

Name: Matthew Cowper

Occupation: Law Clerk and Accountant

Home: Manchester

Date: 17th March 1820

Source: Trial of Henry Hunt 37-38

Summary: Recites Hunt's speech of the 16th August 1819 from notes. Recalls slogans on flags, and states that the meeting was designed to inspire fear in the inhabitants of Manchester.

Done by: RH

Matthew Cowper examined by *Mr. Scarlett*—I am an accountant at Manchester. I went to the meeting of the 16th of August about twelve o'clock. I have some memorandums which I took on the ground. I think about 100,000 persons were assembled; I measured the ground, and made the best calculation I could, as to the number who could stand on a square yard. The meeting seemed principally composed of the labouring classes. The people stood so close that I could not get to the hustings as I wished, I saw the flags. I have an account of some of the inscriptions which were upon them. One was, "*No Boroughmongers;*" reverse, "*Unite and be Free;*" another, "*Equal Representation or Death*", and "*Taxation without equal Representation is tyrannical and unjust.*" There were several others. I was on the field when *Mr. Hunt* and his party approached. Several who followed the procession had white paper or rags in their hats. I heard some of them say to the others lads, take care of your white rags. "*Mr. Hunt* on taking the chair, made a speech. 'I took notes of it on the ground, and they are now-m their original state, (here witness read his notes: —)

"Gentlemen, I must entreat that you will be peaceable and quiet,; and that every person who wishes to hear, must keep order, and all I ask for is, that during the proceedings you will be quiet. We will endeavour to make ourselves heard, but it is impossible for us to be heard by the whole; we wish our fellow-countrymen who do hear us will communicate to those who do not. It is useless to observe upon the intended meeting of last week, only to observe that those who by their malignant exertions, in taking advantage of a few illegal words, expected they had triumphed, instead of which it has produced two-fold numbers (here were cheers), and now we have triumphed. He went on to state that two or three placards, signed by two or three obscure individuals."

While he was saying this, some companies of foot soldiers appeared in Dickinson Street and formed. I did not take notes any further; I give the substance from memory. He said, never mind, they are only a few soldiers, and very few compared with us, we are a host against them. In my judgment the meeting was such as to inspire very great fear in the inhabitants of the town of Manchester. My apprehensions did not arise from what I then saw, but from previous circumstances, and from information communicated to me.

Cross-examined by *Mr. Hunt*—I have no other occupation but those of accountant and law stationer. I was Secretary to a Committee composed of 3 Gentlemen, in aid of the Civil power. I am not in the employ of the Police. I occasionally communicate with *The Courier* and *Morning Post*, London Papers. I sent up an account of the Manchester Meeting to the *Courier*. I think my report did not appear. I have been in the service of a professor of the law for nine years. I have been under instructions for the Excise. I was, earlier in life, a clerk to Dawes and Fogg, of Boulton, perhaps twelve months. My father was in the Excise; he was supervisor of the district in which the brewery is situated. (*Mr. Hunt* asked the witness why he left this employment, but he declined answering, at length he stated as follows): I applied to own the money belonging to the firm, and Messrs. Dawes dismissed me in consequence. That money I have repaid to *Mr. Dawes*, with compound interest up to the time of payment. I took the money out of the till, and was detected. It is some months ago since I paid this money; it was the first money I could command. The reason of my not paying it sooner, was, that my fathers death left three younger brothers to be supported by me. It was to *Mr. Fogg* I paid the money. I have been three years in business. I never told *Mr. Scarlett*, *Mr. Maule*, or *Milne*, this story. I did not know you knew it. The money I took was stamped. If I had known that you were acquainted with it, I should have had *Mr. Dawes* here, as he would willingly have come forward for me. I do not know that my father being a supervisor of the district, and having great power over my master, was the reason why I was not prosecuted. I have not been paid by the Magistrates or Police, except for being Secretary to the Committee in aid of the Civil Power, The accounts of

the Committee were passed at the parish table.

Mr. Hunt—Don't you know this money was paid out of the parish rates?

Justice Bayley said this was not a relevant question.

I was within a dozen or fifteen yards of the hustings on the day of the meeting. I went purposely to take notes of what you or any one else should say. The reasons why the observations respecting the soldiers were not written down was, that all attention being directed to them when they appeared, I ceased to use my pencil. All I have read is now down in my notes.

Justice Bayley , —Let me look at those notes, —(The notes were handed in). I think there are the materials here of such a speech.

Cross-examination continued. —I have a good memory. I wrote out my notes, and handed them over to *Mr. Norris*, the Magistrate. I did not hear you say, 'Put them down, and keep them down'. None but the Editor of the *Courier* employed me to take notes of what passed— (witness repeated the inscriptions on the flags). There was no bloody dagger on the black flag. The inscription on the black flag attracted my attention particularly. I had not time or I would have taken all the inscriptions. The black flag was attached to a pole as the other flags were. I saw a barbed point to one. of the flag poles, it was painted red did not see two hands and the word "Love" upon the black flag

The Court adjourned at seven o'clock.