

## **THE MANCHESTER MEETING AND ITS DISPERSION BY FORCE OF ARMS.**

**Liverpool Mercury, 20 August 1819**

*(Transcribed by Peter Castree)*

The following account is written and compiled by an eye-witness of the unprecedented and memorable scenes of Monday last, and consists of particulars which occurred under his own observation, and such others as have been recorded, on the best evidence, in the various publications of the week.

The meeting announced for the day, was *“for the purpose of considering the propriety of adopting the most legal and effectual means of obtaining a Reform in the Commons House of Parliament.”* Mr. Hunt to take the Chair.

During the early part of the forenoon, the town was much in its usual state, with the exception of the muster of the Manchester Volunteer Cavalry, the Cheshire Yeomanry, and the regular Hussars, and Infantry, who were perceived resorting to their various posts, as if for the usual precautionary purposes. A placard appeared on the walls to the following effect:-

*“Aug. 15, 1819. – The Boroughreeves and 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 this day, Monday, Aug. 16<sup>th</sup> instant, and to keep their children and servants within doors.”*

About eleven o'clock, the tradesmen in the great thoroughfares began to close their shutters; and before twelve o'clock, several immense processions from the neighbouring towns arrived upon the ground, (the area near St. Peter's Church.) Some hundreds of women accompanied the multitude. A number of colours, caps of liberty, &c. embellished the whole, bearing inscriptions of various kinds; such as *“Rights of Man”* – *“Annual Parliaments, Universal Suffrage, and Vote by Ballot.”* – *“Let us die like men, and not be sold as slaves.”* – *“Equal representation or Death.”* – Under a figure of Justice, - *“Major Cartwright's Bill.”* – *“The People are the source of all Government.”* – *“Taxation without representation is unjust and tyrannical.”* – *“Labour is the source of all wealth.”* – *“No Corn Laws”* – *“Unity and Strength.”* – *“Liberty and Fraternity.”* – and the names of the different townships appeared on most of the flags, viz. Saddleworth, Rochdale, Oldham, Royton, Ashton, Bury, Stockport, Failsworth, Lees &c. &c. The meeting at this moment was great beyond all calculation, and yet the principal body, consisting of the Manchester and Middleton people, who were to accompany Mr. Hunt from Smedley Cottage, had not yet arrived. The crowd formed around the hustings in the greatest order; and whilst waiting for Mr. Hunt, the bands of music which had preceded them to the ground played

*“God Save the King,”*

And the innumerable thousands took off their hats. This was followed by *“Rule Britannia.”*

At half-past one, Mr. Hunt's procession arrived. It had passed the Exchange, and came through Deansgate without the slightest disorder or conflict of sentiment. Mr. H. was drawn in an open carriage, accompanied by Mr. Johnson, of Smedley, and other friends. On the coach box sat a young woman with a colour, and a board was carried before it with the words "Order, order." The whole assembly at this time could not be less than 100,000 persons, and the acclamations of welcome were above all description.

Not a soldier was visible in the neighbourhood, and individuals were congratulating each other upon the peaceableness of all parties. Mr. H. was called to the chair amidst great applause, and was surrounded by the members of the different committees, and by several females supporting the colours. The Chairman then spoke as follows:

"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 if you perceive any man that wants to raise a disturbance, let him be instantly put down, and kept secure. 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 utmost silence, we shall be able to make ourselves heard by this tremendous assembly. It is useless for me to relate to you the proceedings of the last week or ten days in this town and neighbourhood. You know them all, and the cause of the meeting for last Monday being prevented. I will not therefore 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. 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 which 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 that "there was a little alarm manifested at the outskirts, and he gave the shout to re-inspire confidence - that was all."

The alarm, however, turned out to be too well founded; for, at the instant, a troop of the Manchester Cavalry, about a hundred in number, galloped on the ground at full speed, and halted within a hundred yards of the hustings, near the house where the magistrates sat. They halted in extreme disorder, and Mr. Hunt cried out - "Let us give 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 it was no trick; for, after a minute's pause, forming, brandishing their sabres, and spurring their horses, they charged through the compact crowd, headed, we understand, by Col. Trafford, cutting their way among the ranks of the

special constables, who had been silently forming a passage for them, and who suffered dreadfully, not being easily distinguished. In a few moments they surrounded the hustings, on which Mr. Hunt was still shouting, with outstretched hand – “Be firm.” The exhortation was vain: the trampling of the horses, and the cutting among the people cleared the adjacent ground in an instant; when Mr. Hunt was taken from the place, and hurried by the constables to the house above mentioned, near the door of which, -----\* struck him a violent blow on the back part of the head with his club. Without a minute’s delay, the hustings, with men, women, flags, and caps upon it, were hurled to the ground – the cavalry in the midst of and upon them. Mr Johnson and several others were secured, and sent with Mr. Hunt under a strong escort, to the New Bailey. A dreadful scene now took place near the shattered hustings; and the ground was strewn with the bleeding bodies of men and women, bruised, cut, and trampled upon. The cavalry galloped upon the people, cutting at all within their reach, and traversing the ground with great rapidity. The most dreadful cries of vengeance were heard throughout the whole of the dispersing multitudes. In other parts of the field, the Cheshire yeomanry and the 15<sup>th</sup> huzzars 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 pursuit and cutting of the people was continued into the adjacent streets, and after the heat of the fray, the magistrates were seen mounted and heading the cavalry in all directions. Six coaches, three carts, and three litters, loaded with the wounded, proceeded to the Infirmary, where about fifty persons received surgical aid, and one of them died. Among the wounded were several girls dressed in white, who had been on the hustings. One young woman who held a colour, resolutely stuck to it until cut down; and when the staff was wrested from her, she kept hold of the drapery, and as she fell, twisted it round her waist. Mr. Ashworth, of the Bull’s Head, a special constable, was killed by the military. Mr. John Hulme, of the cavalry, was so wounded as to preclude all expectation of his recovery. A Mr. Pollard, of the same corps, was also dreadfully wounded. The landlord of the Roe Buck it is said was killed. A woman respectably dressed in a grey cloak lay dead on her back.

Many were desperately lacerated by falling one over the other into the cellars under the houses which range along one side of the field; in all the adjacent streets the wounded who were able to retreat, were seen running in different directions, the blood streaming in torrents from their heads, sides, or arms; and it is generally supposed that in the whole there were not fewer than a hundred severely injured, and that of these ten or twelve have already died. When the cavalry arrived at the Police-office they gave three cheers.

During the afternoon a great many arrests were made, and in the whole about thirty persons were lodged in the New Bailey, including John Tyas, George Swift, John Thacker Saxton, Robert Wild, Thomas Taylor, Mary Waterworth, Sarah Hargreaves, Eliza Grant,

Valentine Faulkner, Jas. Johnson, Wm. Billinge, Wm. Bolton, Edward Perrins, Thomas Kesugh, James Moorhouse, John Knight, Isaac Murray, Thomas Ashton, Thomas Worthington, Abraham Whittaker, Wm. Ashworth, Moses O'Hara, James Makin, Thomas Johnson, John Wild, and Anthony Jefferson.

During the afternoon and evening, several of the cavalry were hooted and attacked by detached bodies of the people. In Deansgate, one of them, who was caught alone, was beaten and stoned to death. Towards dusk, the shop of Mr. Tate, grocer, in Oldham-street, from the front of which a captured colour was hung out in triumph, was attacked by the populace, and every window broken. The soldiers coming up, fired several shots which wounded some of the crowd.

After seven o'clock, all the public-houses of the town were closed, and the military continued to parade the streets. After midnight two field-pieces were fired off blank, near the New Cross.

On Tuesday morning, the populace broke all the windows of Mr. Tate's dwelling-house, in the same neighbourhood. The military were again in action; a woman was shot through the leg, and a child was trampled to death. At the New Cross an attack was made on the regular Hussars, but they soon dispersed the mob by calmly manoeuvring, and did no damage.

All the forenoon of Tuesday, idle rumours were circulated, from the highest authorities, that insurrections had commenced in various parts of the country, and that 40,000 men, armed with pikes, were marching towards the town, from Oldham. The military continued incessantly scouring the streets; and at eleven o'clock, Mr. Moore, one of the constables of Manchester, went upon 'Change, and declared, in a formal manner, that the neighbourhood was in open rebellion. He ordered the Exchange Rooms to be instantly closed; and, at the same moment, a placard was issued, commanding all shops to be shut, and people to quit the streets. The utmost alarm prevailed, but every individual arriving from the country brought information of entire tranquillity, and at noon the alarm subsided. During the remainder of the day all was as quiet as military force could make it.

After the dreadful occurrences of Monday, it was given out that the Riot Act had been read previous to the attack, but the writer of this, although he had been from first to last in the most likely situations for knowing the fact, never heard of such a proceeding; no part of the people had the least idea of it, and his enquiries in various parts of the town were answered by the most positive denials. They who assert that it was read, dither most essentially as to time and place; and whether it was read or not, or whether or not the fact will make much difference as to the propriety of the proceedings of the military, must be matter of future investigation.

*\*We have deemed it [prudent?] to suppress the name of this officer for the present, although it cannot long be [concealed?] and there are most respectable persons ready to make oath to the fact.*

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*Extract of letter from Manchester, dated 18<sup>th</sup> Aug. :*

The people assembled as peaceably as it was possible, and the confidence in their quiet disposition was so universal that one half of the inhabitants of the town attended out of curiosity, and several are now suffering in consequence; a few of the soldiers have been killed, but not more than two or three, and about as many constables, and of the innocent spectators and reformers about twelve killed and near a hundred wounded, of whom many will certainly die.

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