

# The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrích October 1816

Yo get t'feelin' that sommat's bubblin' up. Everybody's talkin' about being out a'work, short a'food and pissed off wí t'weather. It's not stopped rainin' all year and the tracks and fields are like bogs. I canna remember owt like it and nor can any o't'others. It sempt to be weírd that just as folks were feelin' t'pinch, t'weather made things wos.

Somebody left a newspaper in t'White Horse one naíght and I found a bit about more Luddíte trouble – we thought it had stopped after they'd hanged a few.

*It said, "There was a revival of violence and machine breaking following a bad harvest and a downturn in trade. On 28 June the Luddites attacked Heathcote and Boden's mill in Loughborough, smashing 53 frames at a cost of £6,000. Troops were used to end the riots and for their crimes, six men were executed and another three were transported."*

It dídna tek 'em long to ger 'em before court and dealt wíth harshly. Most folks think it all were to do wí factories takin' men homework and fillin' some jobs wí women and children at half the price, even less than that sometimes.

One naíght in t'White Horse, Tom brought a copy of William Cobbett's paper and it had his víew of events, Cobbett reckoned that:

*Society ought not to exist, if not for the benefit of the whole. It is and must be against the law of nature, if it exists for the benefit of the few and for the misery of the many. I say, then, distinctly, that a society, in which the common labourer . . . cannot secure a sufficiency of food and raiment, is a*

*society which ought not to exist; a society contrary to the law of nature; a society whose compact is dissolved.*

When Tom read it owt loud most o'lads went quiet – it took some understandin' and I dunna think many got it. One o'Ludlams said it were about time summat were done, we've had too many fancy wods. Most agreed and Tom put his paper away and sat watchin' and listenin'. I'm not goin' to write down what some men were sayin', I'd risk me 'ead.

Yo may recall that I told thee that I'd moved in wí Tommy Bacon after me mam died. Well, I don't think I told thee that Tom had allus had a girlfriend who lived in village. I didna say owt cos it's not my business tha knows.

Anyroad, Tom's cottage is quite big for two men but not forra crowd. To cut a long story short, he told me one naight that he were movin' her in as she'd bin evicted and she were bringin' all five kids. And if that weren't bad enough, he told me I'd got to find somewhere else to live. I knew it were too good to last. To mek things wos, Tom said that if t'kids got too noisy he'd come to see me wherever I ended up – cheeky bugger!

It didna tek long to sort messen out. I'd done some buildin' work for t'blacksmith last year and I did a deal wí 'im to rent me on old stable at back if I agreed to do it up. So wí-in a week I were gone. So much for friendship. I dunna know what Tom is plannin' to do wí a woman at his age but there it is. I'm pleased in a way as Tom were goin' away more and more on meetin's and delegate work. I'd a'bin left with his woman and her kids – I dunna know how many were Tom's kids – they all looked different!

More and more villages were seekin' help from Parish Poor Fund as they were strugglin' to mek ends meet. This were specially so for frame workers who had

---

<sup>1</sup> Cobbett's Political Register, 11 September 1819

less work and, to mek things was, that were being asked to put out poor quality cut-ups.

For last few years, as the framework knitters were being forced to rent the frames they worked on by the manufactures, hosiers-masters. A bit later mass production was being introduced by the use of wide knitting frames in small factories. These frames made the work less labour intensive, because the stockings were made of a one cut piece of material, which was called a 'cut-up.' Consequently, stockings were cheaper to manufacture. The knitters felt that these methods of manufacturing were displacing skilled labour and that the deterioration in quality, due to the cheaper production practices, was producing the decline in the purchase of stockings<sup>2</sup>.

To mek things was, many used to work a strip a'land with a few tators, greens or a few chickens, mebbe a cow. This were a thing o'past as most land were enclosed. Since t'new game law it were a brave lad as went poaching.

One naight we had a Hampden Club meeting at Cock Inn in Ripley and Old Tom brought a fella called William Stevens from Nottingham, he were a Needlemaker and I think he were some sort o'leader. When he started to talk he had one o'them voices that meks thee listen. He told us ow there were plenty a'men in Nottingham area who were ready to do summat. He told us we'ed need to be careful as there were hundreds a'soldiers barracked in and around Nottingham just waitin' for a chance to cause a rumpus.

So yo can see how things were goin', I dunna know if things were t'same everywhere. I'd not bin much farther than Derby and yo could men in pubs there moanin' about their plight. They surely were in t'villages in and around here such as South Wingfield, Swanwick, Ripley and t'rest. As Owd Tom kept sayin' there's no bugger listenin' to us, no bugger's interested.

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.picturethepast.org.uk/](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk/)

I dunna think I've had much good news to tell thee this time and, to be 'onest, I dunna know what's goin' to happen. I can see folks gerrin' more and more wound up.

Mind thee it's nor all bad. Sun's out now and I'm going to get stuck in me new room to try and block a few draughts afore I catch me death o'cold.