

Name: William Harrison
Occupation: Spinner
Home: Oldham
Date: 27 September 1819
Source: Lees Inquest 73 – 80
Summary: Local associate of John Lees who observed his condition a few days before he died. Also was present at St.Peter's Field during the events, which he describes vividly. 'At Waterloo there was man to man, but at Manchester it was downright murder.'
Done by: CW

WILLIAM HARRISON called in, sworn, and examined by the CORONER.

Q. What business are you?

A. I am a cotton spinner.

Q. Where do you live?

A. In Oldham.

Q. What do you know about the death John Lees; did you see him on the 16th of August?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. Where?

A. I saw him going to the meeting at Manchester. When I first saw him he was running, and I asked him to stop for me, but he said "No, I have company, and I shall go with them."

Q. How soon after the 16th did you see him again?

A. I did not see him again until five days before he died, when I heard he was very poorly, and I went to see him; I found him in the kitchen on a couch, with a face like a cap.

Q. What do you mean by, like a cap?

A. I mean as white as a cap; and he then told me he was at the battle of Waterloo, but he never was in such danger, there as he was at the meeting; for at Waterloo there was man to man, but at Manchester it was downright murder.

Q. Was any one present and heard this?

A. Yes, Samuel Davenport.

Q. Was no one else there?

A. No; not that paid any attention.

Q. What time in the day did this conversation pass?

A. I went about twelve and left about one.

Q. Was none of the family in the kitchen with you?

A. Mrs. Lees brought some ale, but did not stay.

Q. Did he tell you what he had done?
A. No; he only told me what was done to him.
Q. Did he show you any wound, or marks of violence?
A. No, he could not: he was so weak and ill he was then likely to die.
Q. Did he tell you he believed he should die?
A. No.
Q. Did he say any thing more?
A. He said his shoe was trod and rent off by a horse, and he crouched down to put it on.
Q. Were you at the meeting?
A. Yes, I was.
Q. What time did you get there?
A. About an hour before Mr. Hunt.
Q. Did you see many people come, after you were there?
A. Yes.
Q. Had they sticks or arms?
A. No; they were without sticks or any thing. Some papers were put up in Oldham, from Mr. Hunt, desiring the people to go to the meeting peaceably, and without arms, and they did so.

The Witness examined by Mr. HARMER.

Q. The people, you say, went peaceably and unarmed?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you go unarmed?
A. Yes; I went without a stick, and so did many others who came afterwards.
Q. Did they come to the meeting in a tumultuous or a peaceable manner?
A. They came as quiet as if they were in a chapel or church.
Q. Now, had each party that came from the different townships their flags or banners?
A. Yes, they had.
Q. Now, on their arrival, did the people on the ground receive them with a shout of welcome?
A. Yes.
Q. Was that the only noise that you heard made?
A. It was.
Q. After those shouts ceased, was all quiet and peaceable?
A. Yes; there was no other disturbance.
Q. Did you see many constables at, or near, the hustings?
A. Yes, a great many, they were six deep at the lower aide of the hustings.
Q. How near were you to the hustings?
A. I was from eight to twelve yards on the upper side of the hustings.
Q. As you were so near, could you hear what Mr. Hunt said?
A. Yes, I could.
Q. Repeat, then, as near as you can, his words?
A. Mr. Hunt got upon the stage, and received applause—he then said he was very glad the meeting had been put off for one week; and to see so many people arrive peaceably and quietly.
Q. Did he say any more?
A. Yes; he said, if any person made a tumult, or attempted disturbance, for a

green bag plot, to put him down and keep him down, and not suffer him to rise till the meeting was over.

[The Witness spoke very loud, and was here told by the Coroner, as he had been frequently before, to lower his tone, and not speak so vehemently.]

The Witness (*to the Coroner*)—I don't wish to offend you, Sir, but if I speak slow I *stutter*.

The Coroner—Go on, but don't be so violent.

Witness *proceeded*—The soldiers then came—the first could hardly sit on his horse, he was so drunk; he sat like a monkey.

Q. At what part of the field did he enter?

A. He came in near the Quakers' chapel, and many behind him, through the crowd.

Q. Did they halt, and draw up any where?

A. Yes; they came and stood in front of the houses, and began to shout.

Q. Was there any shouting between the time that Mr. Hunt arrived and the coming in of the soldiers?

A. Yes; there was a shout about something said on the stage about a minute before.

Q. At what pace did they come into the crowd?

A. They came at a real gallop.

Q. In what way did they proceed to the hustings?

A. They began cutting all before them and on each side, and the people began shouting for mercy—they said, "Have mercy, O, have mercy."—I was squeezed against the iron palisadoes; I thought I should have been squeezed to death.

Q. Was every thing quiet and good humoured until the soldiers came in?

A. Yes; and if it had not been for them, it would have been the nicest sight that ever was seen; we all said so as we came home.

Q. Did the constables assist or obstruct the escape of the people?

A. The constables prevented the people getting away; they were on the opposite side to the soldiers, and struck at all near them by the hustings, and said, D—n you, will you come again.

Q. Did the soldiers say any thing to the people when they were striking them?

A. Yes; they said the same.

Q. Did you hear that said often by both the soldiers and constables?

A. Yes; hundreds of times.

Q. Had you the good fortune to escape without being wounded?

A. Yes; but I was obliged to stoop down several times to save my head.

Q. Did you see any others hurt?

A. Yes; I saw many bruised.

Q. Did you see the people strike, or in any way molest, either the soldiers or the peace officers?

A. No; I did not.

The Witness re-examined by the CORONER.

Q. Did the Cavalry strike you?

A. No; they struck at me, but missed.

Q. Did any constable strike you?

A. No; I turned my back to avoid them—I tried to escape for my life like a hare from a pack of hounds.

Q. Did they cut at you near the hustings?

A. No; as I was running away three soldiers came down upon me one after another; there was whiz this way and whiz that way, backwards and forwards there *the witness rose up and described what he meant by the action of his arms*), and I, as they were going to strike, threw myself on my face, so that, if they cut, it should be on my bottom.

The Coroner—You act as well as speak?

A. Yes; I'm real Lancashire blunt, Sir; I speak the truth; whenever any cried out "mercy," they said "D—n you, what brought you here."

Q. Did you see any persons afterwards who were cut?

A. Yes; I saw people wounded in every street in Manchester which I passed through.

Q. How far were the palisadoes from the hustings, against which you say you were pressed?

A. I don't know.

Q. Were they a mile or a quarter of a mile?

A. Bless you, Sir, nothing like it.

Q. Give me an answer to my question then?

A. Well, Sir, when you speak out of reason I can give you no answer; for you ask whether the palisadoes were a mile or a quarter of a mile from the hustings."

Q. Well, I ask your opinion?

A. I suppose about fifty yards.

Q. You were then about fifty yards off when Mr. Hunt came?

A. No; Sir, you contradict yourself, but I will not have words put into my mouth which I have not said; when Mr. Hunt came I was only eight yards or a little more from the hustings, but after the soldiers came I was pressed back to the palisadoes.

Q. You have before said differently; you have said it both ways.

A. I ask your pardon, Sir, I have not. I wish to hear what you read, and what you have been writing; for you shall not make me say what is wrong, if I know it.

Q. How long were you against the palisadoes?

A. About three minutes.

Q. Did you return from the palisadoes to the hustings again?

A. No; I did not.

Q. Where did the soldiers form into line?

A. They galloped about twenty or thirty yards, and formed into line opposite the houses,

Q. How was the first man dressed that came down?

A. I cannot tell.

Q. Was he a soldier?

A. I saw he held a sword lifted up, but I cannot say he was a soldier.

Q. Was he on horseback?

A. Yes; but the hats obstructed my view.

Q. At what pace did he come?

A. He came into the crowd at a gallop; he was fuddled, I reckon.

Q. Where was this man when the soldiers were cutting?

A. I can't tell; I did not keep my eye en one person; I could not, for I was looking for my life; I was very hard at first, because I did not think they would hurt us; but when they began to cut, I was very much frightened.

Q. How long were the other soldiers in getting up to him?

A. I can't tell.

Q. You can say how many minutes?

A. I can't tell how many minutes; they were only thirty yards or so behind, and as they came at a gallop they could not be many minutes. Sir, you put so many questions to me which are very troublesome, and I think you cannot expect them to be answered.

Q. I do expect them to be answered, and I desire that you do not speak so loud, you are a great deal too noisy?

A. I am sure I speak very calmly; I wish to do, but you try so to confuse me.

Q. There may be a difference of opinion about your conduct; I never had the honour of seeing you before, but I think you speak very boisterously.

A. I speak the best I can according to truth; I am no scholar, Sir.

Q. You say they were as peaceable as in a church, did you ever hear shouting in a church?

A. Yes, I have, when they strike up to be singing; at the lime the singers begin their concert.

Q. Did you see the soldiers, when in front of the large houses, shout and wave their swords?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. You saw Mr. Hunt come in his carriage?

A. Yes.

Q. How many women came with him?

A. I don't know, there were so many.

Q. Did you see Mrs. Fyldes?

A. Yes, a woman that the people told me was Mrs. Fyldes, and she held a colour.

Q. What like woman was she?

A. The most beautiful woman I ever saw in all my life.

Q. Where did she sit in the carriage?

A. By the driver.

Q. How was she dressed?

A. I believe all in white, and had on a straw bonnet.

Q. What sized woman was she?

A. She was middle sized.

Q. Where did you last see her?

A. By the side of the driver.

Q. What age was she?

A. I thought her middle aged.

Q. Did she get upon the hustings?

A. Yes, she got upon the stage.

Q. You call the hustings the stage, do you?

A. Yes, it is what the Merry Andrews call a stage; you would bother any one.

Q. And Mr. Hunt was the Merry Andrew?

A. No, he was not more merry than the rest; we were all merry in hopes of better times.

Q. Were you not desired to disperse?
A. Only with the swords—nobody asked us to disperse—only trying to cut our heads off with their swords.

Q. Did you hear of any Riot Act being read?
A. Yes, I heard it had been read at New Cross.

Q. You know I was not alluding to New Cross. I want to know if you heard of its being read at the meeting?
A. I heard none, Sir; if you come to that much, I did not hear of any Riot Act being read on that said ground, Sir.

Q. Did you see any body hurt on the ground?
A. I went to the ground about an hour after the people were gone, and I saw some were throwing water in the people's faces to bring them too.

Q. Did you see any Magistrate among the crowd?
A. No, I saw nothing of the kind.

Q. Did you see John Lees cut?
A. No, I did not; but I saw plenty of constables striking with their truncheons.

Q. What, John Lees?
A. No.

Q. I said striking him.
A. I beg your pardon, I did not hear that. I did not see him struck; but I saw the constables laying on the people to some tune.

Q. Were there any persons on the ground before you arrived there?
A. Yes, some; and I saw a number of constables near the hustings, who were there about an hour before Mr. Hunt came.

Q. Did they beat or knock any one before the soldiers came?
A. No.

Q. Did you not see a scuffle at the hustings?
A. Yes, after the soldiers began with their swords.

Q. Were the constables doing any thing at this time?
A. Yes, they were tearing the banners from the people.

Q. How soon after the soldiers came up, did this take place?
A. As soon as they got past the constables. They knew the plot, I expect; they all began together.

Q. Did the constables or the soldiers come first up to the hustings?
A. They were all together, and drawn up in a circle.

Q. How far did the circle extend?
A. That I can't say.

Q. Well, tell us what passed?
A. Why I saw three pigeons fly out of a window, and the curtain was then dropped, and I suppose that was the signal.

Q. What reason have you to suppose so?
A. Why, because the soldiers and constables directly began together playing their music with their swords and truncheons.

Q. What do you mean by music?
Q. Why, the soldiers began cutting and slaying, and the constables began to seize the colours, and the tune was struck up; they all knew of the combination.

Q. Were any of the colours saved?
A. I have heard of one being saved, and that is all.

Q. Which were first attacked; the colours or the people?

A. The constables first attacked the colours; but those who held them stuck very fast, for they were beautiful things, you know, and they did not like to part with them.

Q. Did they keep them after all?

A. No, Sir, they left them; I fled for my life, and the people for theirs; for life, you know, is sweeter than any colours.

Q. Did you see what became of Mr. Hunt?

A. No, I did not; the last time I saw him was receiving the applause of the people.

Q. How many persons were there on the stage?

A. There might be twenty or thirty; some were playing music in honour of the day; and a pretty sight it was, if we had not been disturbed by the soldiers.

Q. Had the soldiers who came about the hustings, hair on their upper lips?

A. No, I did not see any with beards that I know of.

Q. Did you see any constables with the soldiers afterwards?

A. Yes, I saw them in the afternoon mixed with the Yeomanry in the town, all rejoicing as much as they could.

Q. Are you sure you saw no soldiers except those without beards come up to the hustings?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you know Nadin?

A. No, and I don't wish to know him.

Q. Is he not much feared in this country?

A. I believe he is, and with good reason.

[The Witness was then ordered to withdraw.]