

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich January 1817

After th'appenings at London in December, remember I told thee all about that, last time, the chat in White Horse seemed to change - by th'way I dunna know much more about t'riots in London as yet. We've not heard of any trials or hangings or owt like that.

Since frame-breaking were made a hanging job, Luddite troubles had gone quiet for a few years. It were brought home when seven Nottingham men were transported for life in 1812 everybody kept their heads down - I were only a kid at t'time but we were taught to say nowt.

We all knew of a few riots in Derby and Nottingham about wages and food prices but that didna really concern us in Pentrich although there sempt to be more folks short o'work. What I'm tryin' to say is that men began to talk about disturbances and politics just recently, more than ever I could remember- yo often heard folks say things like "summat needs to be done" or "it's goin' to get wos afore it gets better" and all that.

Owd Tom Bacon had his contacts and he got to know about wot were 'appenin' around and about but he kept tellin' folk to watch wot they were sayin'. He used to say "walls have ears!". It took me a while to understand what he meant by this - then it suddenly dawned on me. Mind you, Tom did say that he'd heard that the troubles in December had been set up by government agents. I

suppose we'll get to know more soon. We all knew that local magistrates had them as would report things to him, it were Colonel Halton at Wingfield Manor who were allus keen to find out about our lot.

Anyroad, it were not uncommon to see strangers call in at t'village, usually to see Owd Tom. Yo could see em whisperin' in t'corner o'White Horse, often wi some from South Wingfield, as likely or not wi Isaac Ludlam and William Turner in t'front. I never heard what they were on about.

Well, wor about December, weather o'er Christmas were a bit mixed, some snow but not too bad, yo could ger about but it weren't much fun wokin' outside. I managed to repair a few leaking roofs and a barn wi a door blown off.

As yo can imagine, there were a load o'ale drunk at White Horse ower Christmas and we even tried to play football on t'common but it were a farce in t'snow and sludge. We were remembering about t'weather in 1816¹ in t'pub one naight - nobody could remember a wos year, even th'old men. Spring were severely cold and it snowed as late as 7th June. There were no grass until end o'June. Autumn were very wet and th'harvest around t'county were bad. Up north, oats were not cut 'till October and some couldna ger it all 'oused. There were even some as left stacks in t'fields all winter². Yo can imagine that everything got more expensive.

1 The main cause was the eruption in April 1815 of Mount Tambora, Sumbawa Island, Indonesia – the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history.

2 As described in the diary of Sir Harry Fitzherbert for 1816.

I got t'hear about one bit a'news yo might like. As tha knows I'm not a church man but I heard some talkin' about a kafuffle in t'church when t'vicar had a go at them as were there. What happened wer that vicar were tellin' his flock to say their prayers and when they did they should add a bit at t'end for a blessin' for local landlord, Duke o'Devonshire and also His Majesty t'Prince Regent and, he added, for the poor sick King George. Well, yo can imagine that didna go down very well, there were grumblin' and muttering and, so I were telled a few even walked out. Somebody said that t'vicar lost his place and brought service to a stop.

Mind yo, it weren't all bad news for us, Pentrich Village blacksmith, Robert Briggs married a lass named Jane on 30th December³ and that were as good a reason as any for a party. As folks ad bin mending things rather than buyin' new, Robert had done well at 'is forge and could afford a few beers for his mates! Its amazin' ow many mates yo hav when there's free ale to be 'ad.

I better get down to me stories. Around t'middle of January, Owd Tom began tappin' men up for money but he were a bit secretive as to wot he wanted t'money for. All he'd say wor that he 'ad to go to London and he'd tell us all later on. Yo can realise that some were not too keen as they'd probably grabbed some coins out of 'ouse-keepin' pot to buy their ale.

It were a few days later when Tom decided to tell folks what he wor plannin' to do in London and why he wanted money. He'd bin invited to a posh meetin' wi all t'workers' delegates from around t'country at a pub called Crown and Anchor in t'middle of London. I've never bin farther then Derby but I'm told London's a big city with thousands o'people and palaces and the like. I did know that it were there that Parliament was and I'd heard em say that it were the plan to take a petition to Parliament asking for cheaper food. To be 'onest, we all expected that after Waterloo we'd be better off not wos but that's ow it turned out. But them as knew farming said that big landowners were really better off. I dunna know why them in t'pub even bother abowt this, as far as I can tell it's allus bin like that and it's not goin' to alter.

Tom told me that they were tryin' to get everybody to write their name on a big scroll askin' for cheaper food and a fair price for their goods. I dunna know how much good it would be, even when Tom brought his papers in t'pub one naight to be signed, half t'men had to ask Tom to write their names and then they'd put a big cross by t'side on it.

I hope I can find out abowt what happened I'London when I get me papers owt agen.