

# The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich November 1816

A bantle o'us were in t'White Horse pub at start of t'month, Tom brought a Nottingham newspaper he's picked up on one of his travels. He told us that Nottingham magistrates were going to watch and ward again as they expected some trouble from Luddites, republicans or food rioters in t'city. He'd met with a man called Gravenor Henson who were secretary of t'Framework Knitters union. Tom said he were a smart fella and someone who cared for t'poor workers.

Most o'others seemt to know what he were on about but I asked Tom what watch and ward was has I'd never heard of it.

"Well lad, it's complicated and I dunna know all t'details. As far as I know it's an old system to keep t'peace locally. Guards are set up and the duties of the night constables, that's t'watch and in daytime, that's t'ward, were written down. Years ago they used to shut Town gates from dusk to dawn, strangers had to prove their identity and what their business were. The number o'men depended on how big the village or town was. It all points to fact that they expect trouble and, unless working men ger a better deal, they're raight to expect trouble! We all mow that there's plenty o'soldiers in and around Nottingham.

This started a debate on how we got information months after things what happened months ago.

Mr Ludlam had a piece a'paper he'd got from somewhere. It were that The Leicester Chronicle of 15th June 1816 had an article about an attack on frames - we all thought it had stopped but 'No' an there were a local connection. I borrowed it and copied into me notes next day, it were:

Luddites destroy 19 Lace-frames at New Radford, Nottinghamshire.

On Sunday 9th June 1816, Luddites undertook an action in Nottinghamshire for the first time since September 1814, almost two years.

Daring Outrage.—On Saturday night last, about one o'clock, a party of men, disguised and armed with various sorts of weapons, forced the door of Mr. William Wright, of New Radford, when about seven of them, having obtained a light, rushed up stairs into the workshop, or shops, where they demolished twelve point net lace-frames; and with such vengeance did they exercise their lawless authority, that the frames, which were principally of superior worth, are rendered of very little value.

And this is t'local bit. It is very singular, that three of the these frames belong to Mr. Benjamin Topham, of Pentrich, Derbyshire, and were broken about four years ago, in his shop, at that village, along with a number more, two of which have made very little work, and the other none since they were repaired.

As it were read out t'men in t'pub went quiet!

One of the other frames belongs to Mr. Platts of Nottingham, four to Mr. Wright, and three to Mr. Waynman, lace-manufacturer of Nottingham, who is Mr. Wright's principal employer, and one to Mr. Cole, lace-manufacturer. The loss thus occasioned must be very great; but this is not all, for the depredators, not content with the mischief thus done, very materially damaged or destroyed (principally the latter) about thirty-one yards of net which was upon the frames, and took away six yards. The clock face in the house was struck with great violence with a hammer, and the corner cupboard was beat in pieces. Mr. Wright was away from home. Mrs. Wright and family were kept in their respective rooms while the

mischief was going on, but, as these nightly violators of property and domestic repose had twice to go down stairs for a light, the guarded parties had opportunity of seeing them, and they agree in stating that seven men were in the shop, while Mrs. Wright thinks she saw twelve men that stood watch on the outside.—When the workmen, as those, we understand, are called that actually do the mischief, had completed their purpose at Mr. Wright's, they immediately went in the house of Mr. Mullen, close by, the door of which they broke into pieces, and then rushed up into the workshop, where they demolished seven point net lace-frames, six of which belonged to Mr. Waynman above named, and one to Mr. Mullen—one was left uninjured, and is generally understood, from the watchword of alarm being given from without. They also took from Mr. Mullen's, fifteen yards of net and a shirt, and left an instrument behind them like a tomahawk; they also broke the clock. It is proper to state, that the depredators, in order to render their mischief more complete, broke many of the globes, which contain a mixture of water and aquafortis, and which are used by the workmen in winter evenings to add to the brilliancy of their light, and cast the corroding contents upon the frames.—It seems singular, that neither Mr. Mullen nor his wife heard them; the reason assigned is this, which is a very feasible one, and, from the respectability of Mr. Mullen's character, is universally believed—he had more liquor than he usually takes in an evening, which caused him to sleep very soundly, as he had been in bed about an hour: and Mrs. Mullen, who was also asleep in bed, is very hard of hearing. When these daring offenders had completed the object of their violence, they discharged several pistols—shouted, as though in triumph, and then retired. Two persons are in custody on suspicion.

In fact, Topham of Pentrich had been the target of 3 separate attacks by Luddites during their previous heyday in the midlands.

"We dunna need to wake that particular owd dog up," said Owd Tom. Everybody sempt to nod. "Are we ayíng more beer?" added Tom as he went t'counter.

Well, I knew when to keep me mouth shut but it were interesting and as I copied it into these notes I realised what had happened before. I copied it all as I were interested in what t'Luddites did. Nobody had ever mentioned it and they never did again as far as I know. It were probably the first time I came t'conclusion that the Pentrich men were serious about gerrín' summat done. Before I thought most of what they talked about were empty threats and beer talkín'. I could tell by their faces last night that they were serious.

That brings me to thínkín' about messen. Am I goín' to get messen caught up in anything that might happen - or am I already up to me neck in it?