

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich February 1817

Yo couldna ger away from t'idea that things were gerrin' more serious. It all affected folks in different ways. One or two were tryin' to calm us down when t'others were gerrin' excited. Yo gorra feelin' that if some bugger blew a trumpet most o'men in t'village woulda followed em. Anyroad that's war I think.

I adna seen Owd Tom for a few days until one night in t'White Horse. It wer obvious from t'start that he were fulla 'is sen and had summat to tell us. I could tell that Tom were waitin' until he 'ad a big enough crowd - he kept lookin' at t'door to see who were comin' in.

Every now and agin they would call a night in t'pub a Hampden Club meetin', this were one a them. Not that it wer much different from other naights but they waited until any strangers 'ad gone. Mind you, we didna get many strangers at nighttime.

Tom waited for a lull in t'noise and kicked off, "Tha all knows there's bin summat bubblin' for a few months. It's gerrin' to a point when you canna afford to live and especially for stockingers'. I've just bin to a big meetin' in London - yo no doubt recall that I wer collectin' a bit a money to help pay for t'coach trip."

"I were invited as Derbyshire Delegate to a big meetin' in t' Crown and Anchor in middle o'London. T'meeitin' were set up by Major Cartwright, yo've heard me talk on 'im; he lives over Nottingham way. He sent a message about t'meeitin' few months ago.

Afore I tell thee about t'meeitin' I gorra tell thee about this place, Crown and Anchor. Set agen likes of t'White Horse in Pentrich, Cock Inn at Ripley or

t'Peacock Oakerthorpe, the Crown and Anchor is a different world, tha wouldna belive it.

I'll gi thee an idea. Yo walk into what they call a foyer, paved with stone and wi four big columns, 'oldin' up a gallery above. I wer told they could turn a big meal out for more than 500. There were carvings and two massive fireplaces framed with marble and wood. They had chains o'flowers, leaves and ribbons hung from t'walls. Yo couldna believe it, really.

Anyroad, enough o'that. Delegates travelled from across England, including Bristol, Norwich, Middleton, Lynn, Manchester, Lancashire, Liverpool, Nottingham and me from Pentrich. Major Cartwright stood in as the delegate for them as couldna mek it.

Before starting the meeting, the famous delegates from Westminster—Henry Hunt, William Cobbett and Mr Brooks—ceremoniously received 'vouchers' from each of the country delegates entitling them to represent the reformers of their towns. The representatives of the regional areas had bin assembled by Major Cartwright and Jones Burdett (brother of Sir Francis) as representatives of the Hampden Club. We were all there to form a network of reform groups, as intended by Major Cartwright to advance t'cause of parliamentary reform. I've gorra say I wer proud to bey there.

They had a lorra talk and, to be 'onest, some when over me head. They decided not to put the words Hampden Club on t'petition for parliament."

Tom stopped talkin' and looked round t'room like a bull overlookin' his herd o'cows, tha noes as proud as a peacock. He eventually went on about reform and petitions but, as far I can recall nubby said owt about revolutions or marches.

"But", Tom said as an ending, "we all know that we've got friends as is in t'same position as us and them that feel t'same way as wey do. Dunna forget that."

I've not written everything wot 'appened on that naight as I canna remember it all; there were quite a few words said as tha can imagine.

About a wík later I were in t'White Horse when one o'Ludlams were talkin' about a meetin' he'd bin to in Nottingham. Apparently, there'd bin some hangin's in Nottingham for framebreakin', they still call em 'Luddites', and more in Loughborough. As far as I knew there'd not bin any framebreakin' in our area for a while. Mind yo, it were a fact that stockingers were going through a rough time and had bin for a while. T'whole situation were bad, I think I've already told thee about last year's bad harvest.

One thing that seems to a'changed was that t'men seemed to include me and trust me more than they did afor Christmas. I'm sure it were cos I know Owd Tom quite well. But there's allus folks lookin' for informers.

T'other day, old Tom had bin to Derby and come back wí a handful o'books. He said he wukd lend 'em to them that could read. It were called "To the Journeymen and Labourers of England" and it were written by a man they called William Cobbett, I think I can recall Tom sayin' he were at that London meetin'. Tom passed me a copy and asked me to read it and let 'im know what I thought about it.

Well, I did read it, it took me all Sunday and there were lotsa words I didna know. But I copied a piece from t'front and I write for thee to read in case yo avna seen one afor.

"One the Cause of their personal Miseries; on the Measures that have produced that Cause; on the Remedies that some foolish, and some cruel and insolent, Men have proposed; and on the line of conduct on which Journeymen and Labourers ought to pursue in order to obtain effective Relief, and to assist in promoting the Tranquillity, and restoring the Happiness of their Country."

Well, it's all a bit deep. But I could see what he wer gerrin' at. Mr Cobbett went on about price of corn, taxation after Waterloo and summat about a gold standard, I decided I would ask Tom about. As far I could see it went on about prices, taxation and corruption. I did read it all but as I said some I couldna understand but I did understand t'end bit and I write it here.

"I have no room, nor have I any desire, to appeal to your passions upon this occasion. I have laid before you, with all the clearness I am master of, the causes of our misery, the measures which have led to those causes, and I have pointed out what appears to me to be the only remedy—namely, a reform of the Commons', or People's House of Parliament. I exhort you to proceed in a peaceable and lawful manner, but at the same time, to proceed with zeal and resolution in the attainment of this object. If the skulkers will not join you, if the "decent fire-side" gentry still keep aloof, proceed by yourselves. Any man can draw up a petition, and any man can carry it up to London, with instructions to deliver it into trusty hands, to be presented whenever the House shall meet."

Well, I've never bin so serious, I'm sorry if yo're bored but I thought it worthwhile scribblin' this down. What doest think?