

Peterloo. The account of John Galloway, engineer, Manchester.

Born 15 February 1804, died 11 February 1894. Written about 1890.

Working Class Movement Library, Salford. In Robert Walmsley papers, with his ms. note: 'Transcript sent to me by Miss Lofthouse Chetham's Librarian 10 March 1969. From original Ms. then at Chetham's Library.'

An ink diagram shows the five houses on Mount St, with a mark on the right hand one, at the Windmill St end but just past the corner, facing what was later Pender's warehouse. Note: 'My father has several times pointed out to me the window where the Magistrates were to be seen at. H. G.'

'...The atmosphere was, of course, much clearer and brighter than to-day, more like Bowdon, as there were no railways and few mills emitting smoke. But, on the other hand, the condition of the people was dreadfully bad; the weavers who brought their work into the town had a half-famished appearance, and in Manchester itself Bread Riots were not uncommon, for corn was scarce and money scarcer, oat cakes being at that time largely used as a substitute for bread. The times were good for farmers, as the agricultural interest was to be protected at all hazards; if the rioters were caught, of course they were hanged, – as often as not the innocent ones. The great war with Napoleon had cost the country an enormous amount of money and increased the taxes to a very high point. This, combined with the grinding oppression of the Corn Laws, caused great distress, discontent, and sedition. Public meetings were then very unusual; on the one hand, the people had not become accustomed to meeting without disturbance, and, on the other hand, the authorities thought that the people could not meet without riot, or rather that all meetings were with a view to rioting. At length the people met in St Peter's fields in 1819 to present a petition to Parliament, embodying their wrongs. The history of this "Massacre" or "Riot" has been related by persons with all sorts of views, but my own observation was that one side was as much to blame as the other.

To give a short description of what I myself saw, I may say that, on turning from Windmill Street to Mount Street, there were five houses on the right hand, these houses looked over the vacant plot of land known as St Peter's Fields, the last of which houses has just been pulled down. The magistrates had gathered together in one of them in the upstairs front room, to act as might be considered necessary during the meeting. There was a lot of wild, effervescing talk, and the "Cap of Liberty" with other emblems of revolution was freely exhibited, so that the authorities became alarmed, probably unnecessarily. In the case of all these agitations for reform there are a number of well-meaning people who are apprehensive that any alteration can mean nothing but ruin, and so Hunt and company were considered revolutionary and unworthy of pity. The Yeomanry led by Capt. Alexander Oliver* had been kept in waiting behind the Quakers' Chapel (which had then been recently built). They were sent for and drew up under the window, in number about 200. Hunt, surrounded by his friends and a few women, was speaking from a wagon in the centre of the crowd, when the magistrates read the Riot Act. The crowd not dispersing, the soldiers were instructed to proceed, with Constable Nadin and his men, and arrest Hunt, known as Orator Hunt. The crowd opened rapidly as the soldiers came along, the people being startled by the horses, and in the excitement to escape, threw one another down; then some bricks were thrown (it was a brickfield), and so the trouble began. I saw nothing to be frightened at, I stood and watched the Yeomanry file away, and recollect it all as well as though it happened yesterday. The crowd made of in the opposite direction to that in which I was standing, so that I did not see much of the results of the confusion, which was perhaps as well. Hunt and several others I learned were taken, including a Mrs. Jackson. I walked back to Lower Mosley Street,

and saw in waiting the Cheshire Cavalry, who came from somewhere near the barracks in Hulme, where they had been stationed. They were not wanted, and people generally made merry at their expense, as is sometimes done with policemen now-a-days, saying they had succeeded very well in keeping out of the way. Policemen, of course, there were none; there were a few of Nadin's men or "runners", but very unlike runners. Policemen were introduced in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, which is why they are still called "bobbies" or "Peelers". There were a few houses in Watson Street, but nothing between there and Mount Street. The windmill (from which Windmill Street takes its name) was still in existence, in fact it stood there until about 1845, when Mr. Knowles built the Theatre Royal.

*The Mr. Oliver Solicitor previously mentioned.' [Alexander Oliver].