

## The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich May 1817

I were never part of th'ininner circle in t'Hampden Club so I didna allus get to know what were bubblin', but I could tell that things were hottin' up by t'middle o'May when I set about writing me notes. There was Hampden Club meetings at White 'orse most weeks and Owd Tom started meetings in a barn in South Wingfield with t'Ludlam's, Walters and one or two more. Yo cudna help but notice one or two strangers coming into t'village and, often as not, being met wi Tom. It were clear that they planned sommat serious and it some ow got owt they were going to march on London.

It were funny that folks in t'village didna talk about things as much as yo might imagine - but they all seemt to know what were going on. It were a funny feeling as folks expectin' to be expecting a storm or summat like that. I didna go to church, I'd no parents to send me, but some did say that t'crowd at church were gerrin' thinner each week. Somebody said that t'vicar knew summat were afoot and told folks to keep out of it. Mind you, he were never short a'food and drink.

A few days ago, I were told to go to one particular meeting at White 'orse when there were about twenty lads from Pentrich, Swanwick and South Wingfield there. We were all given job o'wandering around th'area and draw up a list of all farmers who had guns and also any farm labourers living in. They made no bones about it, they were going to take firearms on their march and also as many men as they could. Mind yo they didna tell us how to find out - I weren't goin' to walk up t'farm door and ask. Wey had to be careful cos, whilst it were a bad year, most farmers were doing alright. They were no near as poorly off as frame knitters so it seems as though they dunna want to know about marching to London.

Tom let slip that some in South Wingfield were mekkin' pikes and storin' 'em in a quarry at bottom of village.

Most o'stockingers were only working part-time and they were struggling for work and food – that were obvious. I noticed that they often tried to repair their own roofs or build walls on their own rather than get me to do it for em. Mind you I allus managed to get work – I thank me old dad for teachin' me summat useful.

One night I were sat wí Tom takín' a beer when he suddenly turned to face me dírect. "Tha knows you're expected to go on t'march lad and there's no backín' owt." I looked at Tom a little puzzled, he continued, "There'll be bother for them as dunna go when it comes to reckoníng."

"It looks as tho I aint got much of a choice, Tom."

"Aint yo excited about it lad?"

"No, Tom I'm aint, I've never bin to Nottingham let alone London. I canna see any good comín' owt if it, and that's a fact."

Tom gave me a funny look, "Well, we plan to march onto Nottingham fust and then eventually to London. Wey know that there's thousands who'll be joinín' us as t'march gathers strength. I've bin to a meetín' in Nottingham and its all agreed. Remember, keep it to theesen, unless its one o'lads tha's speakín' to. And, dunna forget, that the crafty bugger Colonel Walton 'as set up spies everywhere, even in Pentrích!"

Tom Bacon was collectíng monies in t'pub in order to get to meetings, he musta bin usíng mail coaches, I dunna think he'd ger on a 'oss. I were allus surprised as folk, who adna got a lot, dípped into their pockets. I wonder if their wíves knew! It was clear to see who dropped first coíns into t'pot and that were Tom's síster, White 'orse landlady, Nancy Weíghtman

There were a rumour goíng around that a man called Gravenor Henson had bin locked up in Nottingham. He were stockíngers trade union man and,

according to all accounts, well thought of. I know that Tom knew 'im. I wondered if t'magistrates knew summat.

Another bit a news came from Tom when he's bin to a meeting in Wakefield. Apparently there's a group going to rise up and then joint us to get on to London. There were a lot ready in Manchester but they'd bin put off by many o'their leaders being still in gaol after t'march they call 'Blanketeers' were stopped a few weeks back somewhere at top o'Derbyshire.

I remember gerrin into a discussion wi a chap in t'pub one naight. He were tellin' others about t'difference bwteen them as as loads a'money and them as dunna. He said the t'government were made up of aristocrats, land-owners and bishops and that they didna let any from lower classes get to talk to them and tell 'em how it were like to be starvin' and out a'work. He said that only way were to rise up, break their doors down and go an tell 'em what it were really like.

One old man, a church wardren, were sittin' in t'corner, "it's alraight tha comin' 'ere tellin' us what ta do and gerrin' us to risk our necks, I suppose tha lives well in town."

"Well," said the stranger, "I dunna want to cause yo any worries but yo know as well as I do that things is gerrin' wos. I come from Manchester and I'm ere to see Mester Bacon but I'm told he's away. I probably passed goin' t'other way to Manchester. I'm goin' back in t'mornin'."

That sorta stopped the chat and folks drifted 'ome. As we walked down village one or two said they thought he were perhaps a spy. All I know is that he didna look poor in his clothes. When Tom came back after a couple o'days he aid he'd no idea who it might a'bin. Yo ay to mek up your own mind as to whether that's raight or not.

Anyhow, I'm sure I'll ay summat to write about next month. Sun might shine, it hasna shined much this year so far.

