

Leeds Mercury, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1819.  
(Transcribed by Eva Schlunke).

**MANCHESTER REFORM MEETING  
DISPERSION OF BY AN ARMED FORCE  
MONDAY, AUGUST 16<sup>th</sup> 1819**

Before we proceed to detail the occurrences of this fatal day, it might be proper to premise that this meeting was intended to have been holden on Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> **instant**; but that the magistrates having denounced that meeting as illegal, on the ground of one of the objects stated in the requisition, convening it, being to elect a person to represent that town in Parliament, it was considered, after taking Counsel's opinion, expedient to postpone the meeting to afford time to call another, to which no such objection could apply. The object of this second meeting was stated in the **notice** to be "for the purpose of taking into consideration the most effective legal means of obtaining a Reform to the Representation of the House of Commons." To this meeting, publicly announced through the medium of the newspaper and placards, no official objection was made by the magistracy on the ground of its illegality; though the Boroughreeves and the Constables of Manchester and Salford, expressing in oblique terms their dislike of the proposed meeting, published a notice, which was **couched** in the following terms:-

The Boroughreeves and the Constables of Manchester and Salford most earnestly recommend the peaceable and well disposed inhabitants of those towns as much as possible to remain in their own houses during the whole of the day, (Monday, Aug. 16.) and to keep their children and servants within doors.

At ten o'clock on Monday morning, the magistracy who, probably, at that time, had not determined upon adopting any measures either to prevent or disperse the meeting, assembled a considerable number of special constables in the vicinity of the place of meeting, which was fixed upon to be in a large open space of ground, near St Peter's Church; and the different military **corps** were resting on their arms, prepared to act at a moment's notice if their services should be deemed necessary.

The Reformers, who seemed determined to make this a splendid day, were equally on the alert, not indeed in the preparing of arms, for of those they were totally destitute, but in preparing flags and small bands of music, and in arranging matters for the approaching meeting. It is evident, however, from the great number of females, and even children, who formed part of the procession, that nothing was anticipated that could involve them in the least degree of peril; and an immense multitude gathered together, relying with confidence on each other's peaceable intentions, and certainly not expecting that the precautions taken by the magistracy to preserve the peace, would be employed to destroy it, and convert a peaceful assembly into a scene of terror and alarm, danger and death.

Mr. HUNT left the residence of Mr. Johnson, at Smedley-Cottage, about twelve o'clock, in an open carriage, in which were also seated Mr. Johnson, Mr. Knight, and Mr. Carlile, and on the box with the coachman, was a female of the name of Waterworth, bearing a white flag. The procession, which consisted of many thousands, passed through Shude-Hill, Hanging-Ditch, Old Mill-Gate, Market-Place, St. Mary's-Gate, Deans-Gate, and St. Peter's-street, to the area appointed for the place of meeting. Some idea may be formed of the immense numbers that attended this meeting, when we state that Newton-Lane, which is not less than thirty yards wide, was literally choked up for above a mile with the divisions from Saddleworth, Oldham, Royton, and Failsworth. Each division had its respective flags, music &c. All divisions took Mr. Hunt's route. Females of all ages were interspersed in **each** company, with children of both sexes. Mr. Hunt reached the ground a little after one o'clock, and was received with repeated cheerings from the innumerable thousands that were there assembled.

It may be proper here to state, that the magistrates had assembled about twelve o'clock, at the house of Mr. Buxton, probably about one hundred and fifty yards from the hustings, and from which they commanded a view of the whole field. In a line from this house to the hustings was arranged a strong body of special constables, armed with **staves**, the insignia of their office, and the Manchester yeomanry **and Cheshire** cavalry were drawn up under arms behind the house and of course out of sight of the meeting, who were, however, sufficiently apprised that a strong military force was at hand. Such was the state of things that when Mr. Hunt arrived upon the ground, he immediately proceeded to the hustings, and a **resolution** was put **voting** him to the chair, which was unanimously agreed to, and he proceeded to address the **innumerable**[?] multitude by which he was surrounded; at this moment the most perfect order and entire silence prevailed, nor had any of the *known* proceedings of the magistracy excited and uneasiness, nor apprehension, that they were assembled in defiance of the laws. Mr. Hunt had not spoken more than from eight to ten minutes, in which he exhorted them to the maintenance of the most perfect order, and instantly to put down the man who should make any attempt to create a disturbance; and was proceeding to state that the magistrates, by causing the meeting to be postponed had been the **means** of creating a twofold attendance, and that instead of gaining an advantage by this postponement, they had sustained a defeat; - at this moment a shout of terror announced the approach of the military, and the Manchester cavalry appeared in sight, galloping towards the hustings, and when they arrived within about one hundred yards of the hustings they halted for a moment, probably deterred from proceeding by the solid mass through which they must force their way. At this moment Mr. Hunt, who saw the approach of the cavalry, and the pause they had made, with the view as he explained to the persons who surrounded him, of re-inspiring confidence, gave direction for a shout, with three times three, which was complied with. This cheering had not the effect of inducing the cavalry to retreat; the pause was but momentary; they drew their sabres and charged through the immense body of people that was interposed between them and the hustings, which they instantly surrounded - but we will here give the words of the **Police Journal**: - "The yeomanry cavalry, in support of the police officers, armed with the warrants of the magistrates, dashed through the crowd, and surrounded the hustings." It was in vain that Mr. Hunt, with outstretched arms, exhorted the people to be firm; the trampling of the horses and the sabres of the riders, which were not unemployed, cleared the ground in an instant; and

Mr. Hunt was called upon to surrender himself, which he expressed his readiness to do to a magistrate, but not to the yeomanry cavalry. A gentleman in the commission then presented himself; Mr. Hunt acknowledged his authority and surrendered himself; most of the other persons on the hustings, including Mr. Johnson, Mr. Tyas, a Reporter from the office of the Times newspaper, Mr Swift, Mr Saxton, Robert Wilde, Thomas Taylor, and three females, were carried off the field under an escort to the New Bailey prison. Mr Hunt was taken to the rendezvous of the magistrates. At this moment the Manchester yeomanry were joined by the 15<sup>th</sup> hussars, by the 31<sup>st</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> regiments of **foot**, and the Cheshire yeomanry made their appearance in another part of the field; the infantry and artillery did not take any active part; and the Manchester yeomanry cavalry began to act with great vigour, galloping about and thrusting their sabres in every direction. The hustings, with a considerable number of persons upon them were instantly thrown down, and a scene of terror, confusion and dismay presented itself, to which no language can do justice; the people were thrown down by hundreds and galloped over, and so indiscriminate was the attack and furious the onset, that the special constables shared the common fate, one of them being killed and many wounded, and still more thrown down; nay the softness of the female sex could not procure protection; defenceless women, and tender children, shared in the common overthrow. And it has been stated to us that the former seemed more particularly the object against which their hostility was directed. No resistance was made, or indeed could be made, against this terrible display of military force; it is said, indeed, that when the military had surrounded the hustings, a few brick-bats were thrown, and that Mr. **Hulme**, one of the Manchester yeomanry cavalry, was knocked down from his horse by this **means**, but his fall has been assigned to another cause, and the dreadful injury he received was the result of being ridden over. It is impossible, by any verbal description, to convey an adequate idea of the dreadful scene which now presented itself; it had more than the horrors of a field of battle, because it presented the unusual spectacle of unarmed men, defenceless women, and infant children falling beneath the sword of the (we were going to use the term warrior) but we will not so disgrace it.

The Hussars conducted themselves with great propriety, and did not use their sabres to the injury of a single individual.

The streets, into which the terrified people had fled for shelter, were scoured by detachments of cavalry; and in a very short space of time this immense assembly was so completely dispersed, as hardly to present to the eye a single group, save those that were laid bleeding on the ground.

The special constables who had not been heated in the battle, and who from being exposed to the same common danger, felt considerable sympathy for their wounded friends and neighbours, exerted themselves with commendable **alacrity**, in raising the fallen, and in assisting to convey those who were seriously wounded to the infirmary; and it was a melancholy spectacle **[illegible]** procession of coaches, carts, and **litters**, conveying **the** bleeding to the hospital, who, a few **moments before**, were in possession of health and spirits. Thus terminated this meeting. It now remains for the Magistrates of Manchester to satisfy, not a Manchester Jury, but the country at large, that they have acted in the due discharge of their

duty. It will not be sufficient to **abuse** Mr. Hunt and lay the blame upon the Reformers. We will examine by and by the defence which is offered on their behalf.

In the confusion which prevailed for several hours, it was impossible to ascertain, with a degree of accuracy, the extent of the mischief which had been produced, except that Mr. Ashworth, a special constable, had been killed on the spot, by the charge of the Manchester cavalry, and Mr. Hulme, one of the cavalry, was desperately wounded in the head, and was reported to be dead; but it was supposed that the number of killed was very considerable. The number of lives at present actually destroyed is only three – Mr. Ashworth, of the Bull's Head, Manchester, special constable; John Ashton, Cow-Hill, near Oldham, weaver, aged 41; and William Fildes, a child two years of age. Twenty-seven patients now remain in the infirmary, **all of whom it is hoped may recover; and we think it** right to state, on the authority of the house surgeon, that up to Thursday noon, no death had taken place in the house, from these casualties, and that the patients were doing well. In addition to these, about 50 had their wounds dressed, and were sent to their own houses; and we have been informed, but of course this can only be a matter of conjecture, that nearly 200 persons were more or less injured, either by the trampling of the horses or the blows of the sabre. All the shops in the town remained closed from the hour of twelve o'clock at noon, and all business was entirely suspended during the rest of the day. Parties of cavalry and infantry continually patrolled the streets, and at a very early hour in the evening the Magistrates ordered all the public-houses to be cleared, and it was hoped that there would be no further effusion of blood. This expectation, however, was erroneous, about eight o'clock in the evening a considerable number of persons collected in the neighbourhood of the New Cross, a very populous district in the Oldham road, where an attack was made upon the windows of Mr. Tate, grocer, who was charged with having displayed great activity in pulling down the flags of the Reformers – but which charge he afterwards denied, by public placards, threatening to prosecute any person who should thus calumniate him. The charge, however, whether well or ill founded, occasioned the destruction of his windows; the military repaired to the spot, the riot act was read, and the assemblage not dispersing, they were fired upon, and two persons were seriously wounded, one of whom has had his leg amputated; but no lives were lost on this occasion.

But it is time to return to Mr. Hunt, whom we left in the custody of the military; he was delivered to the special constables, and conducted by them to the rendezvous of the magistrates; it was there said that he was rudely refused a glass of water, by a *certain constable*, but that one of the magistrates interfered, and insisted upon his having that indulgence; and there being no coach at hand, Mr. Marriot, one of the magistrates, offered him his protection to the New Bailey – a protection which the excessive zeal of some of the constables did not render altogether unnecessary. Not knowing the grounds upon which Mr. Hunt and his friends have been imprisoned, we cannot judge of the propriety of the conduct of the magistrates in refusing to admit them to bail; nor could we learn that there had been any examination of them before the magistrates, nor do we think that any such examination has taken place, unless it has been taken privately in the prison.

We stated that the Magistrates assembled at the house of Mr. Buxton, at a short distance from the hustings, in consultation with a number of the principal Gentlemen of the town, and that the Magistrates were divided in opinion, as to the proper mode of proceeding; as some doubts were entertained of the legality of interfering before a breach of the peace had been committed. We understand, however, that this difficulty was got over, by a number of persons offering to make oath that they considered the peace of the town as likely to be endangered by the meeting which was about to take place; and we have been informed that about thirty resident house-holders made affidavits to this effect; thus fortified, the Magistrates appear to have come to the conclusion of dissolving the meeting, and to arrest the principal promoters of it upon the hustings, by means of an armed force, and which was execute in the manner we have just detailed. We now come to a part of the transaction which is involved in great mystery, and respecting which great doubts are entertained. It is stated in the account given in the *Manchester Exchange Herald*, which is understood to be inserted by the authority of the Magistracy, and it will be necessary to quote the whole of a very intricate sentence: - "That soon after twelve o'clock, the Magistrates and a body of Constables *repaired to the ground to which the brigaded Reformers had marched*, and in consequence of depositions made before several of the most respectable inhabitants of the towns of Manchester and Salford, in which they stated their apprehensions of riot and tumult, in consequence of such assemblage of persons from distant townships, marched thither under banners so explicit of rebellious intentions, the RIOT ACT WAS READ, but did not appear to be much attended to by the infatuated crowd, who continued to laugh and scowl at the constables in attendance." The material assertion in this extract is, that the Riot Act was read upon the ground to the people there assembled. This assertion we believe to be false, and we shall, as briefly as possible, state our reasons for this opinion. One of our reporters was on the ground a quarter of an hour before twelve o'clock: the riot act was stated to have been read at near one: he was in a situation where his eye commanded the whole field, which he traversed in different directions; he conversed with persons near the hustings, and yet neither he, nor any persons he conversed with, had ever heard a report of such an occurrence: he saw no Magistrate - no man on horseback. A body of special constables, about 100 in number, stood till the attack was made by the cavalry, within twenty yards of the hustings, and they, therefore, if the Act had really been read, must have been patiently waiting in a body, without movement, interference, advice, menace, or meddling, an hour after it was read: and when the vast body of people assembled, must, in that case, have been acting in defiance of the civil authorities and the law, without notice and without warning, until the military power dispersed the meeting, and cut down the auditors: further, a number of poor helpless girls were placed on the hustings, who certainly would not have been thus exposed by their friends to such imminent danger, had they known that the meeting was denounced as illegal. Of Mr. Hunt's prudence, we know sufficient to be convinced, that he would not be in the midst of an assembly to which the Riot Act had been read. It is evident then, that neither Mr. Hunt, nor the Committee, nor any of the assistants heard of it; and this is a strong presumption that it never was read publicly; but we may go further to say, that if a single individual in the crowd had heard of it, the rumour would have been propagated like wildfire, and it would have produced an instant panic and alarm. That there existed no such rumour and report in any part of this meeting, furnishes the most conclusive evidence against the supposition of the Riot Act having been publicly read upon any

part of the ground. To this evidence, and this reasoning, we may further add, that our Reporter, who repaired to Manchester after the meeting, for the express purpose of obtaining correct information of the transaction, and who took special pains to ascertain this fact; and who, with this view questioned many persons who were at the meeting in widely different parts of the ground, and who all agreed in declaring that they neither heard it read, nor, during the time of the meeting, ever heard any report of its having been read. Upon this evidence we rest our conclusion, that the Riot Act was not read publicly to the people. If it was read at all, it must have been read in a private room, or obscure nook, for the very purpose of not being heard. If it was so read, instead of justifying the Magistracy, it would add greatly to their criminality. It is also worthy of remark, that in all the accounts, official, or otherwise, given of this transaction, it is not stated by *whom* the Act was read, *where* it was read, *how* it was read, and also *who* heard it read. We will dismiss this subject with the following quotation from the [Act of I Geo. II. cap. 5](#):

And be it further enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that the order and form of the Proclamations that shall be made by the authority of this Act, shall be as hereafter [followeth](#), (that is to say) the Justice of the Peace, or other person authorized by this Act to make the said Proclamation shall, among the said rioters, or as near to them as he can safely come, with a loud voice command, or cause to be commanded silence to be, while Proclamation is making; and after that shall (**illegible**), and with **loud voice**, make or cause to be made, proclamation in these words, or like in effect:—

Our Sovereign Lord the King chargeth and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the Act, made in the first year of King George, for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies. God save the King.

Monday night passed over, after the disturbance at New Cross had been suppressed, intolerable tranquility: but about eleven o'clock of Tuesday morning, the whole town was thrown into a state of the greatest alarm: it was announced to the Magistracy that a party of the Reformers, 15,000 strong, armed with pikes, were marching upon Manchester, from White Moss, four miles from Manchester, and that they might momentarily be expected. The Magistrates issued the following placard: -

Manchester, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1819,  
Half-past Eleven, a.m.

The Boroughreeves and Constables of Manchester and Salford hereby caution all the inhabitants to close their houses, shops and warehouses, and to keep themselves and all persons under their control, within doors, otherwise their lives will be in danger. Carts and all other carriages must be instantly removed from the streets and public roads.

The advice contained in this notice was instantly complied with: the shops and warehouses were closely shut up, the news-rooms cleared, all carts and wagons removed from the public streets, and the busiest market-town in England exhibited, at the usual hour of market, an air of silence and desolation. All the military were of course under arms, cannon were planted in the

streets, and every one awaited in breathless terror the **instant commencement** of the threatened attack, which the **more timid** fancied they heard had actually **commenced**.

Terror by degrees abated; an hour elapsed; no tidings had arrived; people again ventured into the streets; the alarm was discovered to be a wicked *hoax*; the shops were opened, and the business of the market commenced. The alarm however did by no means completely subside, and a placard, issued by the magistrates, denouncing the existence of military training, contributed to keep alive the ferment. The following is a copy of the notice to which we allude, and which is placarded over the town in large posting-bills: -

TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE HUNDRED OF SALFORD.

It having been proved, upon oath, before the Magistrates, that large bodies of men assemble in various places within the hundred of Salford, for the purpose of training and practicing Military Exercise, which, in many instances, has been connected with Seditious and Treasonable Purposes: We, the undersigned Magistrates, do declare that such assemblies are practices are contrary to law: And we hereby strictly **enjoin** all persons hereafter to abstain therefrom.

And we charge all Constable and others, on their allegiance, to give Information of the districts where the practices aforesaid prevail; and against all such as may be concerned therein. – Given under our hands this 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1819:

William Hulton,            William Marriott,  
W. R. Hay,                Wm. C. Bagshawe,  
R. Wright,                C. W. Ethelston,  
Trafford Trafford,      J. Silvester,  
H. D. Broughton,        Ralph Fletcher,  
Thomas Wm. Tatton, James Watkins.  
J. Norris

The following caution was also plentifully posted through the town, signed by the Boroughreeves and Constables:

CAUTION.— The Inhabitants of Manchester and Salford are requested not to be out of their own houses after nine at night, during the present disturbed state of these towns. Dated Aug. 17, 1819.

The whole of Wednesday passed over without any new cause of alarm, and the public mind appears to be gradually recovering its usual tone. The Rev. W. R. Hay, chairman of the Quarter Sessions, and another magistrate, have gone to town, for the purpose of conferring with the Secretary of State on the situation of Manchester, and its environs; and on Thursday a meeting of the gentlemen of the town was held at the Star Inn, on the same subject, but the nature of their deliberations had not transpired when our reporter left Manchester. On the same day, an inquest was held by Mr. Milne, the coroner, at the George and Dragon Inn, on the bodies of the three persons who had been killed on the preceding Monday. The Jury returned a

verdict of – “Killed in consequence of a commotion which took place on Monday last, near St. Peter’s Church.”

Mr. Hunt, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Knight, Mr. Moorhouse, and Mr. Saxton remained in custody at the New Bailey Prison, Manchester, on Thursday noon, as the magistracy at present refuse to admit them to bail.

The melancholy transaction which we have just detailed, furnishes matter for important instruction; it may **teach** magistrates the necessity of refraining from an unnecessary exhibition of military force, and we trust that it will induce the Reformers to abstain from the use of flags or any other symbols, which are only calculated to excite suspicion, and give rise to unfounded alarms; and also to avoid every affectation of walking to the ground in military order; this folly has been avoided in Yorkshire, and we trust that it will never be adopted – nay, we would go further, and *earnestly* recommend that for the present those frequent meetings should be entirely discontinued. The following details were communicated to us by our Reporter: -

The number of persons assembled at the meeting this day may be safely estimated at 70,000. Various female societies repaired to the hustings, preceded, like the men, by their flags, surrounded with the cap of liberty. The assemblage was also entirely composed of the working classes, except where strong bodies of special constables were posted.

At half-past one o’clock, Mr. Hunt came on the ground, in an open carriage, accompanied by Mr. Johnson and a few friends, and mounted the hustings amidst loud applause from the crowd – He was called to Chair by acclamation: and having taken it, he spoke to the following effect:

“My friends and fellow countrymen, - I must entreat your indulgence for a short time; and I beg you will endeavour to preserve the most perfect silence. I hope you will exercise the all powerful right of the people in an orderly manner; and any man that wants to breed disturbance, let him be instantly put down. For the honour you have done me in inviting me a second time to preside at your meeting, I return you my thanks; and all I have to beg of you is, that you will indulge us with your patient attention. It is impossible, that with the most silent and patient attention, we shall be able to make ourselves heard by the whole of this tremendous assembly. It is useless for me to attempt to relate to you the proceedings of the last week or ten days in this town and neighbourhood. You well know them all, and the cause of the meeting appointed for last Monday being prevented. It is therefore useless to say one word on that subject; only to observe that those who put us down, and prevented us from meeting on Monday last, by their malignant exertions, have produced two-fold the number to-day. (*Applause.*) It will be perceived, that in consequence of the calling of this new meeting, our enemies, who flattered themselves they had gained a victory, have sustained a great defeat. There have been two or three placards posted up during the last week with the names of one or two insignificant individuals attached to them. One Tom Long or Jack Short, a printer”—



Here Mr. Hunt broke off suddenly, and gave directions for a shout, with three times three, which was made; and turning 'round, with a manner that showed him perfect master of the art of managing large assemblies, he explained to his friends who were at a loss what to shout for, that it was only because "there was a little alarm manifested at the outskirts, and he gave the shout to re-inspire confidence – that's all."

The alarm, however, turned out to be too well-founded; for, at the instant, a troop of the Manchester Yeomanry Cavalry, about a hundred in number, galloped on the ground at full speed, and halted within a hundred yards of the hustings. They halted in extreme disorder, and Mr. Hunt cried out – "Receive them with three cheers and be firm." The orders thus made were punctually obeyed, and Mr. Hunt again said – "They are all in disorder: this is a trick." But after a minute's pause, they charged through the compact crowd, instantly made a passage, and surrounded the hustings, on which Mr. Hunt was still shouting, with out-stretched hand—"Be firm."

The exhortation was vain: the trampling of the horses and the cutting of the riders cleared the adjacent ground in an instant; when, without a minute's delay, the hustings, with the chairman, men and women, flags, and caps upon it, were hurled to the ground—the cavalry in the midst of and upon them. Mr. Hunt, with Mr. Johnson and a number of others, were secured and sent with a strong escort, to the New Bailey. A dreadful scene now took place near the shattered hustings, and the ground was strewn with bleeding bodies of men and women, bruised, cut and trampled upon. Amongst the rest, a special constable, Mr. Ashworth, of the Bull's Head, was cut to the ground by a trooper, and almost immediately died. A pistol was discharged, but by whom we could not positively ascertain; the account most prevalent was, that it was discharged by an individual unknown, at a yeoman who was riding up to him, and that the shot brought the unfortunate man from his horse to the ground.

In the other parts of the field, the Cheshire Yeomanry, the Dragoons, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Hussars, charged among the crowd, without, as far as we could learn, striking at them; and the whole ground, which had been, five minutes before, covered with an attentive audience, was now completely cleared, and the cavalry galloped up and down on it enveloped in a cloud of dust. The streets into which the affrighted populace had run, were scoured by fresh bodies of horse: and in a very few minutes, the immense assemblage was so completely scattered, that no considerable body remained together in any one place. A regiment of infantry was drawn up in the immediate neighbourhood, but was not called out: and special constables went about charging the people to retire and disperse.

Several magistrates and constable rode about with the cavalry, and appeared to be directing them. Gen. Sir John Byng was not in the town. The captured standards and caps were carried in triumph by several of the yeomanry. That part of the audience, which had come from the country, in the morning, in high spirits, in orderly procession, and attended by flags and music, now sought their homes, in straggler parties, with melancholy aspects, and leaving several of their companions behind them. One woman, we understand, who stood by her colours to the last, was cut down by a trooper. We should not state this, as thinking it totally

incredible, had not our reporter seen the woman and flags fall together from the hustings, while the soldiers were cutting round them; and afterwards seen at least four or five women dreadfully wounded, conveyed to the Infirmary.