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REGULAR ITEMS

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Front cover **George Pocock, detail from his collapsible paper globe, Bristol, 1830. 122 cm diameter. Courtesy The Philadelphia Print Shop West.**

GEORGE POCOCK

Nineteenth-century maker of inflatable paper globes

Christopher W. Lane

One of the most remarkable items I have ever handled, or even seen in my years as a dealer in antique prints and maps, is a 48-in (122 cm), inflatable paper globe. Designed and produced by George Pocock in 1830 in Bristol, England, it is an example of a series of three different size globes, the others being 24 in (61 cm) and 36 in (91 cm) in diameter. They are very rare, so much so that when one was brought into our shop I had never even heard of them. Their scarcity is not surprising given the fragile nature of paper and the stress caused by repeated inflating and deflating. This amazing cartographic artifact prompted me to research its history, and subsequently, it and its idiosyncratic maker George Pocock have become particular favourites of mine.[1]

George Pocock (1774–1843) was a British eccentric, an evangelistic preacher, church organist, poet, author of hymns, educator and enthusiastic inventor. Born in Hungerford, Berkshire, England, Pocock moved to Bristol in 1800 where he established the Prospect Place Academy, a boarding school for 'young gentlemen'. A broadsheet printed in 1838 describes it as being 'conducted by Mr Pocock and Sons' with 'domestic management directed by Mrs Pocock' (Fig. 2). It bespeaks his evident interest in the education of youth and genuine love of children, for he was not only the father of at least eleven children, but he frequently wrote fondly to, and of, his pupils whom he addressed as 'my dear boys'.[2]

It is not surprising that a number of Pocock's inventions were specifically aimed at the improvement and education of students, though his generally benevolent persona is somewhat belied by his design for an apparatus for disciplining schoolboys. As was recorded: 'Pocock, the schoolmaster, by S. Michael's churchyard, has a machine to punish the boys, which they call the royal patent self-acting ferule'.[3] This punitive device is, however, an anomaly to the more beneficial nature of his other inventions, which were designed for the education and the common good of students, such as his 'geographical Slates for the Construction of Maps' which he patented in June 1808.[4]

From his youth, Pocock was regularly experimenting and exploring new ideas. His first innovation was a tent large enough to hold five hundred people which could be dismantled and transported from place to place. A Wesleyan Methodist preacher, he was concerned that there were no suitably large buildings in the small villages around Bristol in which to preach. In response, in 1814 he developed his portable tent which he could use to extend his evangelical outreach to these villages. His innovation led to a movement called 'Tent Methodism', which spread to several parts of England and Wales and lasted for almost twenty years.[5]

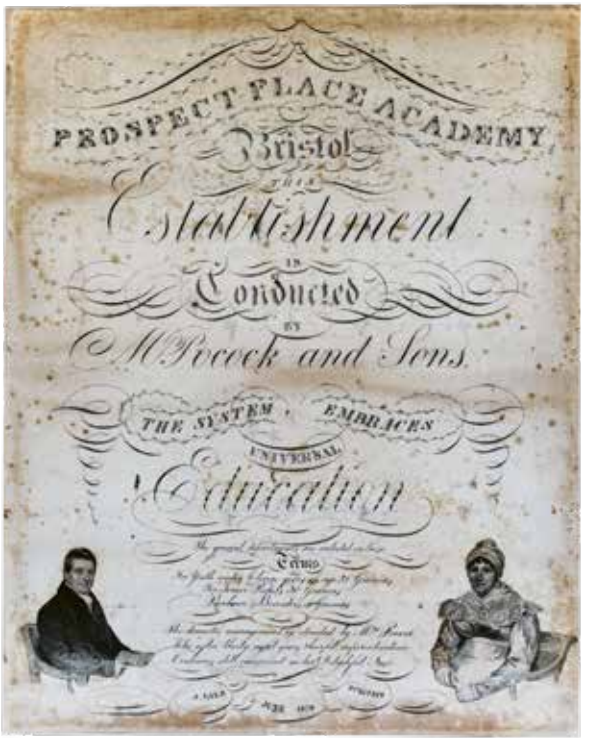

Fig. 1 George Pocock, paper globe, Bristol, 1830. 48-in (122 cm) diameter. Courtesy of The Philadelphia Print Shop West.

Fig. 2 Broadsheet advertising George Pocock's Academy at Prospect Place, Bristol, 1838 with portraits of George Pocock and his wife. Courtesy of Paul Chapman.


BARBARY
SAHARA or GREAT DESERT
UPPER GUINEA
ARABIAN SEA
10
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90

Kites

Pocock's inquisitive and experimental temperament had manifested itself even earlier, specifically with reference to kites. Later writing about his work with kites in *The Aeropleustic Art of Navigation in the Air, By the use of Kites or Buoyant Sails* (1827),[6] Pocock recollected that when he was 'a little tiny boy, I learnt that my paper-kite would draw along a stone on the ground, tied at the end of its string'.[7] His experiments subsequently expanded to include a kite capable of pulling one of his sons along on a board, 'over hillocks, and ruts, and beds of furze, till he arrived at the opposite extremity of the Downs'.[8] He later realised that if he joined several kites together on a single line, their pulling power would be significantly increased.

Not content with these earthbound experiments, in about 1824 Pocock had one of his daughters become the first 'Aeropleust'.[9] In the second edition of his book, Pocock elaborated on this experiment:

> *...we must not omit to observe, that the first person who soared aloft in the air, by this invention, was a lady, whose courage would not be denied this test of its strength. An arm chair was brought on the ground; then, lowering the cordage of the Kite, by slackening the lower brace, the chair was firmly lashed to the main line, and the lady took her seat. The main-brace being hauled taut, the huge Buoyant Sail rose aloft with its fair burden, continuing to ascend to the height of one hundred yards. On descending, she expressed herself much pleased at the easy motion of the Kite, and the delightful prospect she had enjoyed.*[10]

This episode demonstrates one of the problems of researching George Pocock's history, viz. that his eccentricities and interesting inventions have created a body of lore, some of which seems to have been invented and then perpetuated. Pocock does say that he used one of his daughters in this experiment, but he does not specify which, nor where nor when the event took place. However, published by many authors is the claim that it was Martha[11] and that her elevation took place over the Avon gorge, possibly in 1824. Given the consistent accounts from Martha's family, it seems likely that she was in fact the daughter who was the first aeropleust, but of her actual flight we know for sure only what her father published.

In any case, in the 1820s, Pocock continued his experiments with kites, using them to lift one of his sons 200 ft (61 m) to the top of a cliff. George was convinced that kite power was a force which could be harnessed for many practical purposes. To achieve his designs, he needed larger kites which he called 'Buoyant Sails' and, in order to make them practical, he invented 'Pocock's Patent Portable Kite'. These were designed to be controlled by four lines which could be used to manipulate the height and angle of the kite and which could be folded down to a manageable size for transportation.[12]

Having developed a system of using kites that were both powerful and controllable, Pocock demonstrated their many practical applications.[13] For maritime purposes, he suggested his 'Buoyant Sails' could be used as auxiliary sails for ships; hoist signal flags; and help in shipwrecks, either to run a line to shore or even evacuate passengers off a wreck. Similarly, Pocock championed the use of his kites for military purposes, recommending they could be employed to hoist signal flags on land and raise lookouts to advantageous heights for spying during military action. Furthermore, they could be utilised by soldiers to scale cliffs or cross rivers.

In Pocock's view the best use of his kites was for travelling, for propelling various vehicles from place to place. The first practical experiment involved kites

Fig. 3 Pocock's Patent Portable Kite. Courtesy of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives.

Fig. 4 Title page from *The Aeropleustic Art or Navigation in the Air, By the use of Kites or Buoyant Sails*, 1851 showing a ship in distress being saved with a kite. Courtesy of SPL Rare Book Collection.