

Petition of Robert Taylor Wilde

House of Commons, *Votes and Proceedings*, 15 May 1821.

Transcribed by Mick McHugh

(N<sup>o</sup>. 617.)

A Petition of *Robert Taylor Wilde*, Plasterer, late of *Staley-bridge*, in the parish of *Ashton-under-Lyne*, in the County of *Lancaster* was presented, and read; setting forth, That on the 16th day of August 1819, while the Petitioner was attending a public Meeting at *Manchester*, convened for the purpose of considering the most legal and effectual means of obtaining a Reform in the Commons House of Parliament; and when the Meeting so assembled were about to exercise that which they had ever considered as their inherent and inalienable right, without the least symptom of disorder, or any provocation being given, the *Manchester* and *Salford* Troop of Yeomanry Cavalry, and a posse of Special Constables, under the direction of the Magistrates, most wantonly and violently, and without giving the least notice of their intention, furiously rushed on the assembled multitude, sparing neither age, sex, nor condition, cutting, trampling upon, and maiming, all who came within the reach of their murderous arm; while others, with a cowardly brutality, were employed in preventing the escape of those who wished to flee from the dreadful carnage, and who, too fondly trusting in the justice of their cause, and with full reliance on the protection which the Laws of their Country had hitherto afforded, had many of them brought their wives and children to be participators with them in the cheering hope which the prospect of petitioning the House afforded; that in consequence of this violent attack and assault on a defenceless multitude, 14 were killed, and 614 wounded to a great part of which the Petitioner was an eye-witness, and from which he narrowly escaped with his life, by being arrested in the midst of this scene of distress and confusion by two Cavalrymen and two Special Constables, who, without any warrant, seized the Petitioner and conveyed him to an escort, by whom he was taken to the New Bailey Prison, where he was confined on a charge of High Treason for eleven days and nights, in a solitary cell, from which he was not allowed to depart, even to ease the calls of Nature, or to see or correspond with his friends, whereby the Petitioner's friends were held in the greatest pain and suspense; at the end of eleven days and nights confinement, the charge of High Treason was abandoned, and that of Conspiracy substituted, and without one tittle of criminatory evidence being adduced, the Petitioner was (although a poor labouring man) ordered to find bail for his appearance at the ensuing Assizes, to the enormous amount of £1000, in violation of the Laws of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, inasmuch as it exceeded the means of the Petitioner or his friends to procure, and which he considered as only intended to prevent him from being liberated from their custody; and because the Petitioner could not find bail to the amount so unjustly required, he was immediately placed under a military escort, and sent to *Lancaster* Castle, a distance, of sixty-four miles from his friends and home, where he remained until the Assizes, when the amount of bail being reduced to £[.]400, he procured sureties in that amount, and was released, although at very

considerable expense to himself and friends; that at the ensuing Assizes at *York*, the Petitioner, with several others, was tried for a Conspiracy; when, curious to relate, the only offence charged against him was that of being a radical Reformer, and of having, at the Meeting in question, advised the people to be peaceable and quiet; and even to prove this, perjury was unblushingly countenanced and defended; but, on account of the glaringly false and ridiculously absurd evidence adduced, the Petitioner was acquitted, after unjustly suffering 26 days and nights solitary confinement, and a long and expensive prosecution, besides suffering in health most severely; and all this, not because he had been guilty of any crime, but because his humble situation in life rendered him more vulnerable to attack and was consequently selected as the victim of their deadly cruelty; the Petitioner, with pride, avows himself a radical Reformer, and solemnly assures the House, that neither himself, nor his friends and neighbours, had any object in view but the restoration, by legal and constitutional means, of their undoubted rights as Englishmen and is confident that, on inquiry, it will be found that the only real disturbers of the public peace, were those whose duty it was to preserve it; the Petitioner therefore most humbly and earnestly implores the House to take his case into their consideration, by instituting an inquiry into the dreadful scenes of blood of the 16th of August 1819, take such proceedings as will prevent the recurrence of such a disastrous outrage, by causing the authors of the unjustifiable slaughter of unoffending men, women, and children, to answer for that conduct, which has fixed an indelible stain on the national character; whereby the House would do more towards tranquillizing the justly-outraged feelings of a great portion of His Majesty's subjects, than could be effected by any other means.