

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrích October 1815

It's bin a funny old month so far, I've bin busy finishing the estate cottages; I got a pound for finishing a week early!

I had a drink wí' Henry at T'White Horse t'other naíght, he was wantín' to talk about leavín' Pentrích to go to Derby or Nottingham. Henry's a couple years older than me and he lives wí' his parents in t'village- his dad is a framework knitter. He's the eldest and named after his dad. Henry has bin a good pal o'mine since we were kids and kícín' about t'village. He told me they were struggling to make ends meet and to pay t'rent every month. He were allus a good friend so I wanted to know what made 'im think this way.

I could tell he'd bin thínkín' it through. I allus knew he wore a bríght lad. Anyway, he wouldna be t'fost t'leave as one or two families had already gone to Arkwright's mill at Cromford. They even got a cottage wí' t'job.

"Well, its like this," Henry said leanín' back in his chair by t'fire. "There's things about líving here I like and some things I bloody well don't. On t'other hand, there's things that tell me I should go and then there's things that tell me I should stay put."

I was confused by his words, "What does all that mean Henry, it sounds like a riddle to me?"

"It's no good talking to me dad, he only sees them things that could go wrong. I think he dusna want to míss the bit'a board I pays him. There's more work and better pay in t'towns but I'd have to pay rent for a room and feed mesen. Course, I'd míss me parents and mates, even yo, but what chance do I have here? We all know that frame knítting is dyíng out and there's no way I'm goíng down t'pít."

I tried another tack. "Wor about getting' married? There's plenty of young women in Pentrich and South Wingfield, even at Swanwick. You can see their families, their mothers an all. You never know who you'd end up wi in Derby."

"Hang on mate, where does it say I should get married. I'm thinking of a better life not breeding a bantle o'kids. If it dunt work out in Derby or Nottingham I could go anywhere - there's no future here. Why don't you come wi me?"

I'd not really thought about leaving so I ignored this. "Why don't you talk about it wi t'vicar or even Tommy Bacon? See wot they say."

Yo must be jokín'. I woodna trust t'vicar as far as I could kick him. As for Tom Bacon, all he's interested in is politics. I'm not getting involved in his plans, the're pie in t'bloody sky. In fact, you'd do better to ignore t'silly old bugger!"

It sempt to me he's made his mind up so I went for another jug and left 'im to his thoughts. I dun know what he'll do but he'd probably made his decision already.

You remember I told you about t'magistrate's clerk asked me to spy on me mates. I didn't tell you what I decided to do. Well, me first idea was to tell him to get stuffed. Then me second idea was to play his game and then tell him a load a'rubbish. Me third idea was that me second idea would get me in serious trouble. That's if you know what I'm trying to say.

I saw him in t'village yesterday and I told him me decision. I didn't want me mam's rent to be cut, she'd smell a rate and fret about it. I told him that I'd tell him of any strangers or trouble-causers who turned up in t'village and he could pay me; I'd mek sure me mam got some money wi'out fretting where it come from." I were surprised when he seemed happy with that. Mind you, I

never had any intention o'tellin' him owt about t'villagers – more than my life's worth.

We left it like that. I said I'd find him about when I had owt. I felt bad about this but what could I do?

Things were not good in t'village, especially with t'frame knitters. Food prices were going up every week and me mam began tekín' in more washing to help. It were a fact that me dad had died too early to provide for her and too late for her to get married again. She were past 40 and widows didna usually get married at that age.

Despite all this worry she still went to church every Sunday and listened to t'vicar telling her she were blessed. She told me so. I can't see it, I can't see any blessins coming her way.

I'd been thinking about Henry's decision and I've made me mind up to stay in t'village and help me mam. They'd allus want a builder, at least I hoped they would.

I like autumn and when I'm not workín I like to wander around on me own. I noticed that the turnpike running past Buckland Hollow was getting busier every month. More wagons loaded wi stone, food stuffs, animal food, beer barrels and people packed in the open back. Pack horses loaded with cloth and made-up goods going in both directions. I thought there were even more coaches ploughing backwards and forwards – most of them full. T'turnpike through Swanwick was not as busy but saw more traffic than last year.

On t'other hand, anybody could see that there was less material coming in and out of Pentrich from frame workers.

Last thing I ought t'tell you this month is that t'weather has been rough and wetter than normal. Quite a few farmers who had been slow in getting their crops in had found them wet through and flat t'ground. T'roads through

Pentrich and South Wingfield were in a state; yo were likely to lose your boots in t'muddy ruts. Carts got struck regularly and had to be pulled out by one of t'blacksmith's hoss's - he made a good few coppers at this game.