

Petition of William Thompson

House of Commons, Votes and Proceedings, 15th May 1821

Transcribed by Anne Cooper

No 582

A Petition of William Thompson, of Bolton-le-Moors, in the County of Lancaster, Cotton Weaver, was presented, and read; setting forth, That the Petitioner, being strongly convinced of the necessity of a Reform in the Representation of the Country, was induced to attend a public Meeting at Manchester on the ever-memorable 16th of August 1819, called for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of effecting such Reform; that the Petitioner believed then, and still does believe, that the object for which the Meeting was called, and the manner of calling it, were perfectly consonant with the then existing Laws of the Country, and that he was in the exercise of a right as sacred as that of existence, and a duty as obligatory as any of the duties of man to man; that, previous to the arrival of the Chairman, the Petitioner saw nothing but cheerfulness, and determination to preserve entire the peace of the Meeting, on the part of those who had come to attend it; that after the arrival of the Chairman, the Petitioner saw the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry come galloping to the ground, who halted in front of a house where the Magistrates were assembled; when he heard them give three cheers, which were immediately answered by the People in the most friendly manner; after which Colonel Fletcher, one of the Magistrates, said something the them which the Petitioner could not hear, and waved his hand, when they rode furiously among the People, toward the Hustings, cutting without regard to age or sex; that the Petitioner was involuntarily carried near to the Hustings where he was presses between the horses of two of the Yeomanry Cavalry, whom he observed to point their swords in a menacing way at the Chairman, who surrendered to the Civil Authorities without offering the least resistance; that after the surrender of the Chairman, the Petitioner was knocked down by one of the horses, trampled upon, and severely bruised; that after the Petitioner had got up, and was retiring from the ground, he was met by a man with a constable's staff, who, without any provocation, struck him upon the head and brought him to the ground, when one of the Yeomanry Cavalry rode over him, and struck him over the right eye, which has materially injured his sight , and rendered him incapable of following his occupation for some time, upon which depended the maintenance of a wife and two children; that the Petitioner, beside the personal injury he received, witnesses many acts of the most wanton cruelty, committed on peaceable and unoffending individuals, by the Yeomanry Cavalry; that the Petitioner verily believes, that if any legal process was intended to be executed on the person of the Chairman, or any other individual in the Meeting, the same might have been done by the Civil Authorities, without causing any disturbance, or any resistance being offered thereto; in this opinion the Petitioner is borne out by the fact, that during the whole of the attack he did not see any attempt made to injure the persons of the Yeomanry Cavalry or Peace officers; that the Petitioner, taking the foregoing facts into

consideration, is of the opinion that, that attack upon the Meeting was a gross violation of the rights of Englishmen and the Laws of his Country, and that the perpetrators ought to be brought to condign punishment; the Petitioner therefore prays the House to institute an inquiry into the transactions of that bloody day, and to adopt such measures as the justice of the case and honour of the Country demand.