

## The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich April 1816

It's a year since I started to scribble these notes and hide 'em away. I only hope some bugger finds 'em and reads 'em before t'old King dies. I only did it to prove that we're not all stupid, some on us can write.

Well, I sometimes wonder what's up wi t'country, I were in t'pub t'other day talkin' to a man who wer travellin' and sellin' bricks. He were tellin' me about riots in Nottingham and Loughborough over t'price of food. I found a copy of local newspaper and there were bits and pieces about disturbances in Manchester and even some Luddites smashing machines. I thought that were all over when they made it a hangin' matter. Mind you, I know that one or two around here are thinkin' causing trouble and, to mek things worse, Tom Bacon spends a lotta time windin' em up.

To mek things more miserable, it's bin one of coldest winters I can remember and its still wet and cold. Them as plant a few crops are wiks behind and can't get on their land without gettin' stuck up wi mud.

I remember reading about Lord Byron makin' a speech about machine breakin', it were a paper Old Tom might have gen me when I were learnin' to read. I've got it somewhere, and go and dig it out, you'd like it. I can't remember if I told thee about it before.

Found it! It were in parliament when they were talkin' about mekin' machine breakin' a hanging job, as I sed. Well, Lord Byron, who don't live far away from here, made a speech. It were abit drawn out but Tom told me to read one bit at a time, I'll copy it for thee.

"suppose one of these men, as I have seen them meagre with famine, sullen with despair, careless of a life which your lordships are perhaps about to value at something less than the price of a stocking-frame; suppose this man surrounded by those children for whom he is unable to procure bread at the hazard of his existence, about to be torn for ever from a family which he lately supported in peaceful industry, and which it is not his fault than he can no longer so support; suppose this man—and there are ten thousand such from whom you may select your victims,—dragged into court to be tried for

this new offence, by this new law,—still there are two things wanting to convict and condemn him, and these are, in my opinion, twelve butchers for a jury, and a Jefferies for a judge!"

Tom said he were sayin' that it's wrong to sentence a man to death or transportin' just cos he needs to feed his wife and kids. It's bloody right as well. They just don't understand. Tom told me that parliament still went on wí it and ignored Lord Byron.

Any road, why I remembered this was cos I saw it in t'paper that Lord Byron and left England a few weeks before and does not intend to come back. He's lucky, I wish I could go with 'im.

I got a bit a work at Jessops foundry as they were putting new workshops up and all their brickyys were busy. I were puttin' up a wall behind the store to keep pieces of iron in a neat store. I tried to do a good job but it were hard work. I had to walk across t'fields from Pentrich down to Butterley and, as I said, it were muddy and heavy goin' 'specially carryin' some of me tools. When I'd finished Mr Goodwin said it were a good job and he gave me a ten bob bonus – great.

While I were at Jessops I noticed that most of t'men were settled and seemed to be content. This were not t'same amongst frame knitters who were allus moanin' about wages gettin' less and less. Some were earning more ten years back than they are to-day – that can't be raight.

On t'way back I called in t'cloth shop at Swanwick and got me mam a length of nice material for her to mek hersen a new frock. She were pleased, I think it were t'first frock she's had since me dad died, it's a shame. It only cost me three bob so it were worth it.

Last Sunday, I walked out wí this young lass from Oakerthorpe, she'd bin to our church for some Easter service. I walked down to her cottage and her mam made a right fuss a'me. She invited me for tea next weekend. I got cold feet and told her it were me mam's birthday and I'd come and see her another week. I know what'll happen next, if I'm not careful. I'm twenty one and one or two have been tellin' me about young lasses locally. Gerrin' married is not what I want, especially if it means spendin' all your life in Pentrich village wí its sludge and local pub wí rough ale and miserable customers. I have this

plan to get away as soon as I can. But dunna tell me mam will yu – it might never happen.

Well, what else has happemed since I last sent you a note. One or two more soldiers have returned back from French war. Albert, son of a tenant farmer in t'village, didn't get through it, nobody seems to know what happened to 'im. Blacksmith's lad has flitted to Cromford to work at t'mill, he's gorra a job repairing machines – his dad musta taught 'im metalwork. They told me he's gorra a room with a family from Matlock in a company cottage at Cromford, seems good!

We had a laugh t'other day when a drover took a short cut through Pentrich cos there were another flood down Buckland Hollow. Anyroad, he had four old horses and two carts full of wood. They'd managed to drag up t'hill but as soon as they got on t'level there were up to axils in sludge and muck. His horses were snorting and stamping about until they got too tired pull anymore and sat down – it were funny. One or two tried to gi 'im a push but it were no use. He'd no option but to put his oss's in George's field and leave t'cart were ti were until it stopped rainin'.

Mind you, it's were a good night in t'White Horse cos he had to buy a beer for them as gev him a push. I think Nancy put 'im up for a night and some o' men from village got 'im out next day. I dunna think he will come to Pentrich again.