

HO40 15 ff. 284-293 Statement of the Lancashire and Cheshire Magistrates
(undated: March 1820?)

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The Magistrates for the Counties of Lancaster and Chester, whose attention has been particularly directed to the Occurrences which have for some time been taking place in Manchester and a very extensive and populous district in its neighbourhood, and who were present at the Meeting held in Manchester on the 16th of August last, in giving a concise Statement of the Events of that day feel it necessary to advert to the Circumstances in which that part of the Country had for some time previously been placed.

It could not escape the observation of the Magistrates, that thro' the medium of The Press, every effort had been used to render the Working Classes of the People dissatisfied with their condition and to induce them to attribute their privations to the misconduct of the Government.

Whilst however the Magistrates admit that the low rate of Wages, more especially among the Weavers, may have disposed many of them to receive these Impressions, yet they are bound to state that Disaffection has by no means been regulated by Distress.

The attention of the Magistrates had also been drawn to the rapidly increased frequency of public meetings held in almost every considerable manufacturing Town in Lancashire, Cheshire, and Yorkshire. Whatever the professed objects of these meetings may have been, little or no discussion appears to have taken place at any of them: and indeed from the immense numbers attending these Meetings, any thing approaching to deliberation or fair discussion was impossible. The parties conducting such meetings have in most instances been the same Individuals, and the result has invariably been the delivery of Speeches, and the passing of Resolutions of extraordinary and increasing violence, all having the same tendency, and directed to the complete Subversion of the Constitution of this Country.

Extensive as the mischief from these causes had already been, it acquired a character of increased Virulence and Danger to the public peace, from the time of Mr Hunt's first appearance in Lancashire. The ascendancy he possessed enabled him to draw together an overwhelming population in any direction, and for any purpose.

It may be well here to mark the progress of these meetings. Their first avowed object was Petition, their next – Remonstrance, and their last – an open Exhibition of Physical Strength.

In the mean time the necessity of forming a General Union of the Working Classes had been continually inculcated and enforced by means of Delegates and Missionaries and the people had been urged to provide themselves with arms.

These Revolutionary Indications as well as the denunciations of Vengeance, not only from the Press, but by anonymous communications, produced their intended effect: a corresponding degree of Intimidation among the Well-disposed.

A new feature in the Case was the establishment of Female Union 'Societies' and Schools for the instruction of Adults as well as Children, in the Principles and doctrines of Sedition and Infidelity.

Whilst many of the Leaders of the disaffected were thus engaged in poisoning the minds of the Lower Classes, others were no less diligent in teaching large bodies the principles of military movements.

These formidable preparations long and extensively pursued in the most populous districts giving confidence to the disaffected, could not fail exceedingly to increase the danger of every succeeding display of Physical Force.

In this state of Affairs, a general Meeting was advertized to be held at Manchester on the 9th of August for the purpose “of taking into consideration the most speedy and effective mode of obtaining Radical Reform in the Commons house of Parliament, being fully convinced that nothing less can remove the intolerable evils under which the People of the Country have so long and do still groan, and also to consider upon the propriety of the unrepresented Inhabitants of Manchester electing a Person to represent them in Parliament, and adopting Major Cartwright’s Bill.”

The Magistrates deeming such a Meeting illegal, issued a Notice to prevent it. No meeting therefore took place on that day, but another was appointed for the 16th August, which tho’ called by a different form of advertisement, was recognized by Mr Hunt in his letter of the 11th of August and in his address from the hustings on the 16th of August as a postponement of the former.

The interval between the 9th and 16th August was occupied by increased activity in drilling and arrangements for securing a full attendance of the organized bodies at the Meeting of the 16th which the parties themselves in their favourite paper described as likely to be a “tremendous” Meeting.

A principal place for military training was a piece of Ground near Middleton called White Moss. To this place two respectable Constables of Manchester repaired early on the morning of Sunday 15th August for the purpose of making observations. They found considerable numbers assembled but being immediately recognized as Constables they were assailed, severely wounded, and one of them after having been compelled to abjure his allegiance, was left in almost a lifeless state.

During the whole of Sunday the 15th August the Magistrates and Municipal Officers of Manchester (as well as many of the principal Inhabitants who lent their assistance to the Civil power) were in constant attendance and consultation as to the measures to be adopted, and every Report from all parts of the Country confirming them in the apprehension, that the Meeting on the 16th would be of a most imposing and formidable description, the Boroughreeve and Constables issued cautionary Notices to prevent the attendance of women and children. Arrangements were also made for the Civil and Military Powers to be in readiness early in the morning of the 16th.

Between 10 and 11 o’clock in the morning of the 16th the Magistrates took their station in a house which commanded a view of the whole area near St Peter’s where the meeting was to be held, having given instructions to the Boroughreeve and Constables to follow them with the whole of the Civil Power.

In order to facilitate any Communications which might become necessary, and for the purpose of correctly ascertaining the nature of the proceedings on the hustings, a double line of Constables was formed, from the house where the Magistrates were assembled to within a few yards of the hustings, which at first consisted of a single cart. This cart was soon removed a few yards further from

the Constables, and then the hustings were completely surrounded by a compact body of apparently determined partizans linked together and evidently so placed to prevent the Special Constables having access to the hustings. The line of Constables then terminated about 15 yards from the hustings.

From this hour, about 11 o'clock till the arrival of **Mr Hunt**, successive bodies of people came to the ground marching like soldiers under apparent discipline. Most of these bodies were attended by Military Music, and carried caps of liberty and banners with various inflammatory and seditious Inscriptions. On one of the banners which was black was inscribed "Equal Representation or death". On others "No Corn Laws" "Annual Parliaments" "Universal Suffrage" "The rights of man" "Election by Ballot" "Unite and be free" "Let us die like men, and not be sold like slaves" "Taxation without Representation is unjust and tyrannical", with various other Inscriptions. The staff of one of these banners terminated in a pike head painted red, and on another was painted a bloody dagger.

The last body which came to the ground, and which accompanied **Mr Hunt**, consisting of several thousands, marched by a circuitous route to the Meeting, passing on its way the Exchange, The Star Inn (the House used by the Magistrates) and the end of Back King Street within sight of the Police Office, at each of which places they halted, setting up hisses and shouts of insult and defiance, and at the end of Quay Street seeing some of the Military stationed there, they set up a general shout waving their hats and brandishing their sticks in the air, **Mr Hunt** himself being the Director of these proceedings.

The arrival of each body of people at the place of meeting was received with shouts from the parties assembled, proceeding generally first from the hustings, and on the approach of **Mr Hunt**, the shouting was indeed tremendous. He came in an open Carriage, attended by several others and on the dicky was seated a female carrying a banner. At this time the different flags, 18 in number, together with five caps of liberty, were displayed in a line from the hustings to Peter Street, as if to produce as imposing an effect as possible, and to direct **Hunt's** approach to the hustings.

A great proportion of the different organized bodies were furnished with large sticks, which they carried as Soldiers carry fire arms.

The aggregate number of the parties thus assembled has never been estimated at less than 40,000 and is believed by many to have consisted of more than twice that number.

Through the whole of the forenoon, many Gentlemen of the first respectability, who had witnessed the manner in which these people, using the most violent threats, approached the Town, and the disposition which they had manifested, and being strongly impressed with the danger to be apprehended from such an assemblage, resorted to the Magistrates and made depositions of the Facts which had fallen within their observation, stating at the same time their alarm and apprehension for the safety of the Town and neighbourhood. Depositions of this nature were made by above sixty different Gentlemen.

The Character of the meeting being now fully developed, and the opinion of the Magistrates upon their own view completely coinciding with the tenor of these depositions, they determined to issue a Warrant for the apprehension of **Hunt** and three others who accompanied him to the Field.

The warrant was delivered to one of the Constables of the Town, when he, as well as **Mr Nadin** the Deputy Constable, stated the total impossibility of its being executed without Military assistance. The Military therefore (who were placed at convenient Stations in the neighbourhood of the meeting) were ordered to advance to the ground in aid of the Civil Power.

A part of the Manchester Yeomanry about 60 in number first arrived on the ground and as they were forming before the house where the Magistrates were assembled, they were received, by the direction of **Hunt**, with shouts of insult and defiance from the people, who at the same time waved their hats, and brandished their sticks; this was returned by the Yeomanry and Hussars giving a general huzza.

The Borougreeve and Constables having, on the receipt of the warrant, placed themselves on the left of the column of Yeomanry, proceeded along the line of Special Constables towards the hustings, the Special Constables following and closing in with them in their advance.

When they had arrived within about 15 yards of the hustings, **Mr Nadin** called out to the Yeomanry to surround the hustings.

The Yeomanry in extending themselves for this purpose unavoidably occasioned considerable pressure on both sides, and there appeared great Difficulty in approaching the hustings, from the compact body linked together by which they were surrounded. This occasioned delay in the progress of the Constables and Yeomanry, at which period they were assailed with sticks, stones, and Brickbats, in consequence of which considerable confusion took place in surrounding the hustings and in apprehending the prisoners.

The other Military now arrived upon the ground, and under the Impression that the Constables and Yeomanry were overpowered, they were directed to disperse the Meeting, and the general Dispersion of the Meeting, with as much Moderation and Forbearance as could possibly be exercised, was the Consequence.

Such are the Circumstances (established upon undoubted testimony) under which the Magistrates were called upon to act and they feel, not only justified in the Measures which they adopted, but that as Magistrates, they would have incurred deep Responsibility, if they had pursued a different and less decisive Line of Conduct.