

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich June 1817

Well, I dunna know where to start this month and that's a fact, I'm stopping with me uncle Isaac at 'eanor. I dunna know if I mentioned 'im afore, he's me old dad's brother. He lives in a cottage between 'eanor and Tagg 'ill and he does framework knitting like many round 'ere. I never saw much of 'im for years but I were desperate, I didna know where to go.

It all 'appened just 'ower a week ago. Yo know they've bin planning' a march for some time, well it were finally all go. I got to know about it in early June and most o'lads my age were expected to go, yo didna ay a lot a'choice. It all went wrong we'in a day. It were a raight cockup. Now, there's soldiers and special constables everywhere locking up men left, raight and centre. That's why I fled to 'eanor.

I betta go back to start. They'd bin meeting in a barn in Wingfield and setting out plans for last week or two, mind yo they didna invite me.

Anyhow, the main thing were that just afore t'march were to kick off I found out that Owd Tom Bacon 'ad gone missing. No bugger knew where he was. Well I say that but I'm sure his sister Nancy at White 'Oss woulda known they were allus thick as thieves.

I told you we'd bin sent out to draw up a list of farmers wi guns and if they had any servants we could persuade to join t'march. I knew that they'd stored a load o'pikes in t'quarry at Wingfield. It were all decided.

I were told that a man called Brandreth had bin set up at t'White Oss and that there were meetings all day in Sunday, that'd be 8th June. Everybody were expected to get there at some time. When I went it were early afternoon an' there were loads there, some I'd never seen afore. There were even a couple who'd bin sworn in as special constables sitting' in t'corner, these were

Shirley Asbury and Anthony Martin. That werra surprise; I recall Tom tellin' me they were not to be trusted.

To mek things even worse, it adna stopped raining for days, everywhere were sludged up. Carts 'ad carved up tracks deep enough to lose thee boots in.

Anyhow, I still expected to see Tom Bacon turn up at t'last minute but he were nowhere to be seen. Nor did anyone say owt about Tom to me, this after he'd bin top dog for years.

There were a lotta talkin' and middlin' o'drinkin'. William Turner told me to be at White 'Oss tomorrow night, early on; that'd be Monday. He then told me to clear off and keep me head down.

Next morning, I noticed that Pentrich village were very quiet, quieter than on a normal day; there were nubdy knockin' about and it were still rainin'. I turned up at pub later on and were told to tag on t'team being led by this man named Brandreth. He told me that as I were one of t'youngest, I were to be a runner to pass any messages between 'im and t'other groups. I didna need any weapon.

When we set off there were around a 'undred on us. We went through fields and past Coburn Quarry where they picked up a few pikes that had bin hidden. I've gotta tell thee that I were excited - I'd never done owt like this afore.

We then marched through Wingfield Park, called at a'couple o'farm houses and then we got to Ma Hepworth's farm down Buckland Hollow. I knew Ma Hepworth to look at but I've never spoke to her, I think she knew me man and dad.

I were stood at t'back and I could see Brandreth bangin' on t'door. I could 'ere a voice shouting from inside and several men were shoutin' back. Then some

went one way and others went t'other way round t'farmouse. I stopped where I was, it were all gerrin' a bit nasty.

After a couple o'minutes I heard a gunshot to me left. It were strange as everything went still for a bit and somebody broke the silence, "Captain's shot somebody inside." It were clear nubby knew what to do. Brandreth came round from back, he looked a bit weird, sorta unsure what to do next.

"OK lads, form up let's get on wi it." An that's what we all did.

"As somebody bin shot?" I asked them around me. One of older men turned round to me, "Keep thee gob shut lad tha's heard nowt and ta's sin nowt, keep it like that."

We marched on along Buckland Hollow.

"Thee, lad," shouted Brandreth, lookin' at me, "double off to Swanwick, see who yo can find and then get back to me at Butterley, be sharp about it."

"OK," I said, I could feel messen shakin'.

"And," Brandreth whispered, "Tha' seen nowt and heard nowt, gottit!"

That's t'second time I'd heard that.

I set off through fields toward Pentrich, past White 'Oss and then I doubled across towards Swanwick. It didna tek me long, I'd grown up in them fields.

When I got to Swanwick I were surprised to see none a'marchers around. I saw an old women scrapping about in 'er front garden. "Yo've missed 'em, they've all got down through Swanwick Wood, they'll be as far as Codnor bi now."

I decided to go down turnpike from Swanwick to Butterley gatehouse. I ducked down behind t'gatehouse, I didna feel like anserin' questions. I soon got to Butterley, just in time to Brandreth turn his men round at set off towards Ripley.

I ran past t'line to catch up wi Brandreth and as I did I passed entrance to t'works where George Godwin were stood wi a few of his men. I mighta told thee that I've done some buildin' work for 'im.

Mr Goodwin, he were manager, spotted me straight way, "Get thee sen home lad, "he shouted, "this silliness is nowt to do wi thee." He grabbed mi shoulder and I looked at 'im eye to eye. "Tha's got a trade and a future, get the sen in here." As he sed this he pushed me through the gate into the little office. I dunna think any o'marchers saw this as they were tramping through t'sludge towards Butterley Hill.

Mr Goodwin told one of his men to watch me as he shut t'office door. To be honest, I were shiverin', wet through and frightened to death. I were in no mood to chase up wi' t'marchers. Were they goin' to come back me?

I'm not goin' to write anymore this month just in case some bugger finds me notes.