peace had been signed was that of September 6-9 1783. Peace was formally proclaimed in London on 6 October, after which the proclamation was 'stuck up in divers parts.' Dighton shows a cobbler, identifiable from his trade sign as Tristram Awl, reading the gazette to a small crowd consisting of a lamplighter, baker, cutler, sweep and barber. Dighton makes these recognisable types, red faced and faintly grotesque; the title of the print giving a clue to the satire at work. It is clear that the debate over the future relationship between North America and Britain is far from 'intelligent' and that it is the subject of derision from the illiterate men. This was a trope

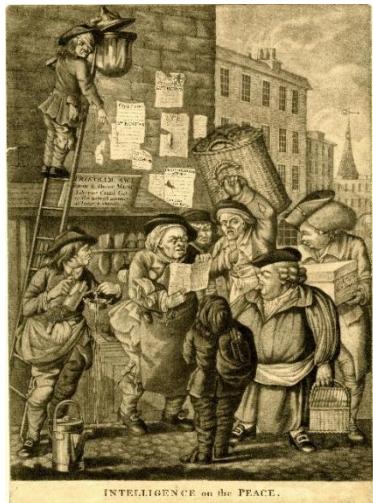
Dighton explored in other cartoons of the period and was clearly a satire which Bowles found popular with his largely urban, middle-class clientele.

Robert Dighton was born in London and trained at the Royal Academy Schools, he worked as a draughtsman for some of the leading print-publishers of the period. Dighton produced illustrations for John Bell's edition of Shakespeare and for Thomas Lowndes's *New English Theatre*. In 1779 a series of portraits of actors and actresses in mezzotint were published by William Richardson and a *Book of Heads*, with a self-portrait as a title-plate, was engraved by the mapmaker and printseller Carington Bowles. Dighton's career as a designer of droll mezzotints and engravings dates to 1780, following the death of John Collett. Dighton's prints were immensely popular, engraved by Bowles and sold from his 'Map & Print Warehouse' situated in St Paul's Churchyard. Dighton's cartoons were frequently topical, satirising contemporary politics, celebrities and events.

In the present design, Dighton has included a wealth of details which contemporary Londoners would instantly have recognised. The scene is set close to Bowles's own shop, with the spire of St Nicholas Cole Abbey visible in the background. A series of handbills are legible on the wall above the cobbler's stall, these include one advertising the Prussian conjurer, scientific lecturer and quack, Gustavus Katterfelto. A figure of satire himself, Katterfelto had reached public acclaim during an influenza epidemic in 1782, but announced his departure from London in 1783 and sale of his extensive equipment. Hannah Humphrey had capitalised on his advertised departure, publishing a satirical portrait of Katterfelto, his family in toe, returning to Germany. A second handbill advertises Charles Hughes's 'Equestrian Philharmonic Academy' at the Royal Circus on Blackfriars Road which had opened the previous year in 1782.

Dighton shows a cast of identifiable characters. The announcement of the peace agreed in Paris is being read by the cobbler, Awl, whose sign proclaims that he is a: 'Boot & Showe maker, likevise corns cut in the neteest manner at home & abrode.' The inference is that Awl is barely literate and his listeners unlikely to be more so, they debate the news of relations between Britain and the new United States and neglect their trades. The lamplighter's assistant allows oil to pour from his lamp, whilst the cuttler, baker, sweep and barber all stand idly. Dighton had designed a similar scene set within a poor barber's shop entitled 'Intelligence on the Change of Ministry'. Dighton is satirising the voracious news consumption of London's working class; this was a phenomenon much commented upon throughout the century. Arthur Murphy's 1758 play *The Upholsterer, or What News?* Revolves around an upholsterer whose business suffers from his obsession with newspapers, an obsession which results in his bankruptcy, an event that in turn appears in print. At which point he observes: 'I shall be read of, in the same paper, in the *London Gazette*, by the powers abroad; together with the Pope, and the French king and the Mogul, and all of 'em – good, good, very good!'

Dighton's drawing can now be read as prophetic. It was precisely the rise in news consumption by a constituent previously excluded from world affairs that precipitated increases in both working class literacy and political awareness, both factors in changing political attitudes. Made in the decade that not only the United States began to flourish as an independent nation, but the start of the French Revolution, Dighton's satire takes on an added resonance.



Carington Bowles after Robert Dighton
Intelligence on the Peace
Mezzotint
13 ½ x 9 ¾ inches; 343 x 249 mm
Engraved c. 1783
© The Trustees of the British Museum