

Name: James Mills
Occupation: Wood-turner
Home: Oldham
Date: 27 September 1819
Source: Lees Inquest 48, 67 – 72
Summary: Mills was on the hustings with Lees and saw the Yeomanry surround and attack it, beating all who were there including Lees and himself.
Done by: CW

[During the evidence of Martha Kearsley]

[*A note was here handed in to a Juror, by a constable.*]

Mr. HARMER (*to the Coroner*)—Sir, I perceive some paper given to one of this Jury. I am sure you will agree with me, that no communication ought to be made to the Jury but through you, and if the note relates to this business, it ought to be handed to you and made public.

The CORONER (*to Mr Harmer*)—No step but what is regular shall be taken, whatever may be the consequence.

[*On explanation of the communication alluded to, it turned out to be a note from a person named James Mills, desiring that he might be called in to give evidence.*]

The CORONER—(*addressing the Constable*)—You must not hand any thing to the Jury without my first seeing it...

JAMES MILLS called in, sworn, and examined by the CORONER.

Q. What trade are you?

A. I am a wood-turner.

Q. Where do you live?

A. At Oldham.

[*Here a note was handed to the Coroner by the Witness.*]

Q. Why did you send in this note?

A. Because Mr. Jonah Mellor refused to take my name in as a witness, on Saturday: he asked me what I wanted my name taken down for? I said, to tell the truth. It was while the Court was sitting.

Mr. Mellor (*the Constable*)—When the witness gave me his name, I said I would take care he should be called, but I refused to admit him into the room.

The Coroner—(*To the Witness*)—What do you know about the death of John Lees?

A. The first time I saw him was on the hustings, and I afterwards saw constables striking and beating him with staves and truncheons on his back, in a most severe manner. As he was escaping from the hustings, one struck him with a piece of a colour with both hands.

Q. Did you see him afterwards?

A. No, I have not seen him since.

Q. Did you know him?

A. Yes, I knew him well; I live near neighbour to him.

Q. Had you ever any conversation with him?

A. I never exchanged a word with him in my life, till I saw him on the hustings, and then I spoke to him.

Q. How came you to speak to him then?

A. I sat in the body of the cart, and he wanted me to make room for him.

Q. Where was he then?

A. He stood on the hustings, and I was holding them by my hand.

Q. How long did he remain there?

A. He stopped till the soldiers came up.

Q. Were the soldiers nigh when the constables were beating him?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you see the soldiers strike him?

A. No, I did not see them interfere; the soldiers formed a circle round the hustings, and I saw him run through the soldiers and constables.

Q. Where were the soldiers when he was running away?

A. They were nearly round the hustings.

Q. Did more than one strike him?

A. Yes, a great many were beating him; he run through a great body of soldiers and constables, and half a dozen constables struck him.

Q. What did they strike him with?

A. One struck with a piece of a staff.

Q. What length was that?

A. Two or three yards long.

Q. Was that the only staff you saw?

A. No, I saw another staff.

Q. Where was he when he was struck?

A. He had got from the hustings about five or seven yards.

Q. What became of him when he was struck? did he fall?

A. No, he was moving on when I last saw him.

Q. Where were you to see all this?

A. I was under the hustings.

Q. Was the deceased under the hustings also?

A. No, he was not.

Q. What made you get there?

A. As soon as the soldiers came within about 100 yards of the hustings, I was alarmed and got under them, and remained there till the soldiers formed a circle round the hustings.

Q. Well, what then?

A. They came and beat me so severely about my body, that I was ill for a fortnight after, and if I had not got up, they would have knocked their staves through my ribs.

Q. In what way could they get at you to strike you if you were underneath the hustings?

A. They pushed their staves violently against me.

Q. Did they strike you any more than once?

A. Yes, four or five times, and two of them were *jobbing* at me.

Q. What became of you afterwards?

A. When I came from under the hustings, they beat me through the soldiers to the distance of about eight yards, and they served others who were under the hustings in the same manner.

Q. Were you struck by the soldiers?

A. I felt two blows on my hat, and here is a cut in my hat now plain to be seen—(*here the witness exhibited his hat*)—but whether that was done with a sword or truncheon, I cannot say. But my neckcloth was cut with a sword by the soldiers.

Q. What soldiers, Cavalry or Hussars?

A. I don't know, I had not time to distinguish; but they were soldiers, at any rate.

Q. How long after Lees was hurt were you struck?

A. About ten minutes.

Q. Were you thrown down?

A. No, I was not.

Q. Was Lees down?

A. I don't know; I saw him on his legs; he was not down when I saw him.

Q. How were the soldiers dressed whom you saw come to the hustings? what facings had they?

A. They had blue clothes on, but I did not particularly notice their facings.

Q. How many women were in the carriage which brought Mr. Hunt?

A. There was only one woman that I saw.

Q. Did you see Mr. Hunt go on the hustings?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. Who remained in the carriage afterwards?

A. I did not notice who remained there.

Q. Did you see the soldiers cut any body in their way to the hustings?

A. No, I did not; but I saw them cut several by the hustings.

Q. But you say you did not notice the facings of the soldiers' dress?

A. No, I did not.

Q. Did you see that John Lees had been cut with a sword at this time?

A. No, I did not.

Q. How was he dressed?

A. He had a dark corbeau jacket on; some would call it a dark brown.

Q. Was it a jacket or a coat?

A. I believe it was shorter than a coat generally is.

Q. How could you distinguish the constables from the other people, so as to state that they were constables who struck John Lees?

A. By their truncheons. The Reformers had none such sticks, I am sure.

Q. How were the constables dressed?

A. I cannot tell; I was too much agitated to notice their dress.

Q. Do you know Mr. Nadin's runners? did you see them there?

A. No, I can't say that I ever saw any one of them in my life.

Q. Were there a good many women at the meeting?

A. Yes.

Q. What made you get under the cart?

A. The reason was, because, when the military came I was afraid they were coming to hurt us.

Q. Did you hear the Riot Act read, or any notice given to disperse, either by the Magistrates or the commanding officer, before the soldiers came?

A. No, I did not.

Q. Which of the soldiers came in first?

A. The Yeomanry Cavalry.

Q. Did the people do any thing to the military?

A. They kept huzzaing till the soldiers came nigh to the hustings.

Q. Why did they do that?

A. I can't tell what it was for.
Q. Did you hear the soldiers huzzah?
A. No, I only heard them cursing and swearing at the people.
Q. As you have not seen Lees since, how did you know he was hurt?
A. Because I have inquired of different persons, and was told he was very ill hurt.
Q. What was your idea when you saw John Lees struck; did you think he was hurt?
A. I was sure he must have been hurt, for they struck at him with such vengeance.
Q. Was nothing done to the soldiers that you saw?
A. No.
Q. Did no one lift their hand against, or throw any thing at them?
A. No, nothing of the sort while I was there; I saw no insult offered to them.
Q. Did you see any soldier off his horse?
A. No, I did not.
Q. Had you a stick?
A. Yes; I had one, which I had used as part of a fishing rod, about as thick as my finger.
Q. Did you see any of the multitude armed?
A. Some of them had sticks, but I saw none strike with them, or lift them against any one.
Q. What do you suppose was the size of the sticks?
A. I saw different sizes; some of them might be as big as a child's wrist, but I never saw any one lifted against the soldiers.
Q. Could the soldiers get to the hustings readily?
A. No, because there was such a number of people.
Q. Did the people appear anxious to get away?
A. Yes.
Q. Then why did they not go?
A. They could not make their way; till they on the outside dispersed, it was impossible.
Q. Did you see the soldiers cut any one before they came to the hustings?
A. I did not; but I saw them striking in all directions when they came near the hustings.
Q. Might not the people have dispersed sooner than they did, if they had chosen?
A. No, the crowd got away as soon as they could; the soldiers would not allow them sufficient time to get away before they cut them, and it was impossible for them to get away, owing to the press of the people.

The Witness examined by Mr. HARMER.

Q. I think you say you were upon the hustings?
A. Yes, I was.
Q. Did not this situation afford you a good opportunity of seeing the people, and how they behaved?
A. Yes, it did.
Q. Then I will ask you what was their conduct?
A. They were as orderly as ever I saw a number of people in my life.
Q. Did you see any riot or disturbance?
A. No, I did not.
Q. Did you hear any words tending to excite the people to break the peace, or commit any violence?
A. Not any.
Q. Did you hear any notice given to disperse before the soldiers came, or even after their arrival?
A. Not any.
Q. Did I understand you that it was the men who were armed with truncheons, as

peace officers, who assisted in creating the disturbance, and who beat the people, instead of protecting them from violence?

A. Yes, it was peace officers that jobbed at me.

Q. Did I understand you to say that you lost sight of the deceased when he was at a few yards from the hustings?

A. Yes.

Q. Might he not, then, have been driven back to the hustings without your observing it?

A. Yes, he might.

Q. Did the soldiers and constables come together to the hustings?

A. Yes, they did; in a straight line.

Q. Did you see whence the soldiers first came?

A. I believe from Saint Peter's, but the first sight I had of them was coming up to the hustings.

Q. Although you cannot tell the particular dress of the military, are you able to say whether those soldiers, whom you saw cutting the people, are the same that first showed themselves on the ground?

A. Yes; they were the first.

Re-examined by the CORONER.

Q. Before the soldiers- came up, did the constables strike you?

A. Yes, they jobbed at my side, and damned me to come out.

Q. Did you hear the soldiers say any thing to the people, or give them notice to disperse?

A. No; the only notice I heard, was cursing and swearing at the people.