

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich July 1817

I could tell from me uncle's manner that it was time I'd better be gerring' back hom. I'd bin 'ere for a couple of weeks and kept me 'ead down. I could see as he were as poor as frame knitters back hom and even just one more mouth meks a difference in t'costa food.

I did walk back to Ripley one day and found abit about what 'appened after I left t'march. There were some soldiers and special constables around Ripley so I didna stay long. I 'ad a jar at t'Cock Inn wi an old mate and they wer all on about it. Yo can imagine there were different tales. Anyroad, after I'd run off, cos that's wor I did, most o'em marched to Ripley, then to Codnor and Eastwood. They said they were about 100 strong when on t'road the Nottingham they ran in t'Hussars. Them as wasna captured ran off and yo canna blame 'em. Some sed that shots were fired and some sed not. I 'eard as it were quiet now and there'd bin no more trouble except t'military picking a few men up. As soon as it got dusk I set off back to 'eanor, keepin' offa main track.

Uncle Isaac had bin t'pub a couple of night ago and come back wi a 'andful of newspaper bits. There were pieces from Derby Mercury and some from Nottingham Courier. E'd also bin talkin' to his mates. There'd bin some talk about t'Pentrich Rising but it sempt to Isaac that 'eanor folks was wanting to keep owta it. I fact, I didna know of any 'eanor men in t'rising, they were mostly locals from Pentrich and Wingfield, one or two from Ripley.

These papers said that there'd bin 48 men taken prisoner by t'Hussars - I bet I coulda named some of 'em, maybe some of me family. It said there were 20 in Nottingham Prison and 28 in Derby. T'paper sed there were 200 when they were set on by t'Hussars yet most in Ripley sed it were more like 100.

I told Uncle Isaac that'd I be goin' back tomorrow and we shared a jug a'ale while I looked through them newspaper agen. I forgot to tell thee that Isaac couldna read so I ad t'read 'em to 'im. I got t'feelin' that he would be pleased to see backa me.

One piece that bothered me were that t'paper said that local farmers, wi'out exception, 'ad gen t'troops utmost assistance despite abusive language from t'marchers. I dunna know if this wer' raight.

Next morning, I set off back t' Pentrich wi a few bits a food aunty May 'ad gen me. I got back about dinner time. I checked me little cottage were alraight and went to t'White 'oss. I wanted to find out what were 'appening and I wanted to find Owd Tom.

T'village were quiet, it were odd. I asked Nancy for a juga ale. As she filled me pot from her jug, I said to 'er, "What's 'appening, as tha seen T. . ." and that's as far as I got. She bent over t'bar and put her mouth right by me 'ear. She whipered, "Tha knows nowt lad, keep thee mouth closed and say nowt to no bugger." I could tell by her face when she pulled back that she meant it good and proper. She nodded to t'back o'pub and I could see a couple a'men I thought were from Butterley, maybe specials. There were one or two in t'pub but none o'me mates. I finished me pot and left, I thought it best, Nancy's not a lady yo argues wi.

I walked owta pub and turned towards me cottage when a big 'and pulled me down a gennel, it were Nancy. "I'll tell thee wot I know about Tom as I know you're 'is friend, but keep it to theesen. Tom didna go on t'march, it dunna matter why, he hid in Booth's hovel over there behind t'village, but he's not there now, he's on th'run, I dunna know where."

"Can I do owt?", is all I think to say.

"I dunna know, there's troops searching for some and best thing seems to know nowt and that's wot I'm doin'. Try to do what tha' normally does. Don't stop comin' t'pub it looks bad. There's goin' to be trial and, who knows wot."

She disappeared back in t'pub and left me in a spin. I began to feel bad as I walked hom, should I stopped at Butterley, should I a'gone after 'em. It were too late now. I resolved to tek Nancy's advice and I remembered summat Tom told me, I mighta told thee at some time. It were 'ear all, see all and say nowt".

I gotta 'ear about some as were arrested during June and July, there were even rumours that some as 'ad bin on t'march 'ad turned and made depositions naming names.

Strangest thing were that Pentrich Village began to empty. I knew that some men were in prison and wives had gone wi their kids to their families. Some that adna bin arrested just seemed to disappear leaving their families behind. I noticed on Sundays that more folks than usual went to t'church in Pentrich. Prior t'march, church goers were gerrin' less and less, folks even talked about it. I thought that, perhaps, some as weren't involved wanted to show a good face.

One or two posters appeared offerin' money for information, some even named Thomas Bacon as a ringleader. I wonder where he's gone.

It were general knowledge that the big man, Brandreth had bin arrested and were in prison. It were sed that both jails in Derby and Nottingham were full to t'top. I'm pleased I'm not there and, to be 'onest, nubby seems interested in me. I dunna know whether I should keep writin' me notes. I dunna want wrong person to find 'em.

I've decided that I'm goin' to try and I'll let thee know wot 'appens.