

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich August 1817

It's middle a'August and we've just heard that Old Tom has been caught in a village called St Ives in Huntingdonshire, I'm not too sure where that is but he were got wi his brother John. It were said that there were a struggle and a constable got a bang on th'head. It musta bin John as I've never known Tom as a fighter.

There'd bin some posters around offering one hundred guineas for information and arrest of Tom. I can't understand why cos e were never on t'march. Anyroad it were big money and I could see how a poor working man would be tempted.

It were rumoured that them as were in Derby Jail were treated badly and it were all Lockett's fault - he's the Derby Solicitor who seems to be running t'job. They were said to be on bread and water and packed in together.

Anyroad, stories were beginning to come out though nubdy were speaking to strangers. Ma Hepworth's servant, who lived wi'er and her sons down Buckland Hollow had bin shot. Some said it were Brandreth who

shot him point blank, some said it were an accident. I suppose only them as were there knew and they were either in jail or keeping their gobs tight shut.

There'd bin another thing that took place around t'middle o'August and that were four local lads had bin hanged at Derby for setting fire to Colonel Halton's hay ricks just down t'road at South Wingfield. Wey all knew who these lads were, their names was George Booth, John Brown, Tom Jackson and John King and they were local lads.

It were said that they were poor and shorta food and were disgusted at wot Halton had got stored away.

Somebody had a copy of t'Derby Mercury and when it were left around t'pub I took it and copied it into me notes.

It went on to say that . . .

. . . the men sturdily asserted their innocence to the end, although all four were found guilty 'on the most satisfactory evidence' and the judge made it clear to them that there was no hope of mercy because of 'the heinous nature of their crime' . . .

I dunna know what heinous means but wey ar'talking about a pile o'hay not somebody's house. It all seemt outa shape and harsh.

When folks did talk about this in t'village - and it weren't very often - they didna hold owt much hope for them poor sods locked up in jail after t'march. We expected t'worst and this dinna help.

Towards end of t'month things quietened down abit, there were no soldiers around and I suppose they'd got all the men they wanted. I'm thinkin' wor it just a wasta time.

I imagine they'd dragged Old Tom back to Derby but nobody told me and I dunna know anybody who went to see any of t' prisoners.

Pentrich were full o'rumours about who'd done what, who'd bin threatened and who press-ganged others to march. It were said that some folks had made money owta naming men who'd bin marching. Mind you, as soon as we heard that Tm had bin taken local officials seemd to lose interest - it were as though they'd got what they wanted and that were that. The word round were that all o'them in jail would be hanged - especially after they'd hanged four for burning some hay.

Reverend Wolstenholme were still at Pentrich church despite rumours that he'd hid some men after t'march. Not being a church-goer I didna see much of 'im but I do know that most folks spoke well of 'im. He went into White Horse now and again often sat in a corner talkin' to Nanny, t'landlady.

There's not a great deal more to put in me notes as th'whole job seems to be waiting for a trial and it should be soon. We knew that them as marched in Yorkshire had bin let off light at court, or so folks said. Mind you, that didna lighten the load in and around Pentrich.

I ought to say summut about Nanny Weightman who was still running t'White Horse. There were several Weightman's in jail and when you went for a pint yo could see empty chairs where t'Weightman's usually sat. We knew as some men were special constables, including some from Butterley, so it were best to keep quiet. Ma Weightman never said owt about it, not to me anyhow. I thought that she'd be angry, we all knew she could be, but she sempt to be quieter than normal, I suppose she were worried and I dunna blame her.

As far as I could tell nubdy made any effort to dig out or have a go at them suspected of being informers - I

thought that some family members woulda done but after t'hangings, it were clear as t'court meant business.

I'll let yo know what 'appens next month. We are all tryin' to ger on wi life and them wi families are still tryin' to mek ends meet. T'weather's still wet and cold and nubdy expects a good crop this year.