

Sir JOHN STODDART (1773-1856)

Born at Salisbury, England, on 6 February 1773, the eldest son of John Stoddart, lieutenant in the Royal Navy. His only sister, Sarah, married the writer William Hazlitt. Educated at Salisbury grammar school, matriculated 1790 from Christ Church, Oxford, graduated B.A., B.C.L. and D.C.L. between 1794-1801, member of the College of Advocates 1801.

King's Advocate of the Admiralty Court in Malta (1803-1807). Back home, he practised in Doctors' Commons. Leader-writer on the *Times* 1812-1816. Dismissed February 1817, started a rival daily *The New Times*, made the subject of several satires, scurrilously known as 'Dr. Slop'. Appointed in Malta President of the High Court of Appeal on 2 June 1826 and Judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court on 5 July 1826. Granted the designation of Chief Justice on 26 March 1827. Between 1 January 1828 and 4 July 1832 he also acted as the legal adviser to the executive government (King's Advocate). Nominated member of the advisory Council of Government in 1835 and drafted various laws. Thus Governor Maitland's 1815 proclamation of the separation of powers was brought to nought.

The Royal Commissioners of 1836 complained of his performance, he had conflicts with fellow members on the Bench, and covertly espoused the cause of the Maltese liberals. On the recommendation of the Commissioners, the office of Chief Justice was abolished, thus ending Stoddart's services on 31 December 1838; his appointment, under the Royal Sign Manual, had been "during the Royal pleasure" and so he had no security of tenure. From 1839 onwards all the Judges in Malta were Maltese.

While in Malta Stoddart lived at the Auberge d'Allemagne rent free, earning a salary of £1,500 a year, and a calesse allowance. The six Maltese Judges earned only £428.12s. each. He died at 13 Brompton Square, London, on 16 February 1856, survived by one of three sons and a daughter. His wife Isabella, daughter of the Rev. Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, whom he married in 1803, died ten years before him.

(Biographical note compiled by Dr Albert Ganado B.A., LL.D., M.O.M.)