

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrích December 1816

There's lots to talk about around Christmas time; a couple of days off work and extra food and drink, especially drink. But, I've got to leave all that and tell thee about what's bín happenín' in London. Yo might remember I told thee last month that things were heatín' up – well this they ha done and wi a bang.

Owd Tom Bacon asked me to go wi 'im on a tríp to Nottingham, he'd managed to ger a ride on a cart wi a man from Swanwick who teks cloth every couple o'weeks. It weren't half a rough ride along t'sludgy turnpike.

We got there about eleven o'clock and ended up in a pub. Tom told me what he usually saíd and that's "watch thesen lad, see all, hear all and keep thee gob shut". There were some rough tykes in t'pub so I did as I were telled.

There were a couple o'blokes from London who were going around Hampden Clubs tellín' folks what had happened. Tom musta known about them comín'. Well, there were a group in London who call theirsens Revolutionary Spenceans; they follow an old radical by t'name of Thomas Spence. It were only later when Tom told me Spence had died a couple o'years ago. Anyroad, the tale was that these Spenceans held a meeting on 15th November to get support for a petition to t'Prince Regent seekíng reform in parliament and relief from hardship and dístress. These blokes reckoned there were ten thousand to hear a speech by Henry Hunt. I've never heard of 'im but Tom told me he were a famous speaker sometimes called the Orator Hunt, whatever that means. I heard out that Hunt were wantíng to get a show of hands for a petition to be handed in by him and Sír Francís Burdett.¹

¹ White R.J. "Waterloo to Peterloo" (1957) – a readable synopsis of the Spa Fields saga.

They told us that that the meeting was peaceful there were no trouble. "But," they said, "let us top our jugs up and we'll tell thee what happened then."

Apparently, Hunt and a MP called Sir Francis Burdett were to deliver this petition but were refused right to see t'Prince or his advisers. Yo can imagine this didna go down well. Apparently, Burdett dropped out at last minute and wouldna go with Hunt, that didna go down well either. We were told that Burdett had fallen out wi Hunt and had said, "I am determined not to be made a cat's-paw of and not to insult the Prince Regent."² Tom whispered in me ear, "That'll upset em!" – and it did seem to.

The group in t'pub pushed closer together as the two London men came back wi their full pots. The leaders were not well pleased at being shunned and arranged another meeting on Monday 2nd December, a couple o'weeks ago, mainly to protest against being ignored. They told us that upwards of twenty thousand this time gathered to hear t'speeches. I canna imagine how many ten thousand would look like never mind twenty thousand. I once saw a couple a'hundred at Derby Market but that's about it

Anyow, whilst Hunt were speaking, they told us, some broke away lookin' for trouble. It were said they broke into a gun shop on their way towards Tower a'London and took some guns. Apparently somebody, who just happened to be there, were killed by t'mob. They were met by an Alderman and some constables. Later by troops who dispersed most but not after some had been arrested and taken away. It's all bubblin' in London and t'government sempt to be expectin' more trouble. There were lots o'questions but not many answers as I could hear.

When they calmed down the bloke who was the leader stood up again. "There's summat else yo all want to know and that's why we've come up 'ere to see thee,"

² White, op. cit

he took a goodly swig from his pot. "We're certain that the second meeting were infiltrated and set awry by spies and government agents. If yo are planning owt in and around this area yo need to know that there's spies about everywhere. Dunna trust anyone tha doesna know or even your own men who're short a'cash, mark my words there's more trouble ahead."

The group settled down and sat down around half a dozen pub tables. Owd Tom, who sempt to be well known, moved around one or before asking me to sup up and get ready.

We met t'carrier closeby and set off back to Pentrich. Whilst bobblin' along Tom were tellin' me about some o'Spence's ideas³. He wanted, to get rid o'aristocrats and have all land owned by t'parishes. Rents should be shared and old folks and them as couldna wok would be looked after. Then he went on about parliament reform.

Tom looked at me wi that glint in 's eyes, "That's all well and good and I agree wi lots a'what Spence said. My problem is that if yo give parish big knobs power the'll end up as a aristocrats – that's ow it woks, think about it thessen."

I did think about it most o'naight. Last thing I said to Tom on this matter was that I asked him if we were likely to get trouble in these parts. Tom thought for a while and then said, "Folks is starvin' and no bugger's listenin'. Summat will 'appen, I dunna know where or even when but it will, thee see! Oh, and if tha tells anybody about this meetin' be careful who might be listenin'."

Tom needn't a worried about tellin' folks about the riots in London, it had bin in t'papers and they all knew summat about it. Mind you, I heard stories in t'White Horse that fifty men and women had been killed and half London were burnt down. It were clear to me that all these stories about trouble, riots and the

³ <http://www.historyhome.co.uk/people/spence.htm> or <http://www.historytoday.com/alastair-bonnett/revolutionary-plan-thomas-spence> - if you seek more detail

like need to be carefully read. A little tale gets much more interestin' after its bin pulled out a bit, more killed, more destruction and more soldiers, yo know wor I mean.

Well, I'm sorry I've gone on a bit but I wanted to keep me notes up to date. It's nearly Christmas now and some o'children are gettin' excited. There'll be some good food if they're lucky and mabbe a few toys for t'little ens. Nancy usually puts on a stronger brew when she knows folks are workin' for a few days. Yo need to be careful, it can make some nasty! Anyhow, merry Christmas one and all.