

Name: John Smith

Occupation: Reporter

Home: Liverpool

Date: 22nd March 1820

Source: Trial of Henry Hunt, 112-115

Summary: Gives detailed account of what he saw on the 16th. Saw no violence or unrest among the crowds assembled at SPF. Saw Hunt give speech and ask crowd to put a stop to anyone attempting to incite unrest. 'They replied, that nothing but peace and freedom did they seek.'

Done by: RH

John Smith of Liverpool, examined by *Mr. Hunt* – Was concerned in the *Liverpool Mercury*. He attended the meeting of the 16th to report for the paper: he made no deposition. He described the approach of various bodies to the place of meeting from different avenues; was struck with their orderly conduct. Heard the conversation of persons in the crowd on the subject of the meeting. He said, in answer to a remark from him, that he supposed they were all friends to Parliamentary Reform; that they were, he said, he hoped peaceably so; and they replied, that nothing but peace and freedom did they seek. The meeting increased between twelve and one o'clock. Heard a band playing what he supposed, from the beat of the drum, to be "*God save the King*" – The beat of the drum in that tune is very peculiar. The persons nearer than himself were uncovered. He asked if the tune was "*God save the King*," was answered "yes" and replied. "I am happy to hear it." He was stationed about 25 yards from the hustings, rather in advance; considered the meeting to be complete, and thought it the finest sight that he had ever seen, and was gratified at the good order of the whole. He heard the speech of *Mr. Hunt*. He (*Mr. Hunt*) congratulated the meeting, that the effect of the meeting which had been previously called having been abandoned, was the increasing of the numbers of the present meeting. He made some remarks on the subject of a placard which had been issued, which he did not exactly recollect the bearing of. He thanked them for having proposed him as their Chairman, and hoped every person would keep the strictest order; that if any person should be seen attempting to disturb the peace, let those who were near him 'put him down and keep him quiet.' In a short time the cavalry arrived. Witness was astonished at the circumstance, as well as his neighbours near him, but the general feeling was, that they came to keep the peace. The people gave three cheers, and there was a pause. He expected things would continue in that state for some time. The cavalry approached the hustings. He saw no resistance; It advanced quicker than he should have thought it could go through so dense a crowd. A general cry was raised about him of "what is to be done," and the general answer to that was, "they must be bringing some Magistrate to listen whether any seditious expression has been used, and they were sure that all would be quiet."

By the *Judge* – Saw no attempt to resist, and no encouragement given to resistance by *Mr. Hunt* or any other person on the hustings. Saw no sticks lifted, and no stones thrown but one, at the close of the dispersion; had any such occurrences taken place, from the situation in which he stood he was likely to have seen them. Up to the moment of the military reaching the hustings, himself and those around him felt no alarm. But on the military surrounding the hustings and seizing the Chairman, it was then thought that the meeting was to be dispersed. Saw no resistance offered them. The horsemen diverged in all directions, and the crowd then dispersed shrieking and weeping.

By *Mr. Hunt* – Witness was rather more than six feet high. Was enabled to see over the heads of the people what took place. Saw a great many women and children on the plain; spoke to several of them; seemed to be clean and decent women; appeared as if they had come to a holiday feast. Saw a great many old people a few being at the head of each company that came on the ground; saw nearly all the parties come up. I saw elderly people at the head of each company, almost invariably bearing sticks, perhaps a dozen at the head of each company: they were merely walking sticks which they carried. Those who followed had very rarely any. Did not see the party come up with the black flag. Saw no body of people marching into the field with long thick staves shouldered like muskets. Had such an extraordinary circumstance occurred, he, as a reporter, must have noticed it. The sticks carried were very properly used to repress the idle boys that were likely to impede their progress. Witness remained till there was no person hardly left on the plain. During the whole

time he heard from the multitude no offensive expressions, and saw no act of violence; good humour was in every countenance. Saw no alarm expressed in the countenances of the respectable inhabitants of Manchester, many of whom (or at least persons he supposed to be such) were there. Witness arrived in Manchester on the preceding night; he heard from respectable persons on the Exchange and elsewhere, that there would be no interference on the part of the authorities; all was likely to go well, and they were very glad to hear it.

Cross-examined by *Mr. Scarlett*. – Is not in the habit of complimenting or censuring the military; remained tolerably stationary towards the husting, but with an eye over the whole meeting; did not know at the time that *Major Cartwright*, *Wooler*, or *Pearson*, were invited; he has the honour of *Dr. Crompton's* as well as *Mr. Rushton's* friendship; *Mr. J. Smith* he knows tolerably well, though rather a difficult thing. Was invited to attend as a speaker; but refused; he went on business connected with the paper; he did not go to the hustings to report, having refused to attend as a speaker, he did not wish to be called upon; in his own town he speaks on Parish and political business, does not praise the military in his Paper; he would blame them if they deserved it; he is junior editor of *The Liverpool Mercury*, has been connected with it for ten years; he hopes his sentiments are well known; he attended a Wigan meeting in the summer of 1816, and spoke in a debating room there; did not know a person of the name of *Knight*; takes articles from *The Manchester Observer*, as from other papers; pays particular attention to Liverpool meetings, but would not have copied a paragraph in the *Observer* calling the Manchester meeting: heard of a subscription for *Mr. Hunt* and perhaps his knowledge of the fact arose from a perusal of *The Observer*, he knows *Knight's* violent speech was not in *The Liverpool Mercury*; he don't call men in Authority "cattle;" their taste would not lead them to insert any such thing; understood the placard alluded to, was issued by the magistrates and made remarkable by a grammatical error; the remarks were made in an under tone, as if *Mr. Hunt* did not think them of importance, but were not such as to recommend the Magistrates to the respect of the people, nor otherwise; witness, himself, laughed at the placard; perhaps *Mr. Hunt* spoke for, ten minutes, including interruptions, is not aware of any infantry having come in the course of that time; after that interruption he recollects that cheers were given, which he thought likely to restore confidence; I dare say *Mr. Hunt* might have used the word "enemies;" did not hear any such expressions as this, "your enemies are at it and if they molest you, put them down, and when down keep them down;" decidedly he did not hear him use those expressions; thinks he did say, "if any one disturbs the peace he is your enemy," and nothing more natural; the reason why he said to the people he conversed with, that he hoped they were "peaceable friends to parliamentary reform," was because he was pleased so many persons were favourable to it; and as the conduct he had perceived at other meetings led him to think himself justified in the hope he entertained of their good views; particularly in consequence of the abuse launched out against public meetings by the press, which represented them as riotous; it was the best assembly he ever saw, and the most orderly; heard nothing of previous drillings, or if he did, he attached no importance to them; the people coming to the meeting did riot march regularly, but kept a line; they could not keep pace, or they were of various sizes, and there were women and children; if he saw regularity and system in a meeting come from a distance of ten miles, it would inspire him with confidence and no alarm. In Liverpool they always, on election days, go in rows to attend public meetings, otherwise they would have all their shins and legs kicked to pieces; good humour on that occasion at Manchester, seemed to beam from every countenance; they naturally almost fall into a line as public convenience seen; to dictate it; he did not hear one expression of alarm on the morning of the meeting at the Exchange, when he left it before eleven o'clock. The invitation to attend the meeting was conveyed in a letter to *Sir. Thomas Smith*.

Re-examined by *Mr. Hunt*. - The Exchange opens about eight o'clock, and is most thronged between eight and eleven o'clock; when the yeomanry approached, his eyes were obliquely directed towards Windmill Street and the Chairman, and not at that moment towards *Mr. Buxton's* house, where the Magistrates were; the advice to persons to keep their servants and children at home was, he believes, included in the placard alluded to by examinant; saw a placard containing a caution, but cannot distinctly say it was not to that as having been signed by some obscure individual that *Mr. Hunt* alluded to; the placard was dated the 15th, and he thought it also odd as it warned the people to keep away on this day, which was the 16th; but it answered the purpose, as it was seen early on the latter morning; heard nothing like disrespect. The women present at the meeting inspired confidence; it is the presence of the ladies (in the witnesses opinion) always chastens the conduct of the men. *Mrs. Fildes* was not worthy of being called "a profligate amazon." Has seen ladies present colours to volunteer

corps.

By the Court. —His impressions relative to the lady were, that she was the wife or daughter of someone in the coach, who had condescended to carry a flag in honour of the meeting—(Here a ground plan of St. Peter's Field was handed to witness, in order to enable the *Learned Judge* to see at what part of the field the witness stood, and after he had pointed it out, the plan was handed to the Jury).