

# The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich September 1815

Workin' on them new cottages for t'Dukes agent kept me busy but it wont last for ever. Since me dad day'd I've got to keep family going. At 20 I should sowing me wild oats not workin' every hour that God sends. Mind you I'm not so sure that there is a God at the moment; way can't even afford a headstone for me dad.

Anyhow, I had a weird meeting yesterday, I'll tell thee about it. As I were on me way hom from wok a tall, well-dressed man came up to me side. I dunna know his name but he were Colonel Halton's clerk; Halton's the local magistrate. I've seen 'im a time or two but never spoke to 'im. He's not the sort a chap to talk to likes a'me.

A were a funny fella tryin' to talk all posh. "I hear your father died last month, how is it all going for you and your mother." I looked at him but he didn't look at me.

He put his head a little closer to mine and said, "How would a bit off her rent suit you both?"

I stopped and looked around, "What dust mean, what're yo after?" Me first thought were that he were after me mam.

"Well, it's like this. You know about the machine breaking last year and bits a trouble in and around the area. I know that one or two trouble-causers drink at White Horse and well, you probably know them as well as I do."

"What do you want from me? I've never bin involved in anything like that."

"I know that lad and that's why I'm asking you."

"Asking me what?" I hadn't worked out wot he were on about.

"Well, the Colonel needs to know who's involved in winding the young men up. It is his responsibility to keep order and we need people we can trust to tell us what's happening. Think about it!"

"I don't know anthin', t'men don't tell me anythin'. Anyhow I've never known of anything going off. T'machine smashing were years ago."

"Now look here lad, I know you drink at the White Horse and other public houses, you must hear what they talk about. We can cut you rent by half. Your dad was a church man, he'd not approve of law-breaking, now would he? I'll bet you even know old Tom Bacon."

"I don't know why you're asking me. It'd be more than my life's worth, even if I did hear owt! And i'm not saying I have!"

"Think about it lad. We can make things hard for thee and your mother. I'll see you in a few days." He strode off and I stood looking after him in a daze.

I sat at home tryin' to eat me tea. Me mam said, "Why are you so quiet son. You aint badly are you? Yo look like you're sickenin' for sommat"

I daren't tell 'er. I couldn't make sense of it all mesen.

Me mam went to bed early and I sat by t'fire with a jug a'ale. Halton's man were askin' me to be an informer against me friends and neighbours. Why me? No bloody fear, I'm not anybody's story teller!

As I sat there more thoughts leapt out of the flames. Cuttin' t'rent by half would make a big difference, me mam could cut down 'er work - she deserved that.

I lay awake all night and just before I got up I had come to me decision. I hope I'd come t'right one. Only time'd tell.

I went t' work and laid a few less bricks than I ought to. I spent all day lookin' over me shoulder. I expected to see my new friend, or perhaps Tommy Bacon or even me dad from his grave. Still, I've made me decision and I'll try to stick by it.

I went t'White Horse that night an sat wi Tommy Bacon and a few o'tothers.

"Wots up wi thee, lad?" said George Weightman, "yo look like a real misry guts. Pass them doms, let's tek some o'your money." I nodded and sat in a hand or two of doms for a penny a corner. You might imagine, I didn't keep me eye on t'doms and I lost fourpence.

Tom were on next table talking to a few of t'locals. I cocked a good ear to wot they were on about.

Tom were first to speak, "I hear as Butterley are laying a few more off this week. Nubdy wants any cannons or bullets not until t'next war that is, or even t'next revolution!"

Isaac Ludlam banged his tankard on t'table, "I've a bit a work at t'quarry but I know as most knitters are only wokng a couple days a week, if that. Me missus says that price o'bread and meat have doubled over last few wicks. I sometimes feel ashamed to bring money t'pub for fear o'starvin' me kids. It's not bloody raight. I sent me lad out scrumpin' tother day but weather's bin so bad fruit's not ripen'd yet."

There was a few general grunts of agreement and they all looked at Owd Tom.

"I met a couple blokes t'other day, they were passing along t'turnpike and I happened to be in t'Peacock when they dropped in."

I'm not stupid, I thought to mesen, there were no way Tom met by chance I bet he'd planned it. I cocked me 'ead back and nearly dropped me doms.

Tom continued, "These blokes were from Manchester and they told me that t'lads up there were having t'same problems as us. Some were making plans to send a petition to London. One o'their top dogs had met with a high-up named Sir Francis Burdett and he promised he would help."

"What you're going to do Tom?" Isaac asked.

"Well, they've asked me to a meetin' in a week or two. We're only going to get sommat done if we stick together but it'll tek time. Bad news is that I've got to ask thee all for some expenses, I can't afford coach to Manchester on me own."

There were more grunts and several man threw a few coins on t'table. Tom grabbed his expenses up and dropped them into a leather purse. I noticed that one or two shook their heads, I don't know if they didn't want to pay up or hadn't got any money.

Tom leant back in his chair, "Get me another pint George, it's your turn int'it!"