

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrích March 1817

Around t'middle of March I went with Tom Bacon t'Peacock Inn at Oakerthorpe. Tom had to meet a man and he asked me to go along wí 'im for company. I know he often went there to meet men who were travelling along t'turnpike from Manchester or Sheffield to Derby and, even one or two, on to London. I've bin to Derby but not London - I can't see messen ever going.

Anyroad the bloke we met, I never knew his name, told us what had bin 'appenning in t'north. We sat in t'corner o'snug and Owd Tom bought the ale. Now that were summatt that didna 'appen very often - it must be serious, I thought to messen. This fella were about 40 years old and tall but skinny - he looked as though he could do wí a good meal.

I could tell Tom knew the man well and he said that I could be trusted. The Manchester man took a draft o'ale and began 'is tale.

"Well I'll tell thee all I know 'though I weren't there messen, around 9th or 10th March there were a meeting of knitters and weavers at St. Peter's Field, close to Manchester, folks said as it were as many as 6 or 7,000. They'd planned a march to London with each man to carry a blanket or overcoat, to sleep under. The plan were for t'marchers to set off in separate groups of ten or a dozen to save any trouble wí t'militia or magistrates. Every leader had a petition wí twenty names, askin' t'Prince Regent to improve the Lancashire cotton trade."

"Who set that up?" Tom asked, "Did they come this way, I've not heard owt about it?"

"Well, yo might ask," continued our friend after another goodly draft o'ale. "T'plan were to give no cause for trouble, nubby being armed and they were to

tell anybody who asked that they were only after t'chance to make enough money to feed their families, simple as that.

Yo might imagine it didna go all to plan, in fact it were a disaster. Dragoon Guards broke up t'march and, to cut a long story short, all them who were seen as leaders were arrested, some at Ardwick and some at Stockport. I dunna know if any got into Derbyshire, although there's bin a rumour that some did.

Tha knows Samuel Bamford."

Tom nodded, "Ay, he were at big meeting in London in January, I've known him for a few years."

"Well, he'd bin tellin' folks it were a bad idea. But he still got hissen arrested and they're all still locked up now."

"It were decided as we ought to tell delegates what had 'appened cos we didna know whether it would be in t'papers. I'm tellin' thee then I'm off to Derby and Birmingham. Others is goin' to Nottingham and Leicester."

"It's a bloody same, I did know that they've suspended habeas corpus¹ and they're locking folks up for nowt. I hear as Grosvenor Henson, that knows 'im, Nottingham Union man, he's bin locked up so I heard."

"I tell thee, Tom, we're faighting a battle 'ere. It's not just frame-knitters and weavers, it's bad conditions in t'mills and not a soul's listening."

¹ A writ of habeas corpus is a judicial mandate to a prison official ordering that an inmate be brought to the court so it can be determined whether or not that person is imprisoned lawfully and whether or not he should be released from custody. The government suspended the process during these troubled times.

"Eye, thats added to fact that we're overrun with spies and informers. You have to keep you wits about you'sen. It's particularly bad in Manchester as that evil bugger Joseph Nadin² has taken against anyone who talks about reform or just pressing for better pay. He's a real bad 'en, and that's raight."

Tom looked around t'pub and looked at me. "That knows there's men here I don't know. They might be traders but yo can never be sure. We found a couple of men from Butterley at our Hamden Club meeting t'other naight. They admitted they'd bin sworn in as Special Constables. One bloke threatened to push 'em up chimney if they told on us, then he kicked 'em out t'pub. I suppose that makes things wos. What can we do."

We chattered a while longer when Tom and me set off back to Pentrich. We went back to White Horse for a night cap. There were one or two regulars so we passed t'news on."

Folks had bin talkin' about rising up but, to be 'onest, I didn't believe them. Yo know how men talk when they had a pot or two. But, as I sit watchin' last bits o'me fire, I'm beginnin' to see folks as serious. We've seen bits in t'newspapers and heard about riots in Nottingham and Tom had told us about men lobbin' bricks at Prince Regent's carriage in London. To mek things even wos it's still raining and as bin all year.

I remember Tom showing me a old piece a paper he'd had for donkey's years. It were a proclamation from King George, yo know that one that's gone mad. He told that were why he didna write much down in case t'authorities found it.

² The Manchester authorities made Nadin their Deputy-Constable. Nadin soon developed a reputation for corruption, for example, he received money from most of the owners of brothels in Manchester. As well as arresting criminals, Nadin was given responsibility of dealing with the growing social unrest in Manchester. In 1812 Nadin arrested thirty-eight weavers for political offences. Nadin was much hated by local radicals and they claimed that for twenty years he was the "real ruler of Manchester".

As I write these notes, and I still dunna know what I'm goin' to do wi 'em, I must put down that I think that t'next few months are goin' to be interesting, yo mark my words.

Any road, I've sat to write down the Proclamation from t'King in 1792, so thee beware. Sorry about me mistakes. Watch out there's some words even I canna understand.

A Proclamation by King George III 21st May 1792

Whereas divers and seditious Writings have been printed, published and industriously dispersed, tending to excite Tumult and Disorder by endeavouring to raise groundless Jealousies and Discontents in the Minds of Our faithful and loving Subjects, respecting the Laws, and happy Constitution of Government, Civil and Religious, established in the Kingdom, and endeavouring to vilify and bring into Contempt the wise and wholesome Provisions made at the Time of the glorious Revolution, and since strengthened and confirmed by subsequent Laws, for the Preservation and Security of the Rights and Liberties of Our Faithful and Loving Subjects: And whereas divers Writings have also been printed, published, and industriously dispersed, recommending the said wicked and seditious Publications to the Attention of all Our faithful and loving Subjects: And Whereas We have also Reason to believe that Correspondences have been entered into with sundry Persons in Foreign Parts, with a view to forward the criminal and wicked Purposes above mentioned: and Whereas the Wealth, Happiness, and Prosperity of this Kingdom do, under Divine Providence, chiefly depend upon a due Submission to the Laws, a just Confidence in the Integrity and Wisdom of Parliament, and a Continuance that zealous Attachment to the Government and constitution of the Kingdom which has ever prevailed in the Minds of the People thereof; And whereas there is nothing which we earnestly desire, as to secure the Public Peace and Prosperity, and to preserve to all Our loving Subjects the full Enjoyment of their Rights and Liberties, both Religious and Civil: We therefore resolved, as

far as in us lies, to repress the wicked and seditious Practices aforesaid, and to deter all Persons from following so pernicious an Example, have, thought fit, by the Advice of Our Privy Council, to issue this Royal Proclamation, solemnly warning all Our loving Subjects, as they tender their own Happiness, and that of their posterity, to guard against all such Attempts which aim at the Subversion of all regular Government with this Kingdom, and which are inconsistent with the Peace and Order of Society; and earnestly exhorting them at all Times, and to the utmost of their Power, to avoid and discourage all Proceedings tending to produce Riots and Tumults; And We do strictly charge and command all our Magistrates in and throughout our Kingdom of Great Britain, that they do make diligent Enquiry in order to discover the Authors and Printers of such wicked and seditious Writings as aforesaid; and all others who shall disperse the same: And we do further charge and Command all our Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace, Chief Magistrates in our Cities, Boroughs, and Corporations and all our Officers and Magistrates throughout Our Kingdom of Great Britain, that they do, in their several and respective Stations, take the most immediate and effectual Care to suppress and prevent Riots, Tumults, and other disorders, which may be attempted to be raised or made by any Person or Persons, which, on whatever pretext they may be grounded are not only contrary to Law, but dangerous to the most important Interests of this Kingdom; And we do further Require and Command all and every Our Magistrates aforesaid that they do from Time to Time, transmit to One of Our Principal Secretaries of State, due and full Information of such Persons as shall be found offending as aforesaid, or in any Degree aiding or abetting therein, it being Our Determination, for the Preservation of the Peace and Happiness of our faithful and loving Subjects, to carry the Laws vigorously into Execution against such offenders as aforesaid.

Given at Our Court at the Queen's House, the twenty-first Day of May, One thousand seven hundred and ninety-two, in the Thirty-second Year of Our Reign.

GOD SAVE THE KING.